

## From Routes to Roots: A Vision of the Indian Subcontinent in Salman Rushdie's Novels

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### Abstract

Rushdie has explored many themes and issues in his writing cosmos within the postcolonial perspective in relationship with language, history, politics, identity, migration, and globalization. The present paper is focused on his two famous novels *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Shalimar the Clown* that had taken a reversion from the other works that are based on western countries and characters. He is traversing back from routes to roots, envisioning the Indian subcontinent within his critiques. Rushdie encompasses through the geographical, political, and cultural limits in the course of his written works, just to come back to explore his subcontinent. In both these books the Indian nation expects a key topical core interest with a major focus on serious issues like historical backdrop of India loaded with turbulence in the present circumstances, and the issue of Kashmir has given a priority that has got mutilated between India and Pakistan since independence. The experience of distance inside the third world connection is pondered upon after the postcolonial era of the subcontinent. Rushdie investigates the historical backdrop of India full with turbulence in the most recent century in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, while it is the issue of Kashmir that expects priority in *Shalimar the Clown*.

**Keywords-** Roots, Turbulence, Politics, Postcolonial, Subcontinent

Both novels are traversing from western thoughts to the author's own subcontinent that has become the victim of too many impunities and turbulences. The experience of the third world alienation has become the source to deliberate upon. *The Moor's Last Sigh* explores the real historical figures and events including the surrender of Granada by Boabdil, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the 1993 Bombay riots, the gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, as well

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as the modern Indian political organizations like Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena in Indian Political history. It traces four generations of the narrator's family and the ultimate effects upon the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby. Also, the novel reflects upon its own moment of production as part of our engagement with a 'palimpsestic' or multilayered reading of the novel. While as *Shalimar the Clown* deliberates to attempt to write about the core issue of Kashmir. It is a most celebrated work of cultural fusion and merging, of diversity and postcolonial hybridity which ends on hope and reconciliation, of unpremeditated joy, a narrative of ecstasy, betrayal and angst produced by a powerful and melancholic narration about the brutalization of Kashmir. It is a perfect combination of revenge, love, lament, and warning towards the decline of the pluralistic and tolerant community of Kashmir that was lost forever. The best in *Shalimar the Clown* is that the recent history of Kashmir is both a terrible tragedy and a fault-line in the modern world, which the world ought to know about its people and its geography.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* appears to be the author's predicament by foregrounding a sense of banishment and impending death, opening and closing the eponymous Moor's narrative with his premature death in exile. Also, the novel reflects upon its own moment of production as part of our engagement with a 'palimpsestic' or multilayered reading of the novel.

The novel draws a deliberate attempt in mentioning real historical figures and events including the surrender of Granada by Boabdil, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the 1993 Bombay riots, the gangster and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, as well as the modern Indian political organizations like Bal Thackeray and the Shiv Sena. It traces four generations of the narrator's family and the ultimate effects upon the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby. The title is taken from the story of Boabdil (Abu Abdullah Muhammad), the last Moorish king of Granada. The spot from which Boabdil last looked upon Granada after surrendering is known as *Puerto del Suspiro del Moro* (pass of the Moor's Sigh). Moraes Zogoiby is in fact a translation of Arab which means 'unfortunate one'. According to the legend, it is said that the misfortune of the Zogoiby dates back to the Boabdil who cried as a woman, since he was not able to defend as a man. Zogoiby divides a similar history to one of the Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. His ancestry is veiled in the mystery of his father, but it seems that the origin was there of Boabdil, the Moorish and the Jewish woman. Rushdie insists on the crossroads, to the origin of any identity that assumes the mixture of an emblematic importance. Rushdie displays his numerous linguistic sources in his writing cosmos that makes the universe of Rushdie, multilingual of the migrant existence in a postcolonial output.

