Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy.

- Salman Rushdie (Imaginary Homelands 15)
I

Of Imaginary Homelands: Introduction

"'We are. We are here.' And we are not willing to be excluded from any part of our heritage."

-Salman Rushdie (Imaginary Homelands 15)

This study aims at coming to grips with Salman Rushdie's engagement with the history, politics and identity of the Indian subcontinent, from his distinct location of a postcolonial migrant writer drawing culturally from multiple spaces, even as he belongs to none completely. A close textual examination of Rushdie's major fictional work has been undertaken in order to expound how a selection of thematic and structural patterns can be traced in the corpus of his major fiction, namely Midnight's Children (1981), Shame (1983), The Moor's Last Sigh (1995), The Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999), Fury (2001) and Shalimar the Clown (2005). The study attempts to chronicle the development of the writer vis-à-vis a critical examination of these six novels. The Enchantress of Florence (2008), Rushdie's latest major work of fiction was published as this study was nearing completion. It thus enabled the inclusion of examples into the discussion herein. A study of Rushdie cannot ignore his linguistic ebullience. Therefore, it takes into account the manner in which he reinvigorates narrative and the English language. The central thesis can be summarised and situated thus: Rushdie's oeuvre engages with the history, politics and identity of the Indian subcontinent shaped by the perspective of a migrant postcolonial. The study also takes into consideration his remarkable contribution to narrative and language.

The experience of being uprooted fascinates Rushdie, and his fiction is informed, enriched and contextualised by his experience of displacement as well as exile. Despite the density and complexity of his work, certain ideas and
preoccupations clearly resonate through his corpus of writing. The focus of the study is to scrutinise the recurrent concerns articulated in Rushdie's major novels which are largely shaped by a diasporic consciousness. The texts lend themselves to the postulation that Rushdie's novels are interconnected on a thematic and formal plane. Interestingly, his work seems to have kept pace with his geographical dislocation. The locales of his texts reflect his physical and geographical dislocation from India to England to America. However, he has repeatedly harked back to the imagined Indian homeland while negotiating a postmodern narrative mode and mindscape. Rushdie draws upon the Indian experience in his narratives. His work gives expression to the broad cultural, historical, religious and political experiences of the Indian subcontinent in the main.

Rushdie's non-fictional essays indisputably and explicitly serve as an annotation to his concerns and can be considered his fictional manifesto. Most of the essays collected in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* and *Step Across This Line* a collection of articles from 1992 to 2002, deliberate upon a range of issues including his particular location as an expatriate writer. The essays provide a valuable reading aide to his work. Hence, the opinions expressed in his non-fiction, interviews and other literary work merit due attention and have been taken into account where deemed relevant.

The tenor of this study endeavours to remain analytical rather than accusative or defensive towards the writer. It has mainly analysed the predominant concerns revealed in his fiction, and the design and evolution of his writing. The postcolonial, postmodern context has provided a theoretical referent for the study. Rushdie's narrative strategies are also closely examined in the postmodern, postcolonial space in which he writes. Nevertheless, this study is not a reductive reading. It does not
attempt to circumscribe Rushdie in a particular mould, for, with a writer like Rushdie who has constantly defied precincts, not only would such a task be confining, it would be virtually impossible. The French critic Guy Astic lays stress on examining Rushdie's work as a whole. As he puts it, this Indo-British writer "is not an individual defined by a single work, nor is he just the face of a fatwa". The present attempt to critically analyse the novels of Rushdie is an endeavour in this direction.

*Midnight's Ancestry and Progeny*

India has had an extremely rich tradition of story telling, a testament to which is its mythology, folklore and umpteen languages and cultures. But prose fiction as we practise it, is basically a legacy of the West. It was Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) that led to the introduction of education in English by the British. As a result, Indians naturally began to try their hand at writing in English. Indo-Anglian fiction as it is frequently referred to, has a fairly young history dating back to about two hundred years. In the course of this span and particularly in the last few decades, it has established its presence in the international arena. From its early modest beginnings, Indian English fiction (the most popular component of Indian English literature) has come a long way, winning almost every significant literary award in recent years. Indian English fiction incorporates literature written originally in English by authors of Indian ancestry, nationality or birth and hence it is also associated with members of the Indian diaspora. It took a host of writers to beat new paths for themselves and those to follow. To understand the course Indian English fiction has taken, it is necessary to look at the gamut of work by Indian writers in English.
The early foundations can be traced in the political writing of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Aurobindo, Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore's work leading to his receipt of the Nobel Prize in 1913. As in the shadowy beginnings of any genre, the beginnings of Indian fiction in English are cloaked in a certain amount of obscurity. Among the early Indian writers who published fiction in English, those that merit mention are Kylash Chunder Dutt's *A Journal of 48 Hours of the Year 1945* (1835), his cousin Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century* (1845) and Panchkouree Khan's *The Revelations of an Orderly* (1849).

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) enjoys the distinction of being regarded as the first published novel in English by an Indian. Therein, an emerging India seeks to find its voice in an alien language. Krupabai Satthianadhan, credited as the female pioneering counterpart has contributions like *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) and *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1895).

A desire for social reform characterised the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century. Consequently, issues of the day like social evils, the status of women and lower castes informed the plots of these early novels including Lal Behari Dey's *Govinda Samanta* (1874), Shevantibai Nikambe's *Ratanbai: A High-Caste Child-Wife* (1895), B.R. Rajam Iyer's incomplete work *True Greatness*, and A. Madhaviah's *Thillai Govindan* (1916).

