TRANSNATIONAL AND COSMOPOLITAN ECHOES IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *SHALIMAR THE CLOWN*

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Abstract

This paper has two parts. The first part deals with the theorisation of the notions of 'transnationalism' and 'cosmopolitanism' based on theoretical postulations of thinkers such as Bill Ashcroft, Gerard Delanty, Robert Fine, Kwame Antony Appiah and Homi K. Bhabha. The second part undertakes textual analysis of Salman Rushdie's novel, *Shalimar the Clown* published in 2005 from the viewpoint of transnational and cosmopolitan perspective with a view to establishing the fact that the core of Rushdie's fictional ethics comprises a borderless view of the world constricted and fragmented by a narrow sense of nationality. The world that Rushdie portrays in the novel is diasporic characterized by national, intra-national and transnational mobility of his characters viz. Max Ophuls, Shalimar, and Boonyi. Rushdie's insightful observation concerning the strife-torn world of today makes us realize instantaneously how "everywhere is everywhere," which stands as evidence of the fact that we live in a world wherein borders are meaningless geopolitical markers and where the sense of globality prevails powerfully. It in no way implies that the local/native is in any way denigrated; it rather gets problematized in an ever-changing global/transnational context.

Keywords: Cormopolitanism, Translationalism, Globality, International/Intra-national Mobility, Diasporic Displacement, Identity

One of the sharpest contemporary minds, Salman Rushdie's fictional

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oeuvre is equally sharp in recording/portraying intricacies that the present transnational and globalised world comprises. Every serious reading of his novels positively affirms certain aspects of his thought that he employs to raise issues affect human lives in varied ways. Be it issues concerning displacement, migration (forced/ willed), violence, identity, rootedness, politics or religion, Rushdie takes a solid stance in a way that is distinctly unique in all of his novels, and leaves readers in an ambiguous state of clarity and bewilderment. His position as a multiply migrated man having multiple associations, and the one who believes national affiliations (roots) to be "conservative myths" (*Shame* 86), compliments the transnational and cosmopolitan curves in his fictional corpus. A careful look into the theoretical contours of the notions of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'translationalism' may help contextualise global issues delineated in *Shalimar the Clown* to thereby demonstrate how inherent textual dynamism in the novel opens up multiple interpretative possibilities.

I

Viewed simply, the term 'transnational' signifies a condition wherein the state has less control over its natives, borders, and territories as people are drawn towards constant migration due to their desire for better opportunities and improved life. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines 'transnational' as "extending or going beyond national boundaries". Thus "going beyond" (literally as well as metaphorically) is a precondition to think through the notion called transnationalism in diaspora studies, which has been discussed across disciplines with a view to negotiating linkages among peoples, nations, and institutions via crossing the physical as well as metaphorical borders imposed by the construct called nation-state. Steven Vertovec in his book *Transnationalism* explores varied nuances of the concept and equates it with socio-cultural, political, economic and religious transformations. According to Vertovec, changes are called transformation when occurring on a global scale rather than regional because "transnational practices can modify the value systems and everyday social life of people across entire regions" (24).

Despite the fact that growing global mobility results in the formation of multicultural societies, the idea of transnationalism also suggests that "immigrants are more likely to maintain contact with their culture of origin and less likely to assimilate" (Huff). The idea, however, seems more comprehensive in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's observation in *The Location of Culture* about "culture" as

a "strategy of survival" which is inherently "transnational" because immigrants have been "rooted in specific histories of displacement" (172). Moreover, any affiliation (i.e. religious or cultural) that an individual carries while moving across national borders is a marker of her/his alliance with the nation-state. In fact, ever-increasing global mobility has restricted the role of the traditional nation-state in carving out the identity of an individual. Nevertheless, it can simultaneously be observed that the idea of flexible citizenship and political participation is still intact in the minds of individuals who belong to transnational groups.

