
Cultural Diplomacy in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*

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Abstract:

Cultural diplomacy refers to the relationships between two or more countries through the exchanges of cultural activities. Its key principle is to foster common values like faith, social justice, and responsibility. Cultural diplomacy helps people from diverse backgrounds to find common ground. A literary text like a novel can express the issues of identity and culture that are relevant to the readers of different nations and cultures. The purpose of this article is to give the theoretical concept of cultural diplomacy and to dig out the ingredients of cultural diplomacy inherent in Salman Rushdie's novel Shalimar the Clown. This paper asserts that the novel is a great literary work to study cultural diplomacy. The novel tries to justify that the external selfish interference can change a paradise-like place into a battleground butchering human beings in a very inhuman way. The novel presents Kashmir as a melting pot for all religious followers before it was intruded on by outsiders. The misuse of power by a diplomat like Max Ophuls, an American ambassador to India, causes great misfortunes in his own as well as the lives of many others. As the result of the selfish interests of the foreign countries, Kashmir becomes a battleground with mass killings, genocides, frequent rape cases, and mass exodus. This type of realistic depiction of Southeast Asia, mainly Kashmir, in the novel shows how the selfish desires of different nations create situations of chaos. The ideas that the novel uses to describe Southeast Asia, mainly Kashmir, help readers make up their minds about that area. The readers may long for harmonious relations between different nations. It happens mainly because of the literary artifact i.e. the novel that expresses cultural diplomacy. The fictional characters and the fictitious societies depicted in the novel help us understand foreign countries and foreign cultures. The reader certainly takes the novel as a work that advocates cultural harmony

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Diplomacy is the relation or behavior of a country to others to foster its relationship with them, whereas cultural diplomacy is the exchange of ideas, values, art, customs, beliefs, systems, and other aspects of culture with the intention of promoting the mutual relationship between nations. Cultural diplomacy is the relations between two or more countries through the exchanges of cultural activities. Its hay day was during the cold war. Thomas Jefferson, the statesman, scientist, and architect is the first to recognize “the potential for cultural expression to shape international opinion about the fledgling republic” (Schneider 191). The argument given by Jefferson about the importance of culture in shaping diplomacy remains relevant even after over two hundred years. Fostering common values like faith, social justice and responsibility have been key principles of cultural diplomacy in the present time. Amidst the present conflictual world, cultural diplomacy is

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an effective means of communication because “creative expression crosses cultures, helping people from diverse backgrounds to find common ground” (Schneider 196). The Nigerian Pulitzer prize-winning novelist Wole Soyinka rightly expressed that “art humanizes while politics demonizes” (quoted in Schneider 196). A literary text like a novel can express the issues of identity and culture that are relevant to the readers of different nations and cultures. It may appeal to readers worldwide on an emotional level. In Schneider’s view “That is the key to the power of art and to the potential power of cultural diplomacy- the appeal to emotions” (200). Generally, cultural diplomacy is considered to be foreign policy. In Thierry Balzaca and et. al.’s view “cultural diplomacy is indeed a public policy that strives to expert data representative of the national culture and to promote interactions with other framework of foreign policy” (227).

Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) is also a fictional narrative that sets in India, some parts of Europe, and the United States of America, and incorporates characters from India, Europe, and America, who expose the customs, cultures, and beliefs related to the countries they belong to. It is a complexly woven novel with the flavor of magic realism. By reading this novel the reader can understand the workings of different cultures as well as the insights into foreign cultures. The novel “suggests a new development to the extent that it fuses the interest in US-led globalization...with the sustained focus on a South Asian national experience...” (Teverson 207). The novel *Shalimar the Clown* is a great literary work to study cultural diplomacy. Cultural artifacts like novels are expected to promote mutual relationships between the nations and their people. But Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) created an uproar that led to riots in Muslim communities resulting in a number of deaths. Instead of creating diplomatic harmony, it created antagonism between the people of different nations, whereas the novel *Shalimar the Clown* is concerned, it seems to have been written to passivize that rioting situation ignited by the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

The research question that this article tries to analyze is, how does the novel *Shalimar the Clown* attempt to express cultural diplomacy? Or has it been able to foster cultural diplomacy between India and the West? In fact, the research asserts that the diplomatic ideas exposed in the novel *Shalimar the Clown* are very much relevant to the relations between India and other Western countries. It means to express the idea that the diplomats may deteriorate the situation that they are meant to smoothen if they behave in an unjust and selfish way ignoring the values of the residing nations. To get knowledge about cultural diplomacy, it is better to get knowledge about the terms diplomacy and culture separately.