M.K. Naik observes that many of these early novels are based on the historical romance or religious life, with some of it being manifestly autobiographical. Attempts at the historical romance include Mirza Murad Ali Beg's *Lalun, the Beragun, or, The Battle of Paniput: A Legend of Hindoostan* (1884), Jogendra Singh's
Nur Jahan: The Romance of an Indian Queen (1909), Romesh Chunder Dutt's The Slave Girl of Agra: An Indian Historical Romance (1909), Svarna Kumari Ghosal's, The Fatal Garland (1915), and A. Madhaviah's Clarinda (1915). The autobiographical element can be traced in Toru Dutt's Bianca (1876), in addition to Madhaviah's Thillai Govindan and Nikambe's Ratanbai. M.K. Naik opines that the world described in these novels is a simple one with virtue and vice meriting just rewards. He also notes an inclination towards "authorial intrusion" into the narrative. The general consensus is that the writing of this period is largely nondescript. Rajmohan's Wife is perhaps the only novel that could be credited with some experimentation in terms of employment of Indian words, though at this stage they are limited to names of objects.

The 1930s witnessed a change in the scenario, with Indian writers trying to find their own voice and making a considerable contribution to the novel. Perhaps, the inspiration for this blossoming can be traced to the high pitch that nationalistic fervour had reached. The triumvirate comprising Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao were the pioneers who "established the suppositions, the manner, the idiom, the concept of character, and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness". The amelioration of society, the tribulations of the freedom struggle, the woes of the lower classes, the caste system and other such noteworthy themes now entered the arena of fiction.

A politically committed writer, Mulk Raj Anand's realism is stark. His passionate concerns include rural India, bleak poverty and the prison of caste. Prominent among his novels are The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1940), The Sword and the Sickle (1942) and The Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953). Untouchable (1935) is acknowledged as Anand's finest novel. It is hailed for its
experimentation in terms of technique and the confident use of Hindi and Punjabi idiom. It encapsulates events of a single day, precipitated by a toilet cleaner from the untouchable class inadvertently touching a person from a higher class.

Located in the eponymous microcosm of Malgudi, the famous Malgudi novels of R.K. Narayan began with Swami and Friends (1935). His literary output has been prolific. Autobiographical content forms a significant part of some of his novels. Narayan’s writing is marked by his keen perception of the Indian ethos and simplicity of language. His endearing characters are mainly simple folk in a changing world. Narayan’s delicately etched world makes an impression on the reader in terms of its completeness. His focus on moral concerns has universal scope. As William Walsh puts it, “Malgudi is an image of India and a metaphor of everywhere else”. A recipient of numerous awards, his admirers included Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene. Narayan’s work has been criticised for his easy-going outlook on life. However, he holds sway as a doyen of the Indian English novel.

Raja Rao’s oeuvre is imbued with the spiritual depth of Indian culture and centres on the inner evolution of his protagonists. He is best known for Kanthapura (1938). This Gandhian novel draws its strength from its typically Indian narrative rhythms and its Indian sensibility. It captures the pulse of Indian life and nationalism of the time as the plot concentrates upon the inhabitants of a rigidly casteist village that rallied to Gandhi’s clarion call. The Serpent and the Rope (1960) has been extolled as a striking contemplation on the raison d’être of existence. It is a search for spiritual truth.

With the end of the freedom struggle, the partition of India and Pakistan, the merger of the princely states into the Indian Union and the wars with Pakistan and China; a review of the freedom struggle and taking stock of the east-west encounter
were grist to the mill of the Indian novelist. The ‘big three’ - Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao honed the Indian English novel in the course of their rich output. Madhusudan Prasad is inclined to believe however, that the new novelists have a definite advantage in terms of sensibility and technique.6

G.V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) has been hailed as a masterpiece of the post-independence era. Regarded as one of the finest examples of literature in English, it has merited comparison with James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Rich in terms of theme and technique, it is the autobiography of a Eurasian eccentric called Hatterr and chronicles his quest to comprehend the meaning of life. A fine blend of Eastern and Western narrative forms, the novel expresses itself in verbal pyrotechnics incorporating Shakespearean archaisms, slang, legal jargon and references from the Hindu pantheon. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* will later draw inspiration from this significant novel.

In his masterpiece *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), the anglophile Nirad Chaudhuri cynically appraises an India without the crown. Bhabhani Bhattacharya’s novels including *So Many Hungers* (1948) are applauded for their irony and perceptive social commentary with themes revolving around history and societal problems of an emerging India.

*Train to Pakistan* (1956), one of the most powerful evocations of the partition, is Khushwant Singh’s claim to novelistic fame. The novel is replete with symbolism and satire. Set in the peaceful fictional village of Mano Majra, it perceptively captures the trauma of the Muslims and Sikhs who are forced to cast their lot with either Pakistan or India. Writers who have explored the theme of Partition in their respective work include Attia Hosain, Balchandra Rajan, Chaman Nahal, Raj Gill and Manohar Malgonkar.
Manohar Malgonkar is a novelist with a proclivity for historical and social themes. The pre-independence and post-independence years form the backdrop to his novels. Some of his important works include *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964).

Nayantara Sahgal was one of the first female Indian English writers to receive wide recognition. As a niece of Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of Vijayalaxmi Pandit, perhaps it is not surprising that the themes of her novels are drawn from the history, politics and modern social problems of India. Her sharp social critiques examine the response of the elite to the crises that accompany political change. *Rich Like Us* (1985) looks back at the Emergency period, while the days of the British rule occupy centre stage in *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988).