The discussion on the subcontinent of India that started in *Midnight's Children* is conveyed and forwarded in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. While *Midnight's Children* ends with the Emergency Crisis, *The Moor's Last Sigh* moves into the emergencies of the 1980s and 1990s, facilitating the political evaluation. *The Moor's Last Sigh* finds itself in cutting edge of India and deliberates upon the Spanish history, which shapes the scenery and an intermittent theme in the content. The "Moor" of the title of the novel is generally Sultan Boabdil, the last

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Arabic-Islamic leader of Granada, the last bastion of Moorish administration in Spain. The legend goes that when King Boabdil surrendered the city to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain in 1492, he turned back and sighed at the spot that proceeds to be called ‘Suspiro del Moro’ – the Moor’s sigh. It is this sigh that is alluded to in the title. Medieval Spain had been a mix of Eastern and Western society and their culture. The acknowledgment of Jews and Christians by the Muslim rulers had prompted a prosperous multicultural society. These ripe assorted qualities finished with the new Catholic rulers acquainting the probe into Spain that united the blended people of Muslims, Jews, and Christians into a national Church. A significant number of the oppressed Jews and Moors picked to leave the nation instead of disavowing their confidence. The takeoff of these people groups bankrupted the nation in social and cultural terms.

Paul Cantor in “Tales of the Alhambra: Rushdie’s Use of Spanish History in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*” contends that the novel promotes Rushdie’s “interrogation of the postcolonial myth of cultural authenticity” (70). According to him, the novel is an endeavor to celebrate social hybridity wherein Rushdie surveys Indian society in the light of Moorish Spain. He feels that Rushdie’s interest with Spanish history owes to his impression of Spain as a model of a multicultural civilization, in the light of partisan clashes that have rented India separated in the twentieth century. Cantor holds out a note of warning against the propensity to frame shortsighted mathematical statements in the middle of dominion and “monoculturalism” from one perspective, and to hostile anti-imperialism dominion with multiculturalism on the other. He praises Rushdie’s investigation of the multifaceted nature of the issue he raises wherein his utilization of Spanish history ends up being a piece of a bigger venture of reexamining imperial history in general.

J. M. Coetzee in an interview with Rushdie in “*The Moor’s Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie” highlights that Rushdie’s contention about the tolerant Arab tenet prompted an imaginative coexisting of societies that the Spanish investigation conveyed to an end. He feels this view has a tendency to disregard the shortcomings of the historical Boabdil. In reality, Boabdil should have been a timid individual controlled by his mother and hoodwinked by Ferdinand of Spain. However, Coetzee concedes that the displaying of Moraes on Boabdil is a fascinating suggestion. He yields that the proposition of Rushdie’s novel is a Hindu’s narrow mindedness in India, bodes as sick for the world as did the sixteenth-century Inquisition in Spain, is a provocative one.

The account and narration of the novel starts extremely with the narrator Moraes Zogoiby - nicknamed Moor - describing his story in the wake of escapement from the imprisonment in Spain. Moor diagrams down his story when he is captured by Vasco Miranda in the latter’s tower in Benengeli, located in Spain. Taking after his break, he is occupied with nailing the pages of his story to the trees around, inspiring Martin Luther’s well known nailing of his postulations to the congregation church door at Wittenberg. A reference

to this demonstration is made on the opening page itself. However, Martin Luther the Moor has no grand plan. He essentially needs his story to be known before his deceased capture.

The story outlines four eras of the Da Gama – Zogoiby family. It takes into account their causes in Cochin on the Malabar Coast, takes after their life of force and richness on Malabar Hill, the elitist region in Mumbai, and plays out its finale in Spain. Rushdie decides to approach the story from the point of view of two little minorities in the country – the Jews and Christians. Francisco Da Gama and Epifania Menezes get hitched in 1900. In this way they construct a domain with zest on the spice trade. Their marriage prompts with the beginning of two children, Camoens and Aires. The homosexual Aires and his wife Carmen bear no kids while the union of Camoens and Isabella prompts the start of a little girl, Aurora. The main beneficiary to the family, Aurora Da Gama discovers a companion in the Jew, Abraham Zogoiby. The four kids conceived of their union incorporate Christina, Inamorata, Philomena and Moraes – the focal character of the novel.

Moor, who is maturing dreadfully and rapidly, has an inherent variation from the norm in the type of a clubbed right hand. Nevertheless, his burdens are later rendered feeble and he becomes impotent. The Moor is inaccurate on the grounds that he can't fit in with the world he lives in – his family history and physiology render him to dangerous things. His roots as a Cochin Jew and his physiological condition guarantee that he is estranged from the general public to which he wants to have a place. He jokes about his Catholic – Jewish inceptions: “I salute their unmarried defiance... I, however, was raised neither as a Catholic nor as a Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was ... a real Bombay mix” (104). Rushdie has adored the city Bombay with its diverse blend, its cosmopolitanism, its versatility, its inconsistencies, its abundances, is the core of India.