Apart from this, transnational tendencies tend to remain in conflict with national affiliations. A transnational subject is expected to leave behind the sense of belonging and connectedness with the nation-state from where s/he is displaced in order to fully assimilate into the culture of the host nation. Indubitably, the host's language and culture emerge as dominating factors in matters related to acquiring citizenship of a particular nation, but ideas such as dual identity and scattered affiliations effectively problematise both the factors. The ensuing dynamicity results in the formation of ethnic communities that retain cultural values by remaining subservient most of the time to identity markers such as the likes of religion, race, caste, etc.

The term 'cosmopolitan' differs from 'Transnation' owing to its origin in Greek oxymoron namely *kosmopolites* which implies citizenship of *kosmo* (world) and *polites* (city) respectively. The idea emphasises the fact that an individual has affiliations with the world as well as the city. The idea is traced back to fourth-century B.C. philosopher Diogenes who, when interrogated about his affliction to the land, replied that he was a citizen of the world. His ideas founded the Cynic movement in Ancient Greece. Historically, the idea of cosmopolitanism has developed carrying multiple implications such as the Stoic's emphasis on "rational humanity" (Dallmayr 427); the Roman Empire's ambition to take the world under its own rule to underscore "emphatic idea of universality" (Fine 15); and Dante Alighieri's pleading in his *De Monarchia* (1314) for a "world-level government that would bring war to an end" in fourteenth century (Inglis 16).

Likewise, in the humanist era, Erasmus urged for worldwide harmony and religious unity of all. In a similar vein, factors such as voyages around the world and resultant discoveries led to the philosophical resurgence of cosmopolitanism during the enlightenment era. In the eighteenth century, the term 'cosmopolitan' was used to designate open-mindedness and non-discrimination. An individual having

unbiased religious, political, and cultural viewpoints was marked as cosmopolitan, but later a person with an urban lifestyle alongside having the ability to feel at home everywhere besides being an adept in travelling culture was considered as cosmopolitan.

Though divisions based on politics, culture, and gender exist in every culture throughout the world, yet Gillian Brock views cosmopolitanism as a belief that "all people are entitled to equal respect and consideration, no matter what their citizenship status happens to be". In fact, cosmopolitanism takes the globe as a single unit of analysis, and therefore, transgression of borders is one aspect of its essentially inclusive nature. Moreover, Gerard Delanty in this context opines that cosmopolitan philosophy maintains "the spirit of openness" and "a perspective" that emphasises "the extension of the bonds of inclusivity" ("Introduction" 2).

The notion of cosmopolitanism is astonishing in the sense that it exists in different cultures of the world in varied forms. The Sanskrit maxim from *Maha Upanishada*, namely *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* lends a unique semantic curve to the implications of the term 'cosmopolitanism'. *Vasudha* in Sanskrit means earth and *kutumb* stands for family. When joined together as *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the notion becomes inclusionary to thereby include the entire world (*vasudha*) as a family. Likewise, the African notion of *Ubuntu* and the Chinese term 'tian zia' have cosmopolitan nuance as they propose the idea of an "open society" that can be connected with collective morals and ideals (Jaidka 44). The concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* finds mentione in *Maha Upanishad* and the verse reads thus: "Only small men discriminate saying: One is relative; the other is stranger," but "For those who live magnanimously, the entire world constitutes but a family" [*Maha Upanishad* VI, 72-73 (a)].

Indian *Upanishadic* philosophy also suggests a path to be a cosmopolitan by considering the world as a family. For that, one needs to achieve the "status of Brahman" that is "absolutely pure and beyond all cravings and sufferings" [*Maha Upanishad* VI, 73 (b)]. The question of identity and transformation in the self comprise the core of the discourse of cosmopolitanism. Thinkers such as Malashri Lal, Jeremy Waldron, and Gerard Delanty have elaborated on this aspect, which echoes implications similar to *Maha Upanishad*. For example, Jeremy Waldron views cosmopolitanism as a "way of being in the world, a way of constructing an identity for oneself" (228). But, cosmopolitanism, in contemporary times, differs substantially as it suggests a 'non-nation-bound' attitude, which is beyond "the idea of belonging to or devotion to or immersion in a particular culture"

(Waldron 228), because people are exposed to nation-bound ideas, which frame their identity in a particular fashion.