The women novelists of the post-independence period seem to be concerned with the social arena. Born in Germany, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala immigrated to Britain, and is presently a citizen of the United States. She lived in India for twenty-four years after her marriage to a Parsi. Much of her work – including early novels like *To Whom She Will* (1955) and the Booker winning *Heat and Dust* (1975) centres around ironic depictions of the urban Indian middle class and the clash between Eastern and Western ways of life.

Hailing from Mysore, Kamala Markandaya moved to England after India’s independence. Her novels deliberate upon the culture clash between rural and urban India and chart a changing social milieu. Her maiden venture *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) was a runaway success and signalled a copious literary output of which *Pleasure City* (1982) marked the close. Her skill lies in the sensitive relationships and the strong individuality of her characters. Uma Parameshwaran the Indo-Canadian academic, regards Kamala Markandaya as one of the inaugurators of the diasporic tradition. She
reckons that *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is Markandaya’s best work, prefiguring diasporic issues that are relevant today.

Some single novels by lesser known women novelists that merit mention include Venu Chitale’s *In Transit* (1950), Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977), Zeenuth Futehally’s *Zohra* (1951), Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Perin Bharucha’s *Fire Worshippers* (1968).


In the post-independence period the Indian English novel seemed to stagnate. Josna Rege notes that the inspiration of the nationalist movement which had initially captured its imagination had dulled into a sort of tired social realism. She feels that the Indian English literary scenario of the seventies and eighties “was in the doldrums” with most of the novels of the period content with mechanical formulas of nation building or critique. According to Rege, most of the novels of this period seem caught between polarities of the self or the nation, allegiance or treachery, modernity or convention. She find this “conceptually limiting and artistically stultifying”. These novels had little to offer in terms of content or form. For the first fifty years of the Indian novel in English, novelists tended to depend on standard British English as the linguistic paradigm. Exceptions to the norm were few and far between.
1981 was to witness an unprecedented literary phenomenon in the form of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. It broke through the existing literary impasse. The work was greeted as a *tour de force* within the country as well as internationally. *The New York Review of Books* acclaimed the text as one of the most significant to emerge from “the English-speaking world in this generation”, while the *New York Times* hailed Rushdie as an author to welcome to “world company”, with a book to be received “on its own terms”. “The literary map of India” it gushed, “is about to be redrawn... *Midnight’s Children* sounds like a continent finding its voice.”

With *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie ushered in a new literary era and revolutionised Indian writing in English. As Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paulo Piciucco put it:

The imaginative re-working of Indian history in a culturally hybrid environment, the innovative use of literary techniques...together with a supreme command of the English language and a genius for story telling modeled on the hoary Indian narrative traditions and cultural practices, had established *Midnight’s Children* as a trend-setter and classic for all times.

Meenakshi Mukherjee who had the opportunity to read *Midnight’s Children* prior to publication states unequivocally that even way back then it seemed to her “a landmark novel, attempting in dangerously adventurous manner to stretch the possibilities of narrative fiction in general and of what could be done with Indian material in the English language in particular”. The confidence Rushdie displayed in coming to grips with the indefinable teeming reality of the subcontinent, the dexterity with which he handled the linguistic challenge and the energy of his prose was contagious. Mukherjee concedes that his precedent did galvanise the Indian English
literary vista, leading to a surge of new novels that has not yet declined. The scope of the modern novels extends to embrace a global canvas. Born into a new post-colonial world, the later novelists handle English with a newfound confidence and absence of reserve that stems from the shedding of "colonial baggage".

Rushdie's singular contribution lay in his giving the entity of independent India a new voice. *Midnight's Children* was the embodiment of hybridity, a bricolage, drawing inspiration from magic realism of South America, the narrative innovations of Günter Grass, Gabriel García Márquez, Laurence Sterne, James Joyce, G.V. Desani and Charles Dickens among others, and infusing them with the energy and polyphony of the subcontinent. Rushdie made a stylistic statement. Timothy Brennan feels that much of the acclamation that greeted the book in India was motivated by its contribution in carving out a space for the Indo-English imagination on the global map. Klaus Börner views it as a "Copernican turning-point in the history of literature and of ideas", transfiguring Western attitudes towards India and her literature. Such reactions are largely reflective of the international reception to the novel. Rushdie's irreverence towards public figures, novelistic conventions and the English language, led to a creation beyond the imagination of the Empire. While there are those who were annoyed at what they deemed an inflated response to the novel, the sway of *Midnight's Children* even so many years later is difficult to deny.

Rushdie followed up *Midnight's Children* with other confident and bold works of fiction. However, *Midnight's Children* enjoys the distinction of inspiring an entire generation of creative writers, while also opening up publishing opportunities both within the country and abroad. In addition, there has been a renewed interest in Indian writing in English. Harish Trivedi concedes that the dramatic renaissance of the
Indian novel in English which initiated nothing short of what he terms a "literary stampede" has to be credited to Rushdie.\textsuperscript{16}

The literary upsurge initiated in the eighties has not yet abated. With Rushdie initiating the process, writers have added new dimensions to Indian writing. They have adopted a range of modes, diverse voices as well as techniques of postmodernist fiction to give expression to the complexities of contemporary experience. Numerous writers including Shashi Tharoor and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have acknowledged their debt to Rushdie in shaping their work. There are, of course, those like Rohinton Mistry and Vikram Seth who work along the conventions of classic realism, whose work is not influenced by Rushdie’s self-conscious magic-realist texts. Nonetheless, it remains a fact that Rushdie did forge new directions for writers and had a far-reaching influence. Chelva Kanaganayakam is convinced about Rushdie’s formidable sway enough to make the assertion that despite all the exceptions that exist, the writers of the present-day are in fact “midnight’s grandchildren”\textsuperscript{17}.

