Chapter – 4

Shalimar the clown: Re-membering “Kashmiriyat”

Salman Rushdie has carved a distinctive place for himself in the canon of Indian Writing in English as well as in world fiction. Widely acclaimed for their examination and delineation of the history of the Indian subcontinent, especially the horrific aftermath of the partition and the contemporary political scenario, his novels are considered paradigms of postmodern strategies like magic realism, carnivalesque, intertextuality, irony and parody. Along with the political ravages afflicting his native state, rootlessness, miscegenation and hybridity are some of the recurring themes in his extensive canon. Rushdie, because of his diversified background, embodies multiple identities. Owing to his family’s departure from India in his early childhood, his migrant status paved the way for the exploration of the theme of fractured or shifting identities. Three places had a stronghold on his imagination and memory: India (the country of his birth); Pakistan (where his family resides) and England. This feeling of rootlessness due to migration from his homeland, structures his personal doctrines as well as literary works, His novels illustrate the creation of hybrid, plural identities on account of migration and displacement. Rushdie considers “the condition of exile as the basic metaphor for modernity and even for the human condition itself” (qtd. in Droogan 203). Exile or displacement signifies spiritual as well as epistemological alienation.

Rushdie’s writings are considered to a product of and a response to the colonial history of Indian sub-continent in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Categorized as seminal works of postcolonial literature, his novels deal with the disturbing aftermath of colonization. They
challenge imperial assumptions about identity and history by emphasizing their differences and otherness. They present an alternative understanding and presentation of history, achieved through the mythologizing of history and the historicization of myth. The fusion of history and fiction is a recurring motif throughout his writings. His texts have been exhaustively studied and analysed with regard to their structure as well as for their imaginative amalgamation of the mythical, satirical, allegorical, fantastic, carnivalesque and magic-realist features. Rushdie adopts a stance of pluralism, scepticism and relativism, a stance that shatters epistemological certainties and the comfortable stability of traditional referentiality “because all ultimate principles or signifiers are found to be unattainable” (Droogan 201). Rushdie’s work parodies and challenges the traditional constructions of history. His novels illustrate history as a textual act and “nation as narration.” They present new ways of configuring and imagining the past. They articulate “difference” through alternative forms of writing and narration that challenge Western logocentrism and understanding. These re-mappings of the central tenets of Western and official historiography subvert the established and the familiar. For this reason his writings are taken to “write back” to the Empire, the imperial centre, and “decolonize” and deconstruct accepted epistemologies and modes of thought.

The reclamation of the past is the impetus behind Rushdie’s literary enterprises. His writings are archaeological excavations of the forgotten and erased past, a means to salvage what was lost or suppressed. The metaphor of the palimpsest is a recurrent motif. Nations like India and Pakistan become erased palimpsests which are reinscribed with counter-memories and anecdotes that lie beneath the surface of the official history. His novels function as revisionary accounts of colonial as well as nationalist epistemologies that work within the framework of binary structures of self versus other, West versus East and local versus global. His novels construct
new pedagogies of historical discourse that question inherited epistemes of knowledge and present alternative representations of the “other.” Homogenous constructions of history, language, and textuality are refracted and a process of radical re-imagining of the accepted grand narratives is initiated.

Salman Rushdie’s SC moves beyond the now atypical postcolonial issues to explore multiculturalism, globalization, terrorism, and neo-imperialism. It deals with the horrifying history of fundamentalism, terrorism, and military violence in Kashmir. The issue of religious fundamentalism has been an object of critique in almost all his novels. He came into public limelight and gained notoriety among the Islamic fundamentalists for his apparently blasphemous novel The Satanic Verses. The denunciation of his novel and the death threats that accompanied it led to a period of exile and hiding. In The Moor’s Last Sigh, religious fanaticism and conflicts are manifested in the spice war between the Lobos and Menezes.

SC traces the transformation of Shalimar from a tight-rope walker into a terrorist, with the ultimate goal of taking revenge against the destroyers of his paradise. Shalimar the clown is a shape-shifter, assuming several identities such as a tightrope walker, terrorist and a faithful driver in his pursuit of his personal vendetta. Yet, again and again Rushdie demonstrates that the personal is deeply political. Like its predecessors, SC weaves the personal and the historical, fiction and history. The novel is divided into five parts named after the main characters India, Boonyi, Max, Shalimar the Clown and India/Kashmira. The novel begins with the murder of Max Ophuls, former American ambassador in India, before her daughter India’s eyes. It then takes the shape of a long series of flashbacks into the lives of the main characters to arrive at the main reason for the murder, which is initially considered a crime of passion. The story of India is related through a series of recollections of the lives of the principal characters. Consumed by
hatred, Shalimar seeks out and murders Boonyi, after her return to the village. He then traverses almost the entire globe in his relentless pursuit of Max and his daughter. After performing numerous errands for militant and fundamentalist organizations, he manages to arrive at LA, the residence of Max, and secures a job as his loyal driver. After the gruesome murder of Max, on the doorsteps of his daughter, he is sentenced to many years in prison. However, he manages to escape the shackles of incarcerated life owing to his adeptness in rope walking as part of the village troupe. The novel ends with Shalimar and Kashmira, enveloped in complete darkness, anticipating each other's attack.

In SC, the local, subjugated stories write against three main discourses: globalization, nationalism and religious/Islamic fundamentalism that takes the monstrous form of terrorism. All three are accountable for the degradation and eventual extirpation of the idea of Kashmiriyat that escapes totalitarian impulses.