John Ball Clement in *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights* notes that the parallel between the Spanish and Indian setting empowers a “prophetic critique” (46). Medieval Spain with its multicultural ethos can be seen as a sort of parallel to the mainstream pluralist goals of Gandhi and Nehru. Nonetheless, similar to this European partner that got to be coercive; India’s destiny could run a comparable course under the shadow of hazardous partisan strengths like communalism.

The religious fundamentalism in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is joined by the divisive talk that affects even the cultural and social arena. The novel traces the ascent of religious patriotism building up and finally finishing in the demolition of the city of Bombay. Occasions like the seizure of the golden temple by Sikh terrorists, the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the devastation of the Ayodhya Masjid in 1992 had a domino impact. However, men like Mainduck whose plan was to curb the minority groups in the nation, picked up force to curb the minority tribes. It is important that such divisive strengths had staunch backing from the adolescent groups and the intense classes in the city. The Moor is very much aware that

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... they are not inhuman, these Mainduck-style Hitlers, and it is in their humanity that we must locate our collective guilt, humanity's guilt for human beings' misdeeds; for if they are just monsters – if it is just a question of King Kong and Godzilla wreaking havoc until the aeroplanes bring them down – then the rest of us are excused. (297)

Rushdie's "sigh" in this novel is for the inexorably parochial track that the country has portrayed by a multicultural ethos and has set out upon. An inspiration that is a Rushdie's top pick, that of Oz and a mission for home, is utilized to satiric finishes in the novel. The Moor unexpectedly discovers refuge in the administration of the defender of fundamentalism:

... I found, for the first time in my short-long life, the feeling of normality, of being nothing special, the sense of being among kindred spirits, among people-like-me, that is the defining quality of home....

So, mother: in that dreadful company, doing those dreadful deeds, without need of magic slippers, I found my own way home. (304-5)

Traversing back to his own nation, Rushdie's negativity bears itself out in the destiny of Adam Braganza. In the event that *The Moor's Last Sigh* upgrades the political plan of *Midnight's Children*, even the characters have progressed from one context to the next. In *Midnight's Children* Aadam Sinai is contributed with the expectation for another forward-looking India. Saleem visualizes this second otherworldly era of "potent kiddies, growing waiting listening, rehearsing the moment when the world would become their plaything" (448). The newborn child Aadam Sinai, child of Shiva and Parvati in *Midnight's Children* who was received by Saleem Sinai, returns in *The Moor's Last Sigh* as Adam Braganza. After Saleem's puzzle vanishing, he tackles the name "Braganza" after the Braganza sisters who deal with him.

The end of the novel sweeps and encompasses back to the starting. It discovers the Moor nailing the pages of his story to the trees around. The art of his nailing down appears to be a triumph eventually. Alexandra W. Schultheis in *Twentieth Century Literature* states that the novel has been viewed as "a paeon to the power of the aesthetic" (22). The thought of craftsmanship does appear to temper the negativity in the novel. J. C. Ball, then again, finds the structure of the work – with the starting containing the end and views that the reflection and intelligence of the "gloomy fatalism". Moor knows and recounts that his days are numbered. His quality is by all accounts abandoning him. He is after all things considered, a thirty-six year old, caught in a seventy-two year old physical make-up. Pretty much as the disintegration of Saleem in *Midnight's Children* is the reflection of the national degeneration; the quickened maturing and looming capture of the Moor mirror the breakdown of the Indian country. The last line contains "his hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time" (434). He looks at the Spanish Alhambra in the separation which remains as a confirmation "for flowing together," "an end to frontiers," and "dropping of the boundaries of the self".

He contends at last: “Yes, I have seen it across an oceanic plain .... I watch it vanish in the twilight, and in its fading it brings tears to my eyes” (433).

Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is about a nostalgic festival from routes to roots celebrated in long gone sanctuaries of racial concordance, like as, the flavor manors of Cochin and the Moorish civilization of Andalucía. In *Shalimar the Clown*, he swings back to a spot near his heart, to Kashmir as a lost heaven on earth envisioning the Indian subcontinent while traversing from routes to roots. An Eden, blessed full with nature and manmade magnificence with its lakes, snow capped peaks, pure valleys and Mughal gardens – Kashmir has eagerly drew Rushdie to show his creative ability in jotting down the lost Eden on earth. Rushdie charmingly evoked at the opening of *Midnight’s Children* and in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, that Kashmir gives the background for this novel that turns the focus on the breakdown of a heaven, and the transformation of artiste into terrorist.

The range of Rushdie’s canvas reaches out from Kashmir to the 1960s in Strasbourg and Paris of World War II, to present-day Los Angeles. Through the story of an individual disturbance, Rushdie investigates the headstrong issue of Kashmir in later history, and thereby, stands firm with the concerns of patriotism, religious bias, imperialism and communal harmony. It is his rare attempt to traverse back from Western to Eastern in exploring the Indian subcontinent with a rare view – from Strasbourg, Paris, Los Angeles to his own motherland.

The novel opens in 1991 in Los Angeles with the homicide of the U.S. ambassador Max Ophuls, by his driver Shalimar. The wrongdoing is conferred at the doorstep of the ambassador’s little girl called ‘India’. She has been named after the nation of her illegitimate conception. The story then expect a round development, traveling back five decades through the Partition of India, the Second World War and the great obliteration of Kashmir, digging into the stories of the real characters. *Shalimar the Clown* is partitioned into five areas – ‘India,’ ‘Boonyi,’ ‘Max,’ “Shalimar” and ‘Kashmira’ – each named after a noteworthy character.

In Kashmir, Rushdie zooms into the town of Pachigam, which is an exemplification of the syncretic society. This town is well known for its skilled cooks and food, and the ‘bhand pather’ – dramatic entertainers who stage the customary plays of the valley. The town embodies Muslims and Hindus coinciding in concordance. Their blending has prompted the advancement of a typical society.

The title character “Shalimar the clown” is additionally known as Noman Sher Noman as a tight-rope artiste. He is the child of the Muslim headman of the town Abdullah Noman who drives the bhand pather – the troupe of artistes. Shalimar was enamored with Boonyi Kaul. Boonyi is the girl of Pyarelal Kaul, the Hindu Pandit of the town. Boonyi’s mother, who had died while giving a birth to a child, had been a decent companion of Shalimar’s mother. The young significant lovers Shalimar and Boonyi consummate their affection at the time of fourteen. At the disclosure of their physical contact, the two families

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locate a full grown adequate determination as marriage. They leave apart their religious things, unfriendliness of the mullahs and the troopers in the valley, the parents and their understanding are persuaded that Kashmiriyat: “the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all differences” (110), would win. Abdullah Noman along these lines states:

There is no Hindu-Muslim issue. Two Kashmiri – two Pachigami – youngsters wish to marry, that’s all. A love match is acceptable to both families and so a marriage there will be; both Hindu and Muslim customs will be observed. (110)

The affective love story of Boonyi and Shalimar is hindered by the entry of Max Ophuls on the scene. This U.S. representative to India is bewildered by Boonyi’s beauty amid her hypnotizing dance execution as Anarkali. However, Boonyi, who had been harboring a feeling of disappointment with her claustrophobic presence, grabs the chance to relinquish her spouse and old life for an existence of extravagance with Max, in Delhi. Consequently, she looks for lodging and dance lessons for satisfying Max’s physical wishes. Nevertheless, it is too late to return back for a deserted Boonyi when she understands her misguidance and mistake. She returns home back to Kashmir in the wake of having made the preeminent penance of her little daughter. Meanwhile, her presence in the town has been wiped out. Her identity doesn’t exist anymore in the official terms. She is acknowledged that she is a “dead person”. “Your life has been ended. It’s official” (223).