The Indian Diaspora found opportunities in the fantastic mythical context that were part of everyday conversations in India. After \textit{Midnight's Children}, the first of the new crop of novels began with Amitav Ghosh who responded enthusiastically to the opportunities created by Rushdie. \textit{The Circle of Reason} (1986) is written in the magic realist mode. \textit{The Shadow Lines} (1988) remains a striking achievement among other works including \textit{The Glass Palace} (2000), \textit{The Hungry Tide} (2004) and \textit{Sea of Poppies} (2008). Ghosh’s fiction is associated with a thematic intensity and an exploration of postcolonial realities.

Following Rushdie’s precedent, novelists like Tharoor have successfully experimented with reworking genres from the Indian literary tradition. Tharoor’s \textit{The Great Indian Novel} made 1989 memorable. Therein, Tharoor frames a narrative of
political personages and events in modern India against that of the *Mahabharata*, to weave a brilliant satire. Like Allan Sealy’s *Hero: A Fable* (1990), Tharoor’s *Show Business* (1994) taps into the genre of Hindi film.

Vikram Seth’s magnum opus *A Suitable Boy* (1993) - running into a colossal thirteen hundred odd pages - is a socially realistic novel that has been deemed one of the most popular epic narratives of the late twentieth century. His first work *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a satirical romance composed entirely in six hundred and ninety rhyming tetrameter sonnets.

Josna Rege is of the view that Rushdie’s example enabled new writers from the minority communities like the Parsis and Anglo-Indians to “tell their own stories as Indian stories”. Allan Sealy uses the traditional Indian form of the nama (epic) to give expression to the Anglo-Indian minority in *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988). *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) gained him an international following after being short-listed for the Booker Prize. Rohinton Mistry is perhaps the finest Parsi voice among the writers of this ethnic group. He explores the Parsi world and diverse facets of Indian socio-economic life. Born in Bombay, he migrated to Canada in 1975. He has authored three novels - *Such A Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995), and *Family Matters* (2002) - all of which made it to the short-list for the Booker Prize. The expatriate writer Boman Desai also evokes the Parsi community at large in his novels like *Memory of Elephants* (1988) and *Servant, Master, Mistress* (2005).

From her maiden novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) to *The Zigzag Way* (2004), Anita Desai’s literary output has been profuse. Her work is noted for its psychologically astute observations. She engages with issues like the strains inherent in family life, the pressures of middle-class women torn between personal needs and
those of an Indian society in the throes of change. The Booker Prize that eluded Anita Desai thrice was bagged by her daughter Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) which deliberates upon multiculturalism.


As is obvious, many of the abovementioned writers do not live in India. It is interesting to note that this resurgence of Indian writing and recognition in terms of awards is associated with the diaspora to a very large extent with the probable exception of Arundhati Roy. The term “Immigrant Indian writers” or “diasporic
Indian writers” is getting increasingly inadequate to describe the distinct sensibilities that exist. Such blanket terms fail to take note of the various distinctions in world view and preoccupation between emigrant Indians like Raja Rao, Nirad Chaudhari, Sasthi Brata, Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markandaya, Amit Chaudhari, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and the like; the Indian-born Canadian citizen who spends much of her time in England - Suniti Nam Joshi; naturalised Americans like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bharati Mukherjee who resist the Asian-American hyphenation; the Kenyan-born, British educated Indian writer G.V. Desani; people of Indian origin like the Canadian-American Shauna Singh Baldwin or the English-born American writer Jhumpa Lahiri; Pico Iyer who was born in England to Indian parents, lived in America, and currently resides in Japan; the Trinidadian-born, British writer of Indo-Trinidadian descent, V. S. Naipaul, and the British-Indian novelist Hari Kunzru. Categorising them has its own complexities. Many of them make regular visits to India and regard themselves as hyphenated Indians. On the other hand there are those who would rather cling to an un-hyphenated status. They declare their preference for the land in which they chose to live and express discomfort with being labelled ‘Indian writers in English’.

Though the debates around Indian writing in English are not within the purview of this study, they need to be taken note of. It is felt that Indian writing in English is privileged at the cost of its regional counterparts. The essence of this debate finds expression in the views of Rushdie and Amit Chaudhari. Rushdie’s controversial introduction to The Vintage Book of Indian Writing (1947-1997) brashly states that the prose writing of that period by Indians writing in English “is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what is being produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India”.

He suggests that Indo-Anglian literature is perhaps
the most valuable Indian contribution to the literary world. *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, a meticulous anthology by Amit Chaudhari was a riposte of sorts to the former. While it is true that Indian writing in English has been thriving, the power of regional writing cannot be gainsaid. In addition, this writing occupies a slightly different space.

Indian writers in English have been accused of trying to pander to a Western readership with an eye on the prestigious awards and the phenomenal monetary sums that accompany them. It is felt that these writers are complicit with a cosmopolitan elitism which encourages a literature that caters to the privileged classes in India or an international audience without. An elitist trend has also been pointed out since many writers of this ilk have been educated at the exclusive Doon School (Dehra Dun) and St. Stephen’s (Delhi) before venturing abroad. John Mee agrees that these novelists hail from a rather narrow class band, but adds that their social and economic privilege has had its role to play in “the creation of a cultural space in which to rewrite the language of the coloniser”.