4.1. Globalization and Terrorism

Globalization involves a remapping and reconfiguration of geographical, social and cultural space. Established tangible geographical and cultural boundaries are relaxed or dissolved allowing an enhanced and easier connectivity between nations. As Abdelazis Amrani reflects: “Cultures are no longer defined in terms of their territories; they are unbounded and deterritorialized” (82, Original Emphasis). Globalization has often ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it contracts geographical as well as socio-cultural space. Borders become porous and easily transgressed or traversed. On the other hand, it leads to the fragmentation of traditional identities and cultures. Globalization has undermined the “sovereignty and autonomy of nation states both from ‘above’ and from ‘below.’ ” From above they have become embroiled in the financial and business networks of multinational companies. From below, they are disturbed by
the increasing fragmentation of regional, ethnic and local identities and cultures (Ram 247). The
globalized world with all its accompanying implications on identity and culture—the dissolution
of cultural and linguistic borders, the spread of capitalism and consumerism, the creation of a
homogenous world consciousness—finds voice in the novel: “Everywhere was now a part of
everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one
another’s, were no longer our own, individual, discrete.” Rushdie believes that the world has
never been stable and fixed, but always defined and redefined for many centuries by “shifting
frontiers, upheavals, dislocations, flights, returns, conquests, and reconquests” (qtd. in Amrani
82). The impact of globalization is demonstrated in his description of Los Angeles, Paris, and
Strasbourg as shape-shifters. This indicates that places are no longer firm, bounded and fortified,
but rather they are dynamic and changeable spaces in which identities are in a constant state of
interaction. The novel presents the example of Alsace, a French city, which underwent a series of
politically and historically subject to Frenchification, de-Frenchification, and Germanification
processes. Olga, Kashmira’s neighbour, is another example of a migrant, a hybrid character,
encapsulating the old and the new:

I live today neither in this world nor the last, neither in America nor in Astrakhan.
Also I would add neither in this world nor the next. A woman like me, she lives
some place in between. Between the memories and the daily stuff. Between
yesterday and tomorrow, in the country of lost happiness and peace, the place of
mislaid calm. This is our fate. (13-14)

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However, as Amrani notes, Rushdie through his novel suggests that “non-identity and creolized ‘mélange cultures’ are becoming less Popular” because of a renewal of interest in “primordial or essentialist discourses, religious or nationalist,” which explain identity as “fixed and organic, something pregiven, predetermined, or natural” (80). Not all yearn for the global culture. Some, especially religious fundamentalists, seek primordial imaginary homelands.

Terrorism has received considerable attention in world politics ever since the stack on World Trade Center on 11 September 2011. Subsequently, the violence-ridden valley, Kashmir, has also been in international news because of the several militant attacks, whose ties can be located to terrorist outfits in South Asian Region. Terrorism is usually prompted and buttressed by a religious rationale and is characterized by, in view of Bruce Hoffman, its own distorted “value systems, mechanisms of legitimation and justification, concepts of morality and world view” (94-95). It takes the form of political and cultural violence within and outside the nation state. The novel illustrates how terrorism can be understood as a repercussion or outgrowth of the repressive political and economic forces of globalization or the nation state. It sees terrorism as an outgrowth of globalization, the increased rate of migrancy and the exclusionary politics of nation-states. Terrorism in its cultural manifestation may assert in the reinforcement of reductive binaries or essentialized discourses of national or religious identity.

4.2. Forgetting in the Discourse of Nationalism

Benedict Anderson describes nation as a construct, a politically imagined entity. A nation is imagined “because the members even of the smallest nations never know their fellow members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communions” and “the largest of them has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations and regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that might prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal
comradeship” (7). Eric Hobsbawm and Homi Bhabha also concur that nations and nationalisms are textualized constructions on cultural, social, religious and political lines. They are not pre-existing. Rather, Hobsbawm says they are the product of “artefact, invention and social engineering” (qtd. in Hakala 15). Tangible geographical borders along with cultural and political creation conflate to form the idea of a nation. Nations are formed on the hypothesis that commonalities unify whereas differences divide. As a result, all that is different is “othered”—considered irrelevant or superfluous and hence relegated to the margins of the cultural and political imaginary. Imposition of homogenization and the elimination of differences are the modus operandi of the discourse of nationalism. All slippages and discordant aspects of the past are eliminated and a continuous, strong link is established to the mythical past.

Homi Bhabha explains that “the people” or “the nation” is not a natural descendent of a mythical origin of meaning and culture. There are no unifying features that condense the people into a singular entity. Rather, the “construction of nationness” is a form of “social and textual affiliation” (292) that makes the people subjects and objects of a transcendental narrative through a host of literary and metaphorical strategies. A nation is an act of narration, a narrative strategy. The people are not “a priori historical presence.” They are constructed in the “performance of narrative” (299). A linear temporal order is imposed on variegated historical experiences. Continuity is enforced by finding the necessary link between the past, present and the anticipated future of the nation. Bhabha calls such stable national narratives as pedagogical knowledges that map the present of a nation-state to a true national past (303). Forgetting is central to the conception and understanding of a nationalist past. “It is this forgetting – a minus in the origin – that constitutes the beginning of the nation’s narrative” (Bhabha 310).
SC calls for a rethinking of established ideas of nation and historical representation. It debunks the notion of a secular nationhood as it appropriates regional and cultural differences under the rubric of a unified history. In the novel national and regional space is rewritten as a space of complex heterogeneous, pluralistic experiences that articulate and produce “constructions” of cultural and national identity. Hybridity can be understood as an in-between space which is not constricted by rigid demarcations of identity but is rather a site for being and becoming, an articulation of a plurality of nations, cultures, languages that engage and confront one another in a creative play of meaning and representation. Characters that populate Rushdie’s novels are shape-shifters and drifters, foregrounding the fluidity and mobility of identity. “Salman Rushdie,” as Amrani notes, “has always been a vehement supporter of discourses that encourage transworld, supraterritorial, transplanetary and “translocal mélange cultures” (79).