Rushdie while traversing through the subcontinent and his reversion from occidental to oriental is of great success in rehearsing from routes to roots. Meanwhile, writing about the tragic incidents of Kashmir another fundamental affective love story is woven as a greater part of story about the historical backdrop of Kashmir since partition. Both Boonyi and Shalimar share their personal matters such as the date of their birth. Both of them were born on the same night in October 1947 in the Shalimar greenery enclosures amid a dining feast at which their guardians were employed to cook and perform for the maharaja. Kashmir is attacked by the Kabailis – the Pakistan sponsored tribals – upon the arrival of the birth of Boonyi and Shalimar. On this fateful event the Maharaja took a decision to consent to India for military reinforcement. The concordance of the heaven and peaceful valley is broken by the twin strengths of patriotism and religious dogmatism that start to invade the charming district. The Indian armed force and the Islamic fundamentalists assume terrible parts. Initially, the Indian paramilitary forces are battling an unacknowledged war unwillingly, but progressively they themselves transform into disenthralled culprits of persecution.

Kashmir the heart of the novel meets the tragic fate by the culprits of both India and Pakistan. The parts of the novel woven in Kashmir are the quality of the book. The author’s eagerness unequivocally conveys the greater message of the brutality of Indian forces in the setting of his devastated homeland. The primary peaceful concurrence of the diverse groups is underscored in the novel. Suhayl Saadi in “Storm in the Valley of Death” unequivocally

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states that “massive state repression, intercommunal violence and increasingly fanatical religious ideologies turn the traditional magical vistas into a bloody Himalayan dystopia” (20).

To traverse in the novels of Rushdie in envisioning the Indian subcontinent while taking a reversion from routes to roots, he follows and achieves the goal of his popular culture which has borrowed from other cultures as well. It is observed that the allusions and references in his writing depict the bounded popular culture. On the first page of the novel *Shalimar the Clown*, Scheherazade, Star Trek, and Sigourney Weaver are abounded and discovered in a notice together. Gorbachev, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Mandelas, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Pr. Ronald Reagan, John Kennedy, Churchill, De Gaulle, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Dean Rusk, Indira Gandhi, Akbar, Morarji Desai, Martin Luther King, Bhutto, Napoleon, Pr. Zakir Hussain; are among the great political figures portrayed in the novel.

Rushdie’s allusions to the literary texts, abstract messages, and figures incorporate Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, the Katha Sarit Sagar, Thomas Mann, Achilles, Saint-Exupery, Tarzan, Mowgli, Rip Van Winkle, Keats, Heraclitus, Agamemnon, Troy, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Mycenae, Scheherazade and Shahryar are the most dominant figures of his choice. His famous social references incorporate movies like *The Magnificent Seven*, *Ghostbusters*, *Ted’s Bogus Journey*, Keanu Reeves’ motion picture *Bill and Chaplin*, Joan Baez Clark Kent, and Superman. Also, in the novel there are references to the Warli tribal art and Madhubani painting.

*Shalimar the Clown* is a blend of the recurring motifs such as the obsessiveness of revenge and globalization of modern lives – all cultures are multicultural, self-identity through place of childhood rather than nation, the conflicts brought by modernity, the disastrous effects of religious fanaticism on society, the meeting of the East and West and the unexpected sources of contemporary political events. The narrative spans the world, bringing together three different localities – Los Angeles, France of the nineteen thirties to forties and Kashmir. The narrative that begins with the murder of Max Ophuls, Resistance fighter and former American ambassador to India, in Los Angeles in nineteen ninety one on the doorstep of his daughter conceived out of wedlock, India, by his Kashmiri chauffeur, *Shalimar the Clown*, an assassination which at first sight looks like a political murder.

Rushdie’s use of language in both novels has always been a means of power and the dilemma of a postcolonial aftermath that begins with this process of thought and expression. Caught between a land of one’s own and the fate exercised by a power without, the postcolonial migrant writer finds the mode of expression itself a problem. Rushdie has shaped and animated the bare historical facts into masterpieces with the effective application of postcolonial hybridity. Even though he is not sincere in retelling history, the feeling of reality by the reader is aroused greatly by the implementation of postcolonial hybridity. Rushdie’s message does not have suggestions just for the strict migrant. It is an open and widespread message that people are all, as it was, migrants. The paper is a major and minor endeavor to

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evaluate and explore the hidden truth of brutality, devastation and manipulation in relationship with the lost history of Kashmir that the whole world should know about it.

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