Regarding charges surrounding authenticity and depth of this work, it may be stated that many of these writers consider their dislocation an enabling feature. Great writing after all, has little to do with one's place of residence and a lot of good literature gets written away from the homeland. *Ulysses* for instance was written in Italy not Ireland, and Edward Said lived in America as does the Australian writer Peter Carey. Rushdie and Arundhati Roy refused to italicise or provide a glossary to the words from Indian languages used in their work. The writers of the diaspora have been dismissed by some critics as a media phenomenon. For instance, M. Prabha's book *The Waffle of the Toffs* assimilates the various prejudices against Indian writing in English. Developments in publishing of work in English and sophisticated
marketing networks have given the growth of Indian English novelists a fillip. Nonetheless, the sheer magnitude and sway of this writing simply cannot be ignored.

Since the arrival of a post-independence generation that thinks, speaks and writes in English, there have been numerous promising debuts. The boom shows no sign of abating. Mittapalli and Piciucco are of the opinion that the global visibility of our literature is also determined by the fact that postcolonial studies the world over have been according Indian writing in English a central position in debates. They credit an ingenious group of Indian critical theorists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmed and Harish Trivedi for their opening up of new frontiers to the critical debate concerning Indian writing in English and for valuable critical perspectives. While it is true that Indian writing in English is thriving like never before, one needs to keep a discerning eye open for the true merit of a work in the midst of the marketing blitz and the hype.

The Indian writers in English within India have unfortunately been less successful in making themselves heard with the possible exception of Arundhati Roy. The literary output of the new generation of writers from India expanding the literary horizon includes Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) which in terms of its candour is credited with forging the way for the kind of genre that is Shobha Dé’s claim to novelistic fame. Gita Hariharan’s *A Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) are literary experiments in reworking folk tales and childrens’ tales. Others that deserve mention include Jai Nimbkar’s *Come Rain* (1993), Esther David’s *The Walled City* (1997), Sagarika Ghose’s *The Gin Drinkers* (2000) and Shama Futehally’s critically acclaimed *Tara Lane* (1993).
The scientist Jayant Narlikar has been regarded as a pioneer of the genre of science fiction with *The Return of Vaman* (1989) and *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992).


Among the writers who began their careers post-independence, Manohar Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh and K.A. Abbas have continued to write sporadically. However, they have not managed to outdo their previous work. Arun Joshi’s *The City and the River* (1994) published posthumously, is a significant allegory of the Emergency period of 1975. Another ambitious attempt is Chaman Nahal’s trilogy *The Crown and the Loincloth* (1981), *The Salt of Life* (1990) and *The Triumph of the Tricolour* (1993) which traces the period of Indian history three decades prior to independence.


Nina Sibal’s *Yatra* (1987) draws inspiration from *Midnight’s Children*. Her protagonist Krishna, who has magical skin, is modelled on Saleem Sinai. Magic realism similarly impels the plot of Rani Dharkar’s *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997) and Radhika Jha’s *Smell* (1999).

Kerala’s contribution in terms of novels by women has been notable. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) won her major international and commercial success with the award of the Booker Prize. The novel incorporates words from Malayalam. Her arresting narrative technique, locale, characterisation and plot engaged in a deliberation of themes ranging from a critique of social tradition that curbs individual freedom, to the strains of childhood. Suma Josson’s *Circumferences* (1994), muses over the issue of expecting a woman to get married and bear children, above building a career. *A Video, a Fridge and a Bride* (1995) considers the anxieties that come with expectations of dowry. Lakshmi Kannan’s *Going Home* (1999) takes a look at women’s rights in relation to ancestral property.

In retrospect, it is clear that Indian fiction in English took its time to arrive. English had played a significant part in the writing of early nineteenth-century social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, through the age of nationalists like Gandhi and Nehru in the following century. India’s literary giants of international repute were those like the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore who had not written originally in English. It was in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu that the Indian novel first developed in India. The work of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan earned the Indian novel in English a fair degree of attention. Undoubtedly popular in India, they did not find it as easy to establish themselves on the international literary scene. The second generation novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar and Arun Joshi remained rather obscure inspite of some work of merit. It is the third generation of
versatile writers however, who revitalised the Indian novel in English in the 1980s. They primarily deserve credit for the central position it is ascribed. It is rather difficult to trace a clear line of influence in Indo-Anglian writing until Rushdie appeared on the scene. While it cannot be denied that there were writers of great merit on the scene prior to Rushdie, to give Rushdie his due, it must be pointed out that *Midnight’s Children* “broke out of a certain stagnation of both form and content” that had characterised the Indian English novel of the previous decades. 22 *Midnight’s Children* inspired a generation of writers and initiated the visibility Indian writing in English enjoys. It gave expression to a post-colonial context in a new exuberant form and voice that was embedded in the Indian tradition of story telling, while at the same time multicultural and sophisticated. The Indian novel in English gained tremendous impetus in terms of conceptual complexity and stylistic experimentation in the post-Rushdie era, making a salutary contribution to global literature.