So far as diplomacy is concerned, it is the policy of a nation to make its relationship with other nations amicable, but it may also create antagonism with other nations. It is a tactful way of dealing with people. Berridge defines diplomacy as “The conduct of the relations between sovereign states through the medium of officials based at home or abroad, the latter being either members of their state’s diplomatic service or temporary diplomats” (*A Dictionary of Diplomacy* 62). Similarly, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation, the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist” (quoted in Nicolson 15). Diplomacy is synonymous to foreign policy. It is the process through which negotiation between countries is carried out. Hutchings asserts that diplomacy is “cultivation and management of relations with other states” (ix). He highlights interstate relations. In Berridge’s view, diplomacy is political activity. He asserts that “Diplomacy is an essentially political activity

and well-resourced and skilful, a major ingredient of power. Its chief purpose is to enable states to secure the objectives of their foreign policy without resort to forces, propaganda or law” (*Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* 1). He further says, “Diplomacy is not merely what professional diplomats do. It is carried out by other officials and by private persons under the direction of officials” (1). Diplomacy is the expression of tact and skill that is shown to define diplomatic action. Understanding histories and cultures are necessary for a diplomat to pose diplomatic relations with those countries. In his view, “One group situates diplomacy in the arena of interstate security, concerned with high politics”, it “covers not only questions of security, but also, at a minimum, commercial and cultural issues” (9). Balzaca and et.al.opine that “Diplomacy deals with international relations.” It “refers to the action and [the] manner of representing one’s country to a foreign nation and in international negotiations” (1). “In general the term ‘diplomacy’ is often employed metaphorically, to refer to the tact and skill considered to define diplomatic action” (2).

Diplomacy is the conduct of each other. It is “a way of conducting their relations with one another” (Constantinou6). In Nicolson’s view, “Diplomacy, in the sense of the ordered conduct of relations between one group of human beings and another group alien to themselves, is far older than history” (17). Diplomacy does not simply take place between states but wherever people live in different groups. It is a mistake to take diplomacy on exclusively as state practice. It is “a set of assumptions, institutions, and process- a practice- for handling certain kinds of relations between human beings” (Sharp 13).

So far as culture is concerned, it is a crucial concept, and its history is appended with human history. Culture is important but can be slippery, even a chaotic, concept. It is a term used by social scientists for a way of life, but it includes a mass of interpretations and symbolic associations. Culture is related to society, so people do not get knowledge of culture by birth, instead, they learn it by growing up in a particular society. Culture is shared with members of a society and passed from one generation to the next mainly by imitation or through the use of language. The term ‘culture’ has a ‘complex’ and ‘fascinating’ history. “By the nineteenth century in Europe, it meant the habits, customs and taste of upper classes” (Nayar 4).

Matthew Arnold is the first in western philosophy to describe culture in his book *Culture and Anarchy*. He views that culture is “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (5). He also compares culture with “perfection”. It is the study and pursuit of perfection which “leads us to conceive of true human perfection;” and it helps us to develop “all sides of our society” (9). Its origin rests in the “love of perfection”, and is “possessed by the scientific passion of pure knowledge [as well as] the social and moral passion of doing good” (34). Culture does not pay attention to the fashions of “raw passion”, but it draws “even nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, grateful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that” (38). People of culture are distinguished by their way of life, their habits, their manners, the very tones of their voice. Culture is helpful to shape people in a civilized way. It tends “to deal with the men of a system, of disciples, of a school.” “The man of culture stops him with a turn for small fault-finding, love of selfish ease, and indecision in action” (51).

Culture in the present time is broadly divided into two groups: high culture and popular culture. Popular culture includes such elements as of a society’s art and entertainment as television, radio,

recordings, advertising, sports, hobbies, fads, and fashion. In Arnold's view, culture is related to refined things as a civilization, so he does not include popular culture under the study area of culture. In Robert Young's views "Arnold's culture is often assumed to involve the propagation of high culture in the service of an organicist nationalism" (55). In Young's thinking, for Arnold, culture "is not a matter of belles, letters or aesthetics, for it involves a higher, inward spiritual principle" (55). In Young's view *Culture and Anarchy* "is the highly influential, virtual founding document of English culture" (60). Arnold contrasted culture with anarchy: other Europeans, following philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau, contrasted culture with 'the state of nature'.