Behind this univocal world space, imagined by radical religious or nationalist or globalized discourses lie a plethora of diffused, different and often subsumed local narratives. The tendency to silence or erase local stories, often unwittingly can fuel and bolster religious radicals and fanatics. In SC, Rushdie enumerates the stories that have been appropriated or erased by the global culture in the name of homogenization and unification. The novel can be considered a political allegory in which the characters are metaphorical extensions and repercussions of global-local politics. Through the interaction between the global and the local, Rushdie attempts to celebrate the fluidity of identity and the dynamism of spaces. The novel is a double-voiced discourse where the monologism of canonical history is refracted and diffused into a plurality of previously suppressed voices which vie for a place in history. Shalimar’s story, as the narrator says, was “just one of many stories, one small particular untold tale in a crowd of such tales, one minuscule portion of the unwritten history of Kashmir” (422). The polyvocal text suffused with
unheard memories creates a dialogical space of remembering that counters the fog of amnesia engulfing the nation state. Counter-memories rise from beyond the grave of forgetfulness and demand to be heard and addressed. Dialogism, then, Terdiman says is a “memory model”: “It seeks to recall the semantic and social history carried by a culture’s language, but which tends to be forgotten, to be blanked, in characteristic forms of mystification and amnesia . . .” (45).

The novel SC unravels the national and international political conflicts and treaties that transform national identities. It questions the idea of a unitary, monolithic history; rather, it presents all forms of identities as fluid, multiple, and shifting, confronting and negotiating with varied political and historical changes. All characters in the novel undergo journeys in search of a lost or forgotten past or a desired future. National and local cartographies are transgressed in the quest for a new identity (Boonyi), the recovery of the past (India/Kashmira) and to seek revenge (Shalimar). Inherited names are questioned, abnegated and new names adopted in tandem with alternative identities. Bhoomi becomes Boonyi, India becomes Kashmira and Norman Aher Noman changes into Shalimar the clown. This change in nomenclature is synchronous with the notion of becoming and constant movement that characterizes Rushdie’s thesis on identity and culture. Rushdie’s characters, “living in a situation of not belonging, are chameleon like in the sense that they easily change their identities and affiliations; their identities are shaped and reshaped, and surf from one space to another (Amrani 84).

Although the novel begins in a plush area in California, Kashmir, the home of his maternal ancestors, remains the focal point of the novel. It is here that all the five parts of the novel converge into a complex space of heterogeneous, unheard histories. This region has featured in his other novels like Haroon and the Sea of Stories and MC, in which Kashmir is the paradise from which the lineage of the central character, Saleem Sinai originates. However, despite
Kashmir as the locus, SC is expansive in its creation of a global-local nexus of political processes and historical forces. It maps out and navigates almost the entire globe, from Los Angeles to Europe and England.

Kashmir is presented as a paradigm for a peaceful multi-cultural society, a paradise where a plurality of religions and cultures coalesce and reside prior to its corruption by religious bigotry and national and global politics. This power struggle is embodied in the figures and stories of Shalimar, Max Ophuls and Boonyi. The novel evokes the idea of Kashmiriness that was destroyed in the political conflicts and secret covenants between US interests, the Indian army, and Islamic fanatics from Pakistan. Presented as “variegated and syncretistic” (81), in the words of Amrani. Pachigam, initially a utopia where peaceful co-dependence and liberalism prevail, transforms into an ideological and literal battlefield between two opposing ideological poles, Islamic radicalism and the Indian army. This utopian ideal is distinct from a totalitarian utopia since it allows for the formation of, as Yamuna Sidiqqi says, “a regional spirit of communal harmony and cultural syncretism” (295). In Pachigam, Muslims and Hindus live in a peaceful coexistence because

the words Hindu and Muslim had no place in their story, . . . In the valley these words were merely descriptions, not divisions. The frontiers between the words, their hard edges, had grown smudged and blurred. This was how things had to be.

This was Kashmir. (57)

The essence of kashmiriyat is, in the words of Sidiqqi, a “vernacular form of cosmopolitanism” (295), which conflates the local, variegated cultural nuances, religious practices and occupational mores into a syncretised ethos that celebrates traditional values and accommodates differences as well. Kashmiriness, in the words of Abdullah Noman, Shalimar’s
father, was a cultural umbilical cord that joined all communities and transcended ethnic or religious fissures and schisms: “So we have not only Kashmiriness to protect but Pachigaminess as well. We are all brothers and sisters here ... There is no Hindu — Muslim issue” (180). The village of Pashigam is a microcosmic reflection for Kashmiriness. It is truly hybrid and multi-ethnic, allowing a great diversity of cultural repertoires. In such a space, there is no place for cultural or religious antagonisms. In fact, in such a rich multi-cultural space, different cultures and religions congregate in varying artistic, religious and national practices to sustain an entire community. Kashmiriyat is evoked in the novel through a gamut of cultural and historical allusions. “Kashmiriyat, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all differences” (180) allows for the articulation and co-existence of differences manifested at the cultural and religious levels. The day of birth of Boonyi and Shalimar is a grand occasion for the villagers as they perform at a banquet for the Hindu Maharaja on the eve of Dasehra. This event becomes a symbol for the cultural and religious syncretism that Kashmiriyat evokes. This point is illustrated by Pandit Pyarelal Kaul to his wife Pamposh:

Today our Muslim village in the service of our Hindu Maharaja will cook and act in a Mughal—that is to say Muslim—garden, to celebrate the anniversary of the day on which Ram marched against Ravan to rescue Sita. What is more, two plays are to be performed: our traditional Ram Leela, and also Budshah, the tale of a Muslim sultan. Who tonight are the Hindus? Who are the Muslims? Here in Kashmir, our stories sit side by side on the same double bill, we eat from the same dishes, we laugh at the same jokes. (115-16)
Born into different religions in the post-Independence Kashmir in the idyllic Indian village Pachigam, in a time when the Hindu-Muslim animosity did not exist, Shalimar the Clown, a Muslim and Boonyi, a Kashmiri Hindu, fall in love and get married with the consent of the entire village. Their union is a personification of the spirit of Kashmiriness that bridges all religious and cultural differences.

However, the rich, harmonious cultural landscape of Kashmir is annihilated by the infiltration of repressive and totalitarian forces in the form of religious radicalism and state-sponsored terrorism, the presence of and the wrecking of violence by the national army in the valley and the intrusion of Maximilian Ophuls as the representative of American neo-colonial interests and politics. Like Saleem’s handcuffing to the past, the lives of the characters in SC are intricately tied with the historical and political reality of the region. Not only are they victims of history, but are also involved in its creation. The lives and interactions of Max Ophuls, one of Rushdie’s cosmopolitan characters and shape-shifters, Boonyi and Kashmira, are closely linked to global developments.

The paradise is lost when the Pakistani army, supporting the Kabailis, marches into Kashmir, leading to the fleeing of the Maharaja into the Indian support camp. History ruthlessly interjects first in the form of rumour and gossip:

In the absence of great majority of guests, all manner of rumours came into the Shalimar Bagh, hooded and cloaked to shield themselves against the elements... cheap rumours from the gutter as well as fancy rumours claiming aristocratic parentage, ... The rumours were veiled, shadowy, unclear, argumentative, often malicious, ... The fittest rumours survived, and began to make themselves heard above the general hubbub; and in the hissed or murmured noises emanating from
these survivors, the loudest, most persistent, most puissant rumours, the single
word Kabailas was heard, over and over again. (138-39)

The rumours report that an army of Kabailis from Pakistan, supported by its state machinery, has
violated the border and was approaching the outskirts of the city. The “darkest rumour” informs
of the maharaja’s renunciation of power and his escape. Through a polyvalent discourse,
consisting of rumour and gossip, on the raison d’être behind the Pakistani invasion, the Pachigam
community refracts the singularity of the official historical truth and presents alternative versions
of the historic event:

“Pakistan has right on its side,” said one rumour, “because here in Kashmir a
Muslim people is being prevented by a Hindu ruler from joining their
coreligionists in a new Muslim state.” a second rumour roared back, “how can
you speak of right, when Pakistan has unleashed this murderous horde on us?
Don’t you know that the leaders of Pakistan told these cutthroat tribals that
Kashmir is full of gold, carpets and beautiful women, and sent them to pillage and
rape and kill infidels while they’re at it? . . . A third rumour blamed the maharaja.
“He’s been dithering for months. The Partition was two months ago! And still he
can’t decide who to join, . . . A fourth butted in. “The fool! He has jailed Sheikh
Abdullah, who has sworn off all communal politics, and is listening to that
mullah, Molvi Yusuf Shah, who obviously tilts towards Pakistan. (140-41)

History is caught in-between these opposing fractions of rumours and perspectives. Rushdie uses
gossip and rumour as alternative medium and tool of historical reality in order to infuse cracks in
the nationalist discourse. Gossip and rumours confound the “pregiven” and “naturalized.” As
Foucault says:
The history of some is not the history of others. It will be discovered, or at least asserted, that the history of the Saxons after their defeat at Battle of Hastings is not the same as the history of the Normans who were the victors in the same battle. It will be learned that one man’s victory is another man’s defeat. . . . What looks like right, law, or obligation from the point of view of power looks like the abuse of power, violence, and exaction when it is seen from the viewpoint of the new discourse. (69-70)

In the novel, Rushdie's endeavour is not to justify any side's political stance or encourage political pandemonium. Instead, his text opens up space through speculation and rumour to seek an interpretation of their fast changing historical reality that is not manufactured or imposed. As the narrator says: “Wherever information is tightly controlled, rumour becomes a valued alternative source of news . . .” (203). History is not a perspicuous account of the past. Neither can it claim transcendental meaning since it veils silences and rupture at its core. The sham of unity and continuity is underscored by counter-memories which problematize knowledge through the refraction of an over-arching perspective. As Stephen Morton asserts, by showing Kashmiri people caught “in the middle of these contending rumours” of India’s and Pakistan’s claims over Kashmir, the narrator conveys the way in which the conflict in Kashmir is overdetermined by multiple historical narratives” (qtd. in Hakala 36).