John Mee opines that the renaissance brought about in Indian writing in English as a result of *Midnight’s Children* has been perceptible in numerous ways: the manifestation of a “postmodern playfulness, the turn to history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood”, all of these seem indebted to Rushdie. 23 While it may seem presumptuous to ascribe credit to a single intervention, Rushdie’s impact in galvanising Indian writing in English has been acknowledged by critics and novelists alike. Perhaps it would be apt to consider John Mee’s acknowledgement that in heralding a new era of Indian writing in English, Rushdie seemed more a “sign of the times than their creator”. 24 Indeed, the story of the Indian novel in English is reflective of a changing India and the extensive impact of global changes on cultural productions. Meenakshi Mukherjee also sounds a note of caution about ascribing too
much to the influence of a single book while at the same time drawing attention to
Rajendra Yadav’s statement:

When we look back at the point where history takes a turn, we usually
find an event, a movement or a person who/which embodies the
pressures generated by the impact of time and the forces of society ...

Sometimes, if we look carefully, we might even find a book. 25

Mukherjee concurs that *Midnight’s Children* can well be considered an aspirant for
that position in the context of Indian fiction in English.

**Contexts and Texts**

An endeavour to study the concerns of Rushdie’s work cannot ignore the
eclectic heritage that goes into giving his work its distinctive attributes. One of the
prominent exponents of postcolonial fiction, Rushdie foregrounds the hyphenated
experience of immigrants from former colonies who occupy a space in between
manifold cultural traditions. Rushdie is associated with four countries: India, Pakistan,
England and the USA where he currently resides. He hails from a context that is itself
a complex blend of hybridized influences. His quintessential status and perception as
a migrant postcolonial informs his work which draws upon eclectic sources as he
straddles various cultural spaces and writes in a variety of genres from fiction to travel
narrative, film documentary and critique, children’s fable, journalistic exposé and
political feature.

Salman Rushdie was born on 19th June 1947. His father Anis Ahmed was a
Cambridge educated businessman and his mother Negin Butt Rushdie a teacher at
Aligarh in North India. The family moved to Bombay from Kashmir before the birth
of Rushdie. Despite being committed Muslims they were liberal in outlook. Rushdie
unequivocally declares that although he hails from a Muslim family background, he was not raised as a “believer”, but in an atmosphere of “secular humanism”. Born into this well-off middle class family Salman and his three sisters grew up speaking Urdu, and were encouraged to converse in English at home. He studied at a mission school called Cathedral and John Connon Boys’ High School. The Rushdies chose not to relocate to officially Muslim Pakistan in the aftermath of the partition of India.

Rushdie recalls the film The Wizard of Oz which he watched in the Metro cinema in Bombay at the age of ten, as his very first literary inspiration. As stated in his various essays and interviews; the Bombay film industry, American cinema, comic books like Superman and Batman, The Arabian Nights, Enid Blyton were part of his initial literary stimuli. “A book is a kind of passport,” he states in an essay, and among the works that opened doors for him, range The Film Sense by Sergei Eisenstein, The Crow poems of Ted Hughes, Jorge Luis Borges’s Fictions, Laurence Sterne’s Tristam Shandy, Rhinoceros by Eugene Ionesco and Günter Grass’s The Tin Drum. The literary legacy that he acknowledges includes Lewis Carroll, Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccaccio, James Joyce, Bertolt Brecht, Jorge Luis Borges Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, Miguel de Cervantes, Nikolai Gogol, Franz Kafka and Herman Melville. In an essay called “Influence”, Rushdie has professed his debt to Italian literature and cinema, the genius of Dickens, the Roman classics and G.V. Desani’s All About H. Hatterr.

Rushdie envisages the realm of the imagination not so much as a continent as an ocean for as he puts it, “of influence and creative stimulation there can really be no end”. It is an eclectic heritage that inspires and is transmuted through his work. It comprises Indian oral convention, epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, folklore, myth, legend, international cinema, popular culture and Islamic tradition.
At the age of thirteen Salman was sent to Rugby, a well-known English public school where his encounter with racism and rejection by schoolmates marks it as an unhappy chapter.

The Rushdies migrated to Pakistan in 1962 leaving behind an India that was increasingly becoming uncongenial to Muslims. At the time, Salman was studying in England. On hearing about the sale of Windsor Villa the family home in Bombay, Rushdie says “I felt an abyss open beneath my feet ... I’m sure that if he hadn’t [sold it] I would still be living in it”. Rushdie’s choice of home now becomes an issue for concern — a choice between England and Pakistan. His father wanted him to study at Cambridge.

Subsequently, Rushdie read history from 1965-1968 at King’s College. He regarded the study of history as a stroke of good fortune since it left him free to pick the books of his choice. The course on Arabic and Islamic civilization in his final year had to be cancelled due to only five students having registered. But Rushdie’s resolve was not to be shaken and he turned out to be the only student of the course. D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke views in this persistence “a basic sense of cultural identity”, since the course had little value in the competitive Western society of the time. This episode foreshadows a radical Rushdie who will often choose the path less trodden. The anti-establishment spirit prevalent in the 1960s did not leave him untouched. Rushdie was involved in London’s counter-culture. He was involved in theatre but did not write for the undergraduate magazines nor did he participate in student union debates. Though a bright student he was not considered a methodical one.

On his return to Pakistan, Rushdie was not inclined towards the towel business his father had embarked upon. He tried to produce Edward Albee’s The Zoo Story for
Pakistan's television service, but found the censorship there oppressive. London provided better opportunities for his ambitions as a writer.

Rushdie dabbled with advertising for ten years as a freelance copywriter for Ogilvy and Mather and Ayer Barker while he pursued writing fiction part-time. In 1975 Liz Calder, an editor at Victor Gollancz informed Rushdie of the science-fiction competition Gollancz had announced in order to discover new talent. Rushdie submitted Grimus (1975). This was his maiden novel to be published. Although Rushdie did not win and Grimus was poorly received, Liz Calder had the confidence to steer Midnight's Children into print.