Analyzing cosmopolitanism mainly as a discourse, Malashri Lal suggests that "globalization has raised questions about identity and cultural survival" in a world that has become "borderless" due to the connectivity of "digital media" ("Introduction" 2). Hence, the idea advocates developing proximity between the local and the global, but it in no way suggests the overpowering of the local by the global. Delanty comments thus: "cosmopolitanism arises out of local and global links; it is not simply the rule of the global over the local . . . [but the] transformation of national identities is cosmopolitanism" (220). The inherent paradox that arises out of the interaction between the global and the local as well as the intricacies that the concept contains make it dialogic as well as critical of the homogenizing factors.

Both the notions of the transnational and the cosmopolitan are essentially interdisciplinary in nature as these ideas in preceding decades may be found in debates on travelling culture and international connections. Besides this, these ideas also offer a cross-national and comparative intellectual perspective to develop strategies for the discussion on ideas such as displacement, assimilation, hybridity, nationhood, and identity formation. The constant border-crossing in the contemporary globalised world serves as the background for Bill Ashcroft who defines being transnational as "a permanent condition of displacement, loss, and exile" (75). Moreover, transnationalism transgresses "the geographical, political, administrative and even the imaginative boundaries of the state" and can be located "both within and beyond the boundaries of a nation" (Ashcroft 73).

Speaking conceptually, transnation or transnational is a void that arises from the inevitable loss; a space engaged by ethnic/diasporic subjects and their experiences in a globalised world that reframe the critical relationship among subject, state, and nation. Robin Cohen elucidates the concept and thereby situates diasporic subjects in an in-between condition created by the intricacies arising from the interface of nation-state and travelling culture. These subjects dwell inside a nation-state but their travelling—whether physical or imaginative—falls out of the "nation-state space/time zone" (Cohen 136). Therefore, the transnational discourse when viewed in the light of the takes of above thinkers, should be comprehended as a construct that is equally nation-bound and non-nation-bound. An emphasis, however, on marking it as an ex-centric/non-centric

construct would open up new ways to explore the potential of the concepts.

Furthermore, nation-bound aspect of the transnational is problematic as it restrains the notions of heterogeneity, plurality, and hybridity whereas cosmopolitanism, frequently understood as contrary to the concept of the nation-state, has an altogether different orientation in matters concerning ideas such as roots, ethnicity, and belongingness. Cosmopolitanism deconstructs the politically celebrated notion of nation-state and advocates a more diffused and deterritorial subject positioning and ensures the citizenship of the world, which means having obligations towards other people, ideas, and nationalities. It accepts differences and negates biases, and that is how coexistence rises above ethnic homogeneity. Kwame Antony Appiah observes in his essay on "Cosmopolitan Patriots" that a local community or a particular locale can be called cosmopolitan if it is constituted of masses from different backgrounds living in proximity and interacting with each other.

The interconnectedness of the transnational and the cosmopolitan may lead to confusion about both as identical or having indistinguishable praxis. However, cosmopolitanism is not merely "reducible to transnationalism, although transnational is an important precondition of cosmopolitan orientation" (Delanty 218). Bill Ashcroft clarifies the condition thus: "Cosmopolitanism are not necessarily immigrants, travellers, expatriates, or exiles; they are not necessarily diasporic subjects, they aren't refugees or labour migrants". Instead of that, it is "an orientation towards others and to the diversity" that defines cosmopolitanism, rather than any "particular subject positioning" (Ashcroft 77). Delanty points out another strand of the cosmopolitan thought and terms it as an experience gained through cross-cultural interaction, and "a transformation in the self-understanding as a result of the engagement with the other over issues of global significance" (218).

