THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ’S THE AUTUMN OF THE PATRIARCH, SALMAN RUSHDIE’S SHALIMAR THE CLOWN AND MILAN KUNDERA’S THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER AND FORGETTING

Summary of the Thesis

The present work studies memory as a political space of meaning-making, ideology, public and symbolic representations. It raises and attempts to answer the following questions: In what diverse ways does memory enact a politics or how is politics endemic to a poetics of memory? What are the ramifications of such a politics? How is a politics of memory coincidental with a politics of truth and representation? Can the politics of memory also be productive, besides being a source of violence and atrocity?

The basic premise of this work is the textual nature of memory. The current study views memory as an act of creative, active composition and construction of past experiences into familiar linguistic formats like story, narrative, quasi-narrative, anecdotes etc.

The politics of memory, which is the central focus of this work, encapsulates multiple meanings. It engages memory in social-political praxis that illustrates the nexus between memory and power—use of memory to rationalize and maintain political order; the struggle for meaning and the “correct” or “true” recollection of the past that takes place in private as well as the public sphere; the processes and practices of memory which can establish and normalize meaning, truth or any discourse on the one hand, and on the other, overthrow absolute notions of truth, origin and the past. The politics of remembering and forgetting question accepted notions of referentiality and proposes alternate ways of constructing knowledge. They point to the essential constructedness of reality, history and knowledge. The vicissitudes of memory, its textual nature that is rife with political overtones, interrogate and problematize our perceptions and constructions of truth, meaning, reality, representation and history.

All the three authors taken up for study are united in their resistance to totalitarian utopian ideologies of their times, dictatorship in Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Soviet communism in Milan Kundera, and terrorism/religious fundamentalism in Salman
Rushdie. To this end, they employ different forms of countermemory, an idea conceptualized by Michel Foucault. Márquez offers his vision of myth, the carnivalesque and the discourse of gossip/rumour to combat a debilitating autocratic rule; Kundera presents “devils’ laughter” in opposition to the ideological manipulation of memory and history; and Rushdie uses a combination of gossip/rumour, laughter and local histories to challenge the discourses of nationalism and globalization. These countermemories are all ways recovering and rewriting a forgotten past, questioning official epistemological exclusion or marginalization of alternate remembrances and underscoring the textuality of the past.

In **AP**, the carnivalesque mode of storytelling serves as a form of countermemory and itself in the form of gossip and rumour. It creates a space for the articulation of the history of dispossession, violence and enforced silence and forgetting. It upsets accepted, mainstream understanding of public consciousness and historiography under autarchy. The narration or the act of remembering in the form of gossip and rumour is a site where carnivalization of truth takes place, where the past is demythologized and re-mythologized, deconstructed and reconstructed. In the hands of the dictator and the purveyors of the political regime, memory becomes an instrument to exert power and to falsify the historical record. However, the endeavour undertaken by the masses is both deconstructive and reconstructive. Through their carnivalesque act of recollection, the narrative deconstructs epistemological certitudes and foregrounds the textual nature of reality.

In **BLF**, Kundera equates totalitarianism with utopia, which he names as “idyll” in the text. The novel maps out the political, cultural and social contours of a nation inflicted with a perverted utopia in the guise of communism. The novel illustrates the processes of organized forgetting instituted by the state machinery in order to obliterate all vestiges of social, political and cultural life in Czechoslovakia that do not bolster the “idyll” or the system of governance led by the communist party. The third chapter on Kundera employs the idea of laughter, as it features in Bakhtin’s critical theory, for textual analysis. It focuses on the use of laughter as countermemory in the interpretation of the text. Laughter provides both form and content to counter-memory. Laughter breaks through the silence resulting from enforced forgetting. It provides liberation from the tyranny of established institutions and prevailing truths. Like the carnivalesque mode of storytelling, it is, therefore, transgressive, subversive, political,
ambivalent, self-reflexive and performative. It parodies the monologic official discourse and its claims to absolute truth and meaning.

In SC, the local, subjugated countermemories 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. Through the several countermemories, the novel illustrates the textual processes underlying the discourse of history, nationalism and religion.

Considering memory as a form of political praxis, this research highlights that memory is indispensable to the study of history, culture and society. By investing memory in their literary creations, literary writers like Márquez, Rushdie and Kundera put an ethical demand to remember the forgotten histories and revise the past to its readers.