Grimus tells the tale of an immortal American Indian who embarks upon an odyssey to find the meaning of life. The work springs from a twelfth century Sufi narrative poem Conference of the Birds which deals with the quest of the bird realm for a ruler. Among the mythical characters in the book is the ruler Simurg, a bird that is the repository of age old wisdom. The leader of the questing flock selects the thirty birds to make the arduous journey, at the end of which, they are unified with their creator. Rushdie's Grimus is an anagram of Simurg literally meaning 'thirty birds'. If the plot is reminiscent of Dante in its quest of ascending an island mountain for a miraculous rose, the intellectual temper recalls Kafka.

Grimus is divided into three parts. The first part tells the tale of Flapping Eagle - the immortal hero of the novel inexplicably appearing on Calf Island. He hopes to regain his mortality in this land ruled by Grimus. Flapping Eagle is unusual from the beginning. He is in search of Bird-Dog his sister, who has vanished after giving him the elixir of life. In the second part of the book, with Virgil Jones as his guide, Flapping eagle and Virgil Jones climb Calf Mountain, overcoming numerous impediments on their journey. In the final part, Flapping Eagle understands the reason
behind the existence of Calf Island. He finds his sister, the mysterious Grimus, the stone rose that has made possible existence on Calf Island, and gradually discovers himself. The end of the novel finds the island being obliterated.

A science-fiction based hybrid of religious myth and literary pastiche, *Grimus* blends the simplicity of folktale with the complexity of a questioning philosophical novel. Despite the fact that *Grimus* was dismissed largely on account of the lack of a marked geographical and historical context, critics did take notice of Rushdie as a promising literary talent. *Grimus* has been viewed as a preview to theoretical and stylistic preoccupations that were to be handled with greater maturity in Rushdie's subsequent work. These include notions of mysterious parentage, displacement and exile, unstable personal and national identity, the colonial legacy, a preview of Rushdie's precarious attitude towards female sexuality and cultural hybridity. According to Timothy Brennan, the aspiration of the mission in *Grimus* is "a transcendent vision of heterogeneity". Catharine Cundy sees this as a major pursuit in Rushdie's work. She agrees with the critical consensus that views *Grimus* as a "test-run" for the influential novels to come.

If *Grimus* is Rushdie's experiment, the zenith of sophistication in terms of a fine amalgamation of cultural strands and narrative forms is reached in *Midnight's Children* (1981). In 1976 Rushdie visited India to celebrate the publication of *Grimus*. He feels that this was when *Midnight's Children* was inspired: "when I realized how much I wanted to restore the past to myself, not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor".

The widely acclaimed *Midnight's Children* won Rushdie the Booker Prize for fiction on three occasions. Besides winning the Booker in the year of its publication, it was adjudged the "Booker of Bookers" in 1993, for the best novel to have won the
Booker Prize for Fiction in the twenty-five year history of the award. The novel was pronounced the “Best of Booker” yet again in 2008 for the best novel in the last forty years of the award. It has received numerous other accolades. *Midnight’s Children* catapulted Rushdie to eminence and put the Indo-English novel on the world literary map. The response to the book was overwhelmingly that of a significant literary event.

With epic sweep, *Midnight’s Children* attempts to chart the lives of three generations of the Sinai family. The life of Saleem Sinai the protagonist and narrator, is a metaphor for his country. The children of the book’s title are all born in the course of the midnight of India’s independence. As the two most powerful of the children of midnight the conflictual relationship between Shiva and Saleem bring to the fore the issues each of them represent. The novel is intensely political, interweaving the course of Indian democracy in the wake of its numerous challenges and drawing attention to the Emergency of the seventies. The novel problematises received versions of history, revels in politics, and draws heavily from aspects of Indian popular culture, memory and myth. It has been regarded as “the quintessential fictional embodiment of the postmodern celebration of de-centring and hybridity”.  

Catherine Cundy is of the opinion that *Midnight’s Children* anticipates *Shame* (1983) in terms of “its level of engagement with the realities of political life and in particular the abuses attendant on the assumption of dictatorial power”. More concise, less effusive and less optimistic than *Midnight’s Children*, this well-crafted novel is a darker work. *Shame* recalls historical events and the dynamics of power politics in Pakistan through the prism of a family drama involving Iskander Harappa (based on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and his antagonist Raza Hyder (modelled on General Zia-ul-Haq the military dictator). The novel was banned in Pakistan. The mode of the
novel is intensely self-reflexive with the narrator constantly intruding the narrative. Like his counterpart Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, Omar Khayyam Shakil has an unidentified English father. The motif of paternal confusion is thus recalled. The novel won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger - Best Foreign Book and was a close runner-up for the Booker Prize.

Rushdie had paid a visit to Nicaragua in 1986 to attend the seventh anniversary celebrations of the Nicaraguan revolution in Esteli, Nicaragua. A travelogue *The Jaguar Smile* (1987) resulted from the trip.