II

Like most of Rushdie's novels, *Shalimar the Clown* to deals with issues concerning nation, religion, fundamentalism, imperialism, and transnational intrusions. These issues hae been subtly incorporated into a non-static transnational framework connecting people and their stories amid chaos in the novel. The constant shifting of locales lends the narrative a fluid character through which Rushdie "transcends the geo-political territorial limits thereby viewing the whole world

as rapidly evolving, or non-static" (Sharma 65). The narrative opens in California, in the bedroom of India (the illegitimate daughter of American Ambassador Max Ophuls) as she suffers from insomnia and is afraid of some intruder in her room. Also suffering from nightmares, she sounded "guttural, glottal-sloppy, as if she were speaking Arabic . . . the dreamtongue of Scheherazade" (*SC* 3). The narrative later shifts to Kashmir, and then moves to France, England, and finally to California again by cautiously weaving together the lives of four major characters: Maximilian Ophuls, Shalimar the Clown, Boonyi, and India.

Along with the locale, characters also move constantly across borders with relative ease. For example, Max Ophuls, a Jewish, was born in Europe, moved to America, and has been in France to fight the resistance against the Nazi regime before being appointed as an American Ambassador to Kashmir. Likewise, Shalimar the Clown also moves across borders and was trained in Libya, Saudi Arab, and Afghanistan. He has fought by the side of Afghans and al-Queda against the USSR as well as visited places such as Tajikistan, Algeria, Egypt and Palestine. An intra-national movement occurs on the part of Boonyi too, who leaves her husband Shalimar the Clown behind in Kashmir and moves to Delhi after having an affair with Max Ophuls. She thinks of the metropolitan as a dreamland of opportunities and regrets her decisions later. She once returns to Kashmir to find herself dead to the people she belonged to and finally decides to stay back in Delhi.

Max Ophuls is murdered at the very beginning of the novel by Shalimar the Clown, who disguises himself as Max's chauffeur to accomplish his target. Thereafter, the narrative moves back in time and discloses the reasons and situations that led the Shalimar's cruelty. What lies at the heart of *Shalimar the Clown* is the narrative that revolves around the love affair of Shalimar and Boonyi. Kashmir serves as the backdrop and the story begins here with the birth and dwelling of two central characters, Shalimar the Clown (Noman Sher Noman) and Boonyi, in the village named Pachigam. They fall in love and are married later, but Max Ophuls intrudes into their lives. He seduces Boonyi, impregnates her, and then abandons her. The loss and betrayal turn Shalimar into a cold-blooded *jihadi*, who is consumed with malice and wants revenge by killing Max, Boonyi, and their illegitimate daughter first named India Ophuls (after her father) and later Kashmira Noman (after her mother).

Allegorically, the novel is transnational as well as cosmopolitan in content and scope, and therefore, "everywhere" becomes a part

of "everywhere else". Stories of individuals flow into one another, "Russia, America, London, Kashmir" are reduced merely to points of reference for a violence-trodden world (*SC* 37). Moreover, Shalimar the Clown and Boonyi were born at the moment of partition and they symbolise post-independence Kashmir. The allegorical context can be further elaborated thus: Max Ophuls represents the neo-imperial mindset of the U.S. in the wake of globalisation and the end of Cold War, Shalimar the Clown clearly stands for threats imposed by fundamentalist tendencies and extra-territorial terrorism (as his killing of Max can be viewed in the light 9/11 knockdown of the twin towers of World Trade Centre), Boonyi signifies a leverage/commodity for capitalist intentions as well as the ostracism of Kashmiri Hindus from the land, and finally, Kashmira Noman denotes the bond between America and India that is formed in the wake of globalisation and transnational trade.