According to Edward B. Tylor, "Culture or civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (qtd. in Young 45). Tylor considers culture synonymous with civilization and takes it as the complex whole of the social system. Nowadays this concept of culture is criticized, but Tylor in his view is taking the liberal position. Uptill 1950 was the Enlightenment ethos of the universal sameness and equality of humanity, but "from the 1850s the racist degenerationists talked about civilizations in the plural"(48).

Culture is a particular lifestyle that can be taken as concrete products like skills, customs, folkways, institutions, beliefs, etc. In Williams' view,

Since the nineteenth century there have been two concepts of culture, broadly speaking a 'high' culture associated with Arnold, which assumes itself ethnocentrically to be perfection, and an anthropological, relativistic concept of culture (associated with Tylor) as the 'complex Whole' of any individual society's material and ideational system (Young 45).

As culture is a dynamic concept, it does not remain the same. It is also a conscious striving toward progress or perfection. Culture remains in all human beings, however, crude or primitive its level is, and people's cultural life advances according to the progress in their material lives.

Cultural diplomacy is diplomacy maintained through cultural activities. It is the expression of national culture to promote the relationship with other countries. It helps us develop our respect for others and their ways of thinking. It helps us know about people of other countries. Cynthia P. Schneider defines cultural diplomacy as "the use of creative expression and exchanges of ideas, information, and people to increase mutual understanding" (191). It develops respect for others and their way of thinking. Its real value is counted during the time of crisis.

According to Institute for Cultural Diplomacy,

Cultural Diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society ("What is Cultural Diplomacy?").

Cultural diplomacy is "the first attempt(s) of states to implement the idea of purposeful use of culture in the interest of promoting foreign policy goals" (Pajtinka 96). During and after the Cold

War cultural diplomacy has been a strong tool to foster goals. M. C. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understandings” (quoted in Pajtinka 100). Cultural diplomacy plays a vital role in creating understanding, respect, and trust to alleviate the feeling of humiliation. In the words of an Egyptian official interviewed by the advisory committee on Cultural Diplomacy, “Developing respect for others and their ways of thinking-this is what cultural diplomacy does” (Schneider 201).

Literature is a type of cultural expression because it also affects the relationship with other countries. Similarly, fictional works are also strong tools to affect the relationship with other countries. Many fictional works express national cultural ideas that are read by people of other countries, and they make their minds about the people and cultures of those countries. A fictional work also expresses various ideas related to customs, cultures, systems, beliefs, and traditions of a nation, and they are helpful for foreign readers to understand that country. The fictional works include different characters that we may never have met and different places that we may never have seen. By presenting such people and places they may foster mutual understanding or create antagonism.

Literature can also be a tool for cultural diplomacy as it gives the reader chance to know about foreign countries and their cultures so that people may be aware of enhancing cultural relationships between nations. Daniel Sip views;

From a theoretical perspective, literature can work for cultural diplomacy as it can allow readers to imagine foreign countries or foreign cultures. Characterizations of protagonists can invite us to empathize with people we would usually never meet, and even fictitious societies can potentially make us understand the workings of different countries (1).

Literature includes certain issues and ideas related to foreign countries that are helpful for fostering cultural diplomacy. It implants certain ideas in the mind of the reader about the country it describes, and it helps the reader to make up their minds about that country. Literary works, mainly narrative works, are cultural artifacts and they discuss certain people, certain places, and certain ideas and customs related to certain countries that may be very much helpful for cultural diplomacy. In that sense, narrative works are also diplomats since they use culture in many different ways. In other words, literary texts are unacknowledged diplomats. They are helpful tools to understand foreign countries and foreign cultures. Fictional characters and fictitious societies help us to understand the people and places of other countries. The text does not express anything in isolation; its meaning depends on how it is received by the reader. So some texts are received positively whereas some others are received negatively. The writers cannot be excluded from the writings. So the writer’s role is also of great importance in shaping cultural diplomacy. In a broad sense, Schneider rightly says, “Artists, actors, musicians, and writers in any culture act as the national conscience, reflecting, often critically, on society” (183).