The wooing of Boonyi Kaul by Maximilian Ophuls, the American Ambassador, and their subsequent elopement is a meditation on the American presence and its power games in the region for its own vested interests. Max Ophuls is an adventurous man of remarkable intellectual acuity, a World War II French Resistance hero, an ardent detractor of terrorism and the United States ambassador to India. During his official trip to Kashmir, he falls in love with Boonyi,
whom he meets at an entertainment thrown by the villagers of Pachigam and who is married to Shalimar at the time. Looking for liberation from the established moral, social and cultural mores of the customary, parochial life in Pachigam, Boonyi seduces Max and elopes with him, abandoning her husband, in the hope of finding an alternative identity. Her adultery and infidelity create a scandal and havoc in her native place. However, after a short span of seduction, which involves living as Max’s mistress in Delhi, a pregnant Boonyi is abandoned by Max when he loses his prestigious position after the notorious affair is exposed by the media. Their illegitimate child is forcibly taken by Max’s wife and raised in UK. Boonyi goes back to her village only to find out that she has been proclaimed dead by her village and meets her death at the hands of Shalimar.

Becoming a drug addict and losing her former beauty and charm due to constant, voracious feeding, Boonyi finds herself contaminated and lost. This transient, licentious affair represents America’s seduction and eventual abandonment of third-world nations for its own neo-imperialist interests. Realizing what she has done, Boonyi reprimands Max, symbolic of the American neo-imperialism and economic globalization:

Look at me, she was saying. I am your handiwork made flesh. You took beauty and created hideousness, and out of this monstrosity your child will be born. Look at me. I am the meaning of your deeds. I am the meaning of your so-called love, your destructive, selfish, wanton love. Look at me. Your love looks just like hatred. I never spoke of love, she was saying. I was honest and you have turned me into your lie. This is not me. This is not me. This is you” (337).

The exploitation and abuse of Boonyi at the hands of Max serves as, Nadeem Jahangir Bhat comments, “an effective allegory of US involvement in Kashmir affairs.”
Boonyi, who loses her beauty and becomes obese when she “grew increasingly promiscuous and preemptory in her gourmandizing” (333), the transformation of Shalimar into a terrorist and the homelessness of India are all triggered by Max’s (America’s) self-interested involvement in the Kashmir region. The characters are, therefore, metaphors for the political allegory enacted out at the confluence of East and West, the global and the local. Quoting Andrew Taverson, Bhat says that Kashmir, like Boonyi, “becomes a casualty as a result of ‘a three way power struggle between US interests, the Indian army and Islamic insurgents from Pakistan.’ ”

Boonyi’s infidelity incites rage and a thirst for revenge in Shalimar. At this juncture in the narrative, the author introduces a new form of totalitarian utopia, religious extremism. In SC, Islamic radicalism, like the conventional, Western discourse of history, blatantly manifests a drive towards the cleansing and purging of the historical record. It weds religion with politics and is instrumental in the burgeoning of a new form of terror and totalitarianism. The infliction of fear through overt military stratagems is paralleled by an equally ideologically motivated instruction on God, love and duty to the novices. Shalimar starts receiving training as an insurgent and guerrilla fighter. He is sustained through this process of ideological and militaristic instruction by his deep-seated desire for revenge against the perpetrators who destroyed his life.

The religious radicals enforce the burqa on Kashmiri women. Under the instruction of Maulana Bulbul Fakh, with the “sulphurous dragon-breath” (430), the fighters at the camp FC-22 are not only trained in physical combat, but also have their consciousness altered. They are preached on “the nature of reality,” in which truth, of a religious nature, transcended time, distance and the laws of the universe. This truth is highly ideological and beyond the comprehension of the infidel, who has to be defeated in accordance with the almighty’s wishes. As the “iron mullah” says: “Ideology was primary. The infidel, possessed with possessions and
wealth, did not grasp this, . . . The true warrior was not primarily motivated by worldly desires, but by what he believed to be true” (432-33). The Iron Mullah advocates the adoption of a militancy religion that is the only form of salvation for “the condition of the world . . . when the world is in disarray.” This form of religion which he names as a “martial religion” is a replacement for the traditional conception of religion founded on love and harmony. Since the “fundamental urge” of a true believer is to “crush the infidel,” the only way is by singing “battle hymns” (427). The seditious speeches of the ‘iron mullah’, inflame the conflict between Muslim Pakistani and Hindu India over Kashmir. The Islamist fanatics indoctrinate the Muslim section against the Hindus with their rhetoric of politicized religion. The communal harmony of Pachigam is shattered and Muslims are pitted against their former Hindu friends by the incendiary preaching of the iron mullah. As the narrator notes:

There was no trace of a Shirmal-Pachigam divide, no distinction between male and female opinion, only this deep communal rift. The Muslim majority eyed their Hindu pandit opponents with a sudden distrust that crept uncomfortably close to open hostility. (401)

Under the impact of “firebrand Islam” (153) advocated by Bulbul Fakh and increasing religious fanaticism in the valley, a new wave of history-imagining begins. The politics of remembering and forgotten are confiscated and appropriated by fundamentalists along politicized religious lines, as the history of peace and harmony under the rule of the liberal leader, Sultan Zain-ul-abidin is forgotten and suppressed. Instead, the bloody reign of Sikander and the minister Saifuddin, many hundred years back, is regurgitated as the sole significant historical experiences. As Pyarelal Kaul reflects, “May be tyranny, forced conversions, temple-smashing, iconoclasm, persecution and genocide were the norms and peaceful coexistence was an illusion. . . . The
crimes of the fourteenth century needed to be avenged in the twentieth” (390-91). The iron mullah and his brand of philosophy demand the renunciation of lived experiences in service of an imagined past and future. “The new recruits listening to the iron mullah felt their old lives shrivel in the flame of his certainty” (435).