The allegory sustains throughout the novel. Max Ophuls, a representative of the American ideal of a free world, actually manipulates religious factionalism in politically thwarted regions. He covertly engages himself in arms and ammunition dealings with terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Taliban. The fraudulent ambassador of peace and freedom was "supporting terror activities while calling himself an ambassador for counterterrorism" (*SC* 272). When viewed in relation to the violence, unrest, and bloodshed—"Everywhere [becomes] a mirror of everywhere else. Executions, police brutality, explosions, riots: Los Angeles [begins] to look like wartime Strasbourg; like Kashmir" (*SC* 355) and "everyone's story . . . [turns out to be] a part of everyone else's" (*SC* 269). Roshan Lal Sharma aptly comments: "*Shalimar the Clown* emerges as a true work of the era of globalization, intricately mingling lives and countries, and finding unexpected and at times tragic connections between the seemingly disparate. For instance, the violent fate of Kashmir recalls Starsborg's experience in World War II" ("Fluidity" 68).

As far as the concept of nation is concerned, it has multi-layered connotations in the novel. Rushdie's calling of roots as conservative myths equally points toward that construct of nation that is designed to bind people with their religion, culture, and origin, which in turn have always been perceived as static. When propagated with intentions of meeting political objectives, these ideas always proliferate into adverse scenarios such as mass killings, riots, violence, holocausts, etc. The land of Kashmir in the novel is portrayed as being ravaged by militancy and urgency, which for the most part are sponsored acts largely controlled by fronts demanding liberation/separatism.

To keep the momentum, they impinge upon religious sentiments and call it *Jihad*.

Likewise, to protect the boundaries of the nation-state intact, military acts in the name of counter-insurgency. When after killing Anees Noman—brother of Shalimar the Clown and leader of JKLF—soldiers came to Pachigam to deliver his corpse, they also exterminate Abdullah and Firdaus, but noone questions these killings. Shalimar the Clown's transformation into an avenging murderer is caused by people such as Bulbul Fakh, who is a hatemonger and Rushdie calls him a "scrap metal junkyard". A Pakistan-sponsored militant, he enters Kashmir in the guise of a preacher and people like him "went out into the valley to preach resistance and revenge, [they] were saints of an entirely new kind. They were the iron mullahs" (*SC* 115). Every idea in the hands of people like Bulbul Fakh is a tool to deceive and manipulate people to achieve their own political ends.

Migration or moving beyond the border has a subsidiary impact on the personality of an individual as one's nature changes after interacting with people of different cultures and ideas, and so does one's perception about the idea of national, ethnic, or racial disparities. The world has been annihilated by chaos, violence, and hatred; however, Rushdie sets hopes on future generations and for this reason, he constructs India Ophuls/Kashmira Noman as a redeeming element; a hybrid being signifying co-existence. Kashmira indicates fresh possibilities, combinations, and crossbreed ethnicities that have been generated by globalisation. She lives in an in-between condition and through her, a prospect of political balance is proposed, which can be marked as transnational. She is "neither fully sympathetic to US nor in the arms of absolutist militants" (Taverson 223).

Though movement sometimes functions as a pre-condition to expunge narrow nationalistic considerations (such as religion, race, caste, etc.), yet displacement/uprooting of an individual and one's efforts to assimilate into new cultures or emerging conditions causes a void in her/him. Rushdie elaborates on his experience of displacement thus: "Migration tore up all the traditional roots of the self. . . . Of these four roots, place, community, culture and language, he had lost three" (*JA* 53). He nowhere mentions clearly what remained with him out of the four elements, but it is possibly the hybrid language that makes his writings equally real and fantastical. In *Shalimar the Clown*, Boonyi's aspirations for an easy life and her relationship with Ophuls can be viewed in the light of the displacement of a subject. "Pachigam was a trap" for her and

felt like a prisoner in the village when she migrates to Delhi to be with Max Ophuls, but later she regrets and feels as if "her former imprisonment had been freedom, while this so-called liberation was no more than a gilded cage" and therefore denotes the void caused by uprooting (*SC* 194-95).