Rushdie’s ninth novel *Shalimar the Clone* includes mainly the subject matter related to the state of Kashmir, the favourite place of his family’s holidays as well as the homeland of his maternal grandfather. The novel is presented as “the symbol of the inherent weakness of the US-led efforts to establish a global political and economic consensus in the wake of the Second World War” (Teverson 218). After the cold war, some Western intellectuals like Samuel Huntington formed the

belief in the triumph of capitalist liberal democracy over a centrally controlled ruling system. But the novel asserts that “US machinations against Russia during the cold war have also brought new forms of history into being that were now bearing fruit in regions such as Afghanistan and Kashmir” (Teverson 218). It puts forward the evolution of new ideologies of conflict in South Asian politics. Kashmiriness in the novel “is shown being crushed in a three-way power struggle between US interests, the Indian army, and Islam insurgents from Pakistan” (Teverson 219). The novel is not only the abuse of Rushdie; it is “a plea to the Indian army not to exploit the situation in Kashmir, a plea to moderate Muslims to seek to reform their religion, and a plea to European and North American politicians to create a global political context that helps rather hinders their progress” (Teverson 255).

The novel *Shalimar the Clown* tries to justify that external selfish interference can change a paradise-like place into a battleground butchering human beings in a very inhuman way. The novel shows that paradise-like Kashmir becomes a battleground because of external intervention. Before intruders intervened in Kashmir, it was “like paradise”. Pachigam, a village in Kashmir, the birthplace of Boonyi and Shalimar, was the admixture of Hindus, Muslims and Jews. It was the belief that “at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all other differences” (*Shalimar the Clown* 110). Muslims also actively took part in Hindu Dassehracelebration. Pandit Pyarelal once says, “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” (71) The Pachigam community arranges a marriage between Boonyi, a Hindu girl and Shalimar the Clown, a Muslim boy. On that occasion Abdullah, the village head, says, “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). In fact, Kashmir was a melting pot for all religious followers before it was intruded on by outsiders. Max Ophuls, the American Ambassador to India at that time, spoils Boonyi’s life in the name of providing her dance training. His such misbehavior results in his own death, the death of his mistress Boonyi and the death of his own daughter India. The misuse of the power of a diplomat like him causes great misfortune in his own as well as the lives of many others.

To encounter the Russian support to Afghanistan government, America provides weapons to Muslim revolutionary groups in Afghanistan. Such groups are also supported by the government of Pakistan, and they create riots in once paradise-like Kashmir so that it becomes a battleground with mass killing and genocide. Max Ophuls was in India as an ambassador with the missions of “politics, diplomacy and arms sales” (181), but he is so allured by the beauty and dancing of Boonyi that he forgets his responsibilities and spoils her by making his mistress. The reality was that “The Russians were in Afghanistan and consequently many Afghans had fled to Pakistan, and were even to be found at forward camp number 22 in the “tree” –Azad- sector of Kashmir” (270).

Max Ophuls was an American with Pakistani sympathies. He objected to “the militarization of the Kashmir valley and when the word oppressor passed his lips for the first time the bubble of his popularity finally burst” (198). In fact, India was against America’s trampling over Southeast Asia. So Indian editorial writers often reacted that “America should put its own house in order, and stop telling us how to take care of our own land” (198). The ambassador Max Ophuls supports terror activities though he calls himself the ambassador of antiterrorism. Everything in Kashmir is taken as politics, and old comfortable days are all gone. It becomes a place full of

insurgencies. Mass killings, frequent rape cases, genocides, mass exodus become normal in that area. The words like Mujahid, jihad, Talib- Talim (all means freedom) become buzzwords among the rebel groups. Though the USA provides weapons to them, they hate the Christians and hate America. The motto “Kashmir for the Kashmiris and everyone else, kindly get out” (247) becomes very popular among the rioters.

The realistic depiction of south-east Asia, mainly of Kashmir, in the novel *Shalimar the Clown*, shows how the selfish desires of different nations create situations of chaos. It shows that the diplomatic behaviours of the diplomats are not always oriented to establish harmonious situations between nations. Diplomats may also function for their personal or national selfish desires that may create conflictual situations. The novel includes the deteriorated condition by the selfish intentions of different countries. They make Southeast Asia, mainly Kashmir, a playground for the fulfilment of selfish desires. The novel instills a sense of cultural harmony among the readers. The ideas that the novel uses to describe Southeast Asia, mainly about Kashmir, help readers make up their minds about that area. The readers may long for harmonious relations between different nations. It happens mainly because of the literary artifact i.e. the novel that expresses cultural diplomacy. The fictional characters and the fictitious societies depicted in the novel help us understand foreign countries and foreign cultures. The reader certainly takes the novel as a work that advocates cultural harmony.

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