After the Kabaili attack is pre-empted by the Indian armed forces, Kashmir comes under military-state rule. This period is accompanied by brutal violence and repression which has been unrecorded in the nationalist discourse:

People said terrible things about what the army did, its violence, its rapaciousness. Nobody remembered the Kabailis. They saw what was before their eyes, and what it looked like was an army of occupation, eating their food, seizing their horses, requisitioning their land, beating their children, and there was sometimes deaths. (162)

Under the command of General Hammerdev Kachhwaha and his occupation of the region of Elasticnagar, the hegemonizing of a nationalist discourse is enforced. In the discourse of nationhood, there was no place for unpopularity and difference:

Elasticnagar was unpopular, the colonel knew that, but unpopularity was illegal. The legal position was that the Indian military presence in Kashmir had the full support of the population, and to say otherwise was to break the law. To break the law was to be a criminal and criminals were not to be tolerated and it was right to come down on them heavily with the full panoply of the law and with hobnailed boots and lathi sticks as well. (155)

Through the character of General Hammerdev and his, as Bhat says, “pseudo-reasoning and mock mathematical logic,” the text demonstrates the fictionality of the discourses of nationalism,
which resort to justifiable literary and physical violence in the name of integrity. Under the project of nationalism, there is no place for subversiveness and difference. The monological discourse of nationalism institutes a kind of national amnesia in the form of enforced unity and homogenization. Different stories and identities are compressed into unified, fixed, essential entities. As Florian Stadtler says:

The India that looms in the background in the novel is not a secular, pluralist democracy, as it leaders wanted it to appear after independence; instead, *Shalimar the Clown* questions India’s democracy and pluralism by critiquing its actions on the margins while also showing its unity as a nation-state to be a construction (qtd. in Hakala 47)

Through General Kachhwaha’s rationalization, the text mocks the idea of a secular, plural nation. In the service of nationalism, truth becomes subordinate and is easily manipulated. As the narrator notes:

Elasticnagar was integral to the Indian effort and the Indian effort was to preserve the integrity of the nation. Integrity was a quality to be honoured and an attack on the integrity of the nation was an attack on its honour and was not to be tolerated. Therefore Elasticnagar was to be honoured and all other attitudes were dishonourable and consequently illegal. Kashmir was an integral part of India. An integer was a whole and India as an integer and fractions were illegal. Fractions caused fractures in the integer and were thus not integral. Not to accept this was to lack integrity and implicitly or explicitly to question the unquestionable integrity of those who did accept it. Not to accept this was latently or patently to favour disintegration. This was subversive. Subversion leading to disintegration was not
to be tolerated and it was right to come down on it heavily whether it was of the overt or covert kind. The legally compulsory and enforceable popularity of Elasticnagar was thus a matter of integrity, pure and simple, even if the truth was that Elasticnagar was unpopular. When the truth and integrity conflicted it was integrity that had to be given precedence. Not even the truth could be permitted to dishonor the nation. Therefore Elasticnagar was popular even though it was not popular. It was a simple enough matter to understand. (155-556)

The novel shows how the historicity of nation is a construct, a contested terrain that outcasts local narratives and imposes a singular and grand national narrative. To see the Indian nation as a homogenous entity at the expense of its plurality is a mistake. Rushdie makes this point perspicuous when he says that as far as India is concerned, anyway—it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw . . . The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a mélange of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American. (qtd. in Rocha 239)

Disparate and incompatible versions of the past are pieced together by nationalist historians into a harmonious pattern using scientific, literary and even violent strategies. The idea of fractions is threatening as it can lead to the dissolution of the cherished entity of nation:

Kashmir for Kashmiris, a moronic idea. This tiny landlocked valley with barely five million people to its name wanted to control its own fate. Where did that kind of thinking get you? If Kashmir, why not also Assam for the Assameses, Nagaland for the Nagas? And why stop there? . . . Why not demand freedom for
one’s bedroom, or call one’s toilet a republic? Why not stand still and draw a circle round your feet and name that Selfistan? (165)

In order to weed out subversive terror-affiliated elements from the nation-state, “the political echelon” passes the edict: “The bullet was the only solution” (475, Original Emphasis). A horrific and brutal military campaign is carried out by General Kachhwaha and his men. Innocent people are picked up on ambiguous, inconclusive grounds of suspicion and then physically and mentally tortured in order to be “assisted towards the truth” (477). The text illustrates the pitiful plight of the people of Kashmir who are caught in a tussle between the fundamentalists, supported by the Pakistan Army, and military oppression and state-national politics. It foregrounds local stories and counter-memories from the grand nationalist project of history.

Kasmiriyat, therefore, citing Andrew Taverson, Bhat claims, “dies as a result of antagonism that are fostered and manipulated by distant national leaders and in pursuit of equally distant national ideals.” “Kashmir for the Kashmiris” is not tenable according to the nationalist discourse and hence a militaristic and politically supported crackdown is carried out resulting in the annihilation of the syncretic culture. Under the combined insidious forces of religious extremism and national/international politics, Pachigam transforms from the earlier utopia to a terrorists-sheltering haven. As a result, it becomes the centre of the violent clashes between militants and the Indian armed forces village and is gradually erased from the national discourse: “The village of Pachigam still existed on maps of Kashmir, but that day it ceased to exist anywhere else, except in memory” (505).