Boonyi's relationship with Max suggests America's relationship with the world. Motivated by capitalist intentions, America seduces other nations by showing economic growth, imprisons them by showing care and affection, and after extracting the best to her benefit, these nations are abandoned like Boonyi who thus is a product of America's love for the world and when she confronts Max in the novel she becomes the voice not only of Kashmir but of all those countries who have been victims of America's vicious capitalist designs. She argues with Ophuls thus: "I am your handiwork made flesh. . . . I am the meaning of your so called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love. . . . 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" (*SC* 205). Again the political conflicts are played out microcosmically in the lives of central characters and the novel also defies limited explanations in the favour of more lucid, fluid, and multi-layered observations.

Also, the nuances of cosmopolitanism assert a strong presence in the novel. One aspect that comes to the fore in the course of the novel is the loss of cosmopolitan values. The narrator remarks in the very beginning while explaining the mental state of Kashmira, whose mother Boonyi (being a Kashmiri) was like a lost "paradise, like Kashmir" (*SC* 4). The loss does not only signify the displacement but also embodies the harm that has been done to the happy and peaceful co-existence among people in the valley. The ravaging of Kashmir is mainly the degradation of *Kashmiriyat*. The narrator comments on the local values of coexistence as: "*Kashmiriyat*, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a bond that transcended all other differences". Because Pachigam was a mixture of people belonging to both religions, Hindu and Muslim, "[They] have not only Kashmiriness to protect but Pachigaminess as well. [They were] all brothers and sisters" (*SC* 110).

Furthermore, Pachigam becomes a hallmark of cosmopolitan values through its demonstration of a unique sense of togetherness. Before the times of insurgency and violence in Kashmir, the "words *Hindu* and *Muslim* had no place in their story. . . . In the valley these words were mere descriptions, not divisions" (*SC* 57). Even at the time of Shalimar's (Muslim) and Boonyi's (Hindu) marriage, the issues were resolved by consensus in *panchayat* by the village *sarpanch*.

Abdullah Noman (Shalimar's father) declares thus: "There is no Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri—two Pachigami—youngsters wish to marry, that's all. . . . [B]oth Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed" (*SC* 110). Hence, the novel lucidly portrays that the depletion of *Kashmiriyat* (cosmopolitanism) is not caused by any internal hatred between Hindus and Muslims, it is rather generated by the political agendas, historical forces, and particularly due to foreign intrusions, which have converted the paradise of harmony and tolerance into a land of "broken houses, the broken people, the tanks, the anger and fear in every eye", and where "[e]veryone carries his address in his pocket so that at least his body will reach home" (*SC* 305).

Moreover, Rushdie interrogates the American idea of being cosmopolitan and sarcastically describes it as hollow when he calls Max Ophuls Kashmira's "brilliant, cosmopolitan father" (*SC* 4). His position as an intruder in the life of a happily wedded couple (Shalimar and Boonyi) problematises the kind of devious cosmopolitanism America preaches and simultaneously indulges in unethical and inhuman practice of covertly supplying arms to Islamic terrorists. Therefore, the cosmopolitanism of Max Ophuls and also of America is reduced to the limited understanding of crossing borders through travelling. Rushdie's portrayal of Max could be viewed as a scathing critique of the politics involved in the conduct of nations with each other in the contemporary world.

Summing up, it can be said that despite the perturbing worldview of Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* characterised by violence, hatred, disparities and bloodshed, the novel remarkably portrays values of coexistence and togetherness, howsoever vulnerable, in the crisis of the present times. The novel has powerful transnational as well as cosmopolitan echoes in terms of its textual content, racy narrative, characterization, diverse settings/locales alongside the fluidity which emerges as a prominent aspect as it ensures Rushdie's engagement with the global to "achieve a meaningful interface between literature and the present-day world which, despite being multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, is utterly vulnerable and borderless from accessibility angle" (Sharma). The novel conveys diverse echoes of cosmopolitanism as well as transnationalism in a nuanced manner besides deepening a layered understanding of the local/native (represented by Pachigam) where the novelist demonstrates the seeds of cosmopolitanism germinating without an iota of the shadow of dirty, inhuman and parochial geopolitics.

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