Nations are constructed and textualized products of imagination and discourse. Counter-memories, as presented in the novel, upset the imagined and naturalized cartographies of nation
states by exposing gaps, violence and forgetting central to them. Counter-memories of the main characters and those of the villagers of Pachigam expose national identities as artefacts that dissemble contingencies, manipulations, exclusions and violence. The “fictionalizing effect of heavy government censorship” (399) undercuts the integrity of nationalist rhetoric. At the Yambarzal auditorium, where people gathered to be apprised of national and regional events, a deadening effect is produced by the massive falsification and manipulation of their historical reality. As people stand outside the auditorium smoking, joking and gossiping, the evening news bulletin on television broadcasts a stream of concocted information. Manipulation of knowledge takes place on both the sides of the border. The discipline and management of memory is crucial in the sustenance of an environment of oblivion and darkness. It is through the creation of misinformation that the structures of power intend to keep the community in a state of forgetfulness. Incidents of torture and rape at the hands of the army are dismissed as “pure fiction” (479) and the Indian government’s resolve to maintain Kashmir as its integral part is glorified.

The textualization of the past takes place at the personal as well as the state level. The story of Max illustrates how the past is structured according to the contextual or discursive conventions and requirements. It depicts how history is not a realistic documentation of the past, but an orchestration, a construction using tropological or scriptural strategies. In his memoirs, Max confesses that history for a time “value[d] his skills as a faker above his talents in other fields” (225). On the international political platform, Max has been accountable for several constructive projects as well as shady dealings. His heroic image and laudable feats in politics and war become the stuff of myth and legend. However, writing his autobiography, he starts questioning the veracity of his narratives. Recalling his audacious escape during the Second
World War from occupied France which had acquired supernatural status over the years, the narrator says:

Some of this was certainly true, but in later years Maximilian Ophuls himself seemed prepared to allow the myths to embellish the truth. Had he really broken the record in spite of Finkenberger’s warnings about fuel? Had he really flown at or near rooftop level all the way, or had he escaped radar detection by luck, and on account of the strong element of the unexpected in the dash? In his own memoir of the war years, Max Ophuls clarified nothing, speaking instead with a hero’s modesty of his great good fortune. . . . (260)

In a stroke of ill-timed metaphorical association, Max confesses that during his perilous escape on low fuel, he understood what Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s statement, “flying as a form of meditation,” signified. Antoine de Saint-Exupery was a war hero who had written a previous book on flying. However, the narrator makes it clear that his book, *Flight to Arras*, from which that observation was taken was still being written. So, there is no chance of that Max could have a moment of sudden comprehension. However, even his glaring errors in historical account are not considered significant by the critics, who consider them “within poetic licence” (262). Hayden White reminds us that history is not a faithful rendition of facts. References and facts are searched as well as invented through a host of literary or narrative techniques, making history a creative and a poetic act.

Similarly, his most famous novel *Midnight’s Children* explores the ways in which history becomes an act of narration retold using the lens of subjectivity and memory of the protagonist Saleem Sinai, whose life becomes inextricably tied to the political, national, and religious events of his time. Saleem relates the multifarious fragments of his identity, symbolizing the plural
identities of India. Born at the stroke of midnight on August 15 1947, the time of India’s independence, he epitomizes a post-colonial, plural Indian nation. Along with Saleem, one thousand and one births occur around midnight, and hence they are termed as the “midnight’s children.” Each child possesses a supernatural gift, with Saleem having received the phenomenal ability to read people’s minds, their very essence. The novel begins with Saleem’s attempt to write his autobiography since he believes that his body is falling apart, giving away under the weight of the cracks and fissures. These cracks symbolize his plural and fragmented identity and that of the nation. His story is synonymous with entire history of postcolonial India.

Rushdie has always been distrustful of discourses that claim authenticity to the past and representation of essentialized identities. Such assumptions are part of the legacy of colonial discourses. Authenticity and objectivity, in history and identity, are illusions of power. Rushdie refers to authenticity as “the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism” which “demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogenous and unbroken tradition” (Imaginary 67). His novels not only purport to retrieve forgotten and suppressed historical events, they challenge and question the very act of history writing, exposing the political forces and interests that constitute narrating the nation. As Reder says: “Rather than playing the ‘Western game of History’ and attempting to write – or rewrite – a history of the subcontinent, Rushdie has decided to challenge Western history on alternative grounds” (qtd in Kirca 90).

Through the theme of memory his novels raise “questions regarding the processes of self-knowledge, epistemology, and hermeneutics within a relative universe devoid of any Prime Mover or ultimate referent” (Droogan 205) Rushdie has meditated on the nature of memory in IH. Memory, he says, is selective, malleable and hence fallible. The processes of interpretation,
erasure, amplification and forgetting are the processes of textualization which we use to remake the past to suit our present purposes. His novels through their fragmented narration demonstrate that history-writing is an imaginative, subjective and interpretative activity. A complete historical reproduction of their existence is unattainable. As he says:

Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality... Do Hindus not accept... that the world is a kind of dream; the Brahma dreamed, is dreaming the universe; that we only see dimly through that dream-web, which is Maya,... If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma’s dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right? (MC 211)

Saleem’s autobiographical venture is an attempt at rewriting Indian history and interrogating the foundational principles of Eurocentric historiography. Historiography inclines towards totalitarianism when it erases or reduces the heterogeneity of a complex, receding and absent past. Rushdie novels evade such hegemonic attempts at unification and homogenization by offering a non-linear history that is an amalgamation of the personal and the official. They are metafictional or self-reflexive texts that counter the so-called authenticity of Western and nationalist historical discourse. The novels display an awareness of their status as an artefact, a construction, a fiction through the means of purposeful, self-conscious authorial intrusions. Such an awareness of the fictionality of the world problematizes historical knowledge and truth claims. In MC, Saleem often interjects his narration to reflect on the writing process. The glaring errors that he makes in his historical enterprise only illustrate his cognizance of his authorial status and of his writing process:
Because I am rushing ahead at breakneck speed; errors are possible, and overstatements, and jarring alterations in tone; I’m racing the cracks, but I remain conscious that errors have already been made, and that, as my decay accelerates (my writing speed is having trouble keeping up), the risk of unreliability grows... in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe. (270-271)

Rushdie foregrounds the textuality of the past by deliberately introducing errors into Saleem’s narration. Dates for important historical events are muddled up. Saleem gives a wrong date for the death of Gandhi and confuses between the authors, Vyasa and Valmiki, of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Historical reality is, therefore, partial and fallible. The historical record is fragmented and erroneous. Instead of recovering the past as it was, history has to be imaginatively constructed. Rushdie explicitly states:

"History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings... The reading of Saleem’s unreliable narration might be... a useful analogy for the way in which we all, every day, attempt to “read” the world. (IM 29)

Reality cannot be solely understood through rational and scientific methodologies. There is no univocal relationship between the past and the present, between signifier and the signified. The world is “as much the creation of Kafka... as it is of Freud [or] Marx,” and “[h]uman beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions... Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps” (IM 32).
Similarly, *Shame* highlights the discursive act of history-writing through the depiction of Omar Khayyam and the lives of two families who take an active role in national politics. The novel, a sort of modern improvisation of the genre of the fairy-tale, is preoccupied with oppressive history of Pakistan, consisting of political turmoil and military campaigns, through an exploration of the relationship between shame and violence. The novel encompasses political events such as the partition of India after Independence, the 1971 war that gained independence for Bangladesh and the execution of Bhutto in 1979. Real political personages like Iskander Harappa and General Raza Hyder are given fictitious names. Despite the obvious parallels, the narrator refuses to identify his fictional country with Pakistan: “The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality” (29). It is in this admission or refusal that the narrator first emphasizes the textuality of history, the constructedness of historical and mythical narratives: “Maybe my friend should be telling this story, or another one, his own; but he doesn’t write poetry any more. So here I am instead, inventing what never happened to me” (28). The narrator points to the unreliability and fallibility of his narration:

But I have been out of doors for quite long enough now, and must get my narrative out of the sun before it is afflicted by mirages or heat-stroke... (it seems that the future cannot be restrained, and insists on seeping back into the past. (24)

The narrator raises poignant questions central to this study: “is history to be considered the property of the participants solely? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories?” (28). The novel combats the ideological, totalitarian
discourse of history by presents counter-memories "float[ing] upwards from history, from memory, from Time" (87). Shame unearths buried or forgotten stories that undermine the discourse of totalitarian history-writing. Peripheral voices that have been excluded from official history reinterpret the past, illustrating history as only one story or version among many. The novel suggests that a nation, Pakistan in this scenario, is the fragmenting palimpsest where multiple stories clash, negotiate and are rewritten:

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of facts arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks: field patterns, axe-heads, folk-tales, broken pitchers, burial mounds, the fading memory of their youthful beauty. History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement. No room in it... for the likes of Omar Khayyam Shakil. (124)

The narrator, parodying a historian, narrates the past by selecting some events and forgetting others:

"I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build up imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change" (87).

Rushdie's answer to the totalitarian and exclusionary discourses lies in a hybrid, dialogical space in which, using Agha Shahid Ali verses as his epigraph, "memory keeps getting in the way of... history." The injunction to remember is voiced by the character, Yuvraj, the son of Sardar Singh: "The fanatics kill our gents and the army shames our ladies... This is their Islam. They
want us to forget but we remember" (589). The same zeal to remember the past is found in the character of India Ophuls, the illegitimate offspring of Boonyi and Max, “the literal child of East and West, of the close and far, of the slow and fast and of the global and local” (Amrani 84). One of Rushdie’s many hybrid characters, India is also portrayed as a victim of imposed amnesia and ignorance by her father:

The deadness of India’s mother, however, was of the worst and deadest kind. The ambassador had entombed her memory under a pyramid of silence. . . . The deadly dead woman her mother had become was lost in the ambassador’s silence, had been erased by it. (29)

The journey of the character India is from ignorance and unawareness to the recovery of her buried past, through a process of research and introspection. At the beginning of the novel she is shown to harbour deep abhorrence for her exoticist, colonial, suggesting the appropriation of a reality that was not hers to own, . . . 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. (7)

This is the first indication of her rootlessness and her estrangement from her past. Her submerged and erased past seeps into her “agitated periods of sleep-speech” when she would talk in a “Guttural, glottal-stoppy, as if she were speaking Arabic . . . the dream tongue of Scheherazade” (3). The fitful dreams of the ambassador’s daughter are haunted by the ghosts of a forgotten and silenced past. The incomprehensible words are the language and soul of a mutilated and suppressed culture. Although presenting herself as a child of the western world, “disciplined, groomed, nuanced, inward, irreligious, understated, calm” (7), she is unable to sever her
inescapable ties to the Oriental world. "India can undoubtedly," Donatella Resta says, "be labelled as a hybrid identity because she is under construction in an interstitial cultural and conceptual space." Beginning with the discovery of an old photograph, through which she learns her birth name: Kashmira Noman, India moves on to reconstruct her forgotten past. In such a way, Resta notes, the albatross hanging on her neck is broken off and she gains a precious heritage: her imaginary homeland from indefinite sensation becomes a strong but real tie.