In acknowledgement of his debt to Günter Grass, Rushdie has said: “This is what Grass’ great novel [*The Tin Drum*] said to me in its drumbeats: ... Dispense with safety nets....Argue with the world.” 37 *The Satanic Verses* (1988) created a furore that was unprecedented in the history of literature. Its ramifications went beyond the literary realm provoking powerful emotions on the global arena. Rushdie’s problematic relationship with Islam lies at the core of the issue. Islam played a minimal role in his life. He admits that he lost his faith at the age of fifteen. 38 This conflictual relationship culminated in his interrogation of the ‘grand-narrative’ of Islam in his controversial book. The novel was short listed for the Booker Prize and bagged the Whitbread Award for Best Novel. It even won the German Author of the Year. However, its literary merit was overshadowed by the international furore amongst Muslims for its unfavourable depiction of the prophet Mohammed and its fictional reworking of an episode from Islamic history. There were demonstrations by Islamist groups in various countries. The novel was publicly burnt in Bradford. India was the first of many countries to ban the book. In addition to the censorships, riots, mass protests, shaky diplomatic relations, deaths, attacks and murder of some translators of the novel, Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian religious leader declared the
infamous fatwa on Rushdie on 14\textsuperscript{th} February 1989. The writer was condemned for blasphemy and a bounty of 1.5 million pounds was offered for his death. Rushdie was thus forced into hiding for almost a decade under the protection of the British government.

*The Satanic Verses* highlights the exploits of two Indians - Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, who spectacularly fall to earth in Britain when their Air India jet explodes. The former is a famous Hindi movie star who has pursued the woman he loves to England while the latter is an Indian who is embarrassed by his Indian heritage and is obsessed with acculturation into the English mainstream. On arrival in Britain, the two begin to metamorphose. While Gibreel assumes a kind of halo evocative of his namesake, the angel Gabriel; Saladin Chamcha (colloquially meaning sycophant) sprouts horns and hooves, attributes of the devil. However, in the course of the work the anglophile Saladin reconciles and embraces his Indianness, while Gibreel ends up confused. His paranoid schizophrenic state drives him to suicide. Rushdie introduces the discussion of Islam within the paradigm of the dreams that Gibreel experiences subsequent to his metamorphosis. *The Satanic Verses* is an ambitious novel about hybrid identities. It is a cutting satire of racism and migration in the U.K., as well as a compelling exploration of good and evil, religious faith and fanatical belief.

In 1990 Rushdie published an essay “In Good Faith” to conciliate his critics. He issued an apology in which he seemingly reaffirmed his respect for Islam. However, Iranian clerics did not revoke their death threat. The impact of the Rushdie affair continues to endure. After the death of Khomeini, the Iranian Government publicly committed itself in 1998 not to carry out the death sentence against Rushdie. This was agreed to in the context of a larger agreement between Iran and the U.K. to
normalise relations. Rushdie subsequently emerged from his enforced exile. Some believe that the fatwa died with the Ayatollah, but fundamentalist Islamic groups have continued to renew the fatwa and the reward amount.

Rushdie continued to write. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) is a paean to the power of narrative. It narrates the exploits of Haroun Khalifa and his father Rashid in Gup and Chup. They are in quest of Rashid’s flair for spinning stories which seems to have gone missing. Haroun is mesmerised by the stories his father narrates. On the other hand, Saroya, Rashid’s wife feels neglected in the wake of his obsession for stories. This prompts her to run off with Mr. Sengupta. Her elopement in turn motivates the journey to the Valley of K in the dual pursuit of mother and talent. Thus the characters enter into the palimpsest story-world of Kahani. Rushdie has asserted that the film *The Wizard of Oz* helped him most in finding the right voice for the work. Haroun’s companions are clearly evocative of Dorothy’s friends. In the course of what reads as a simple fable, its appeal not restricted to any particular age group, Rushdie makes some pertinent points on reading fiction and the role of the author. *Haroun* won the Writers’ Guild Award for Best Children’s Book, and Rushdie adapted it for the stage.


The British Film Institute launched a publishing programme in 1992 to showcase British film classics. It encourages fresh approaches to contemporary film
criticism and critiques of some remarkable efforts in the history of film. The institute has subsequently been publishing titles annually in batches of four. The idea of homecoming in the MGM classic *The Wizard of Oz* has always had a special reverberation for Rushdie. He acknowledges the tremendous impact the film had on him since he was a child: “When I first saw *The Wizard of Oz* it made a writer of me”. Rushdie’s critical assessment *The Wizard of Oz* (1992) was among the first British Film Institute Film Classics to be published. He considers *The Wizard of Oz* as a creation whose scope eluded its own creators. The magic that resulted went beyond the intentions of all involved in putting together the film.

*East, West* (1994) is a book of short stories. In the first section called “East” Rushdie deals with stories set in the East. The second section “West” centres around tales from the West, and the concluding section is an intermingling of both the East and the West. Each section consists of three stories.

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995) tells the history of the wealthy Zogoiby family through the story of Moraes Zogoiby, a young man from Bombay descended from Sultan Muhammad XI, the last Muslim ruler of Andalucía. With a focus on contemporary India and Moorish Spain, the novel explores a Bombay very different from that of *Midnight’s Children*. It is a Bombay that flags its Portuguese links and bring to the focus characters from the Jewish-Christian minorities of South India. It is also a Bombay in which communalism and fundamentalism sometimes reach a dangerous pitch. Some Hindus in India were enraged by the parody of Bal Thackeray the leader of the Hindu right wing party the Shiv Sena, but the Supreme Court warded off attempts to ban the book.

The protagonist Moraes Zogoiby is a *mélange* of Catholic, Jewish, Arabic/Spanish and contemporary Indian influences. The concept of the palimpsest is
exploited by Rushdie as a paradigm of the notion of hybridity. The narrative strategies in *The Moor's Last Sigh* are reminiscent of those deployed in *Midnight's Children*. Catherine Cundy observes that *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the first book Rushdie has written using the computer. She feels this may be instrumental in giving his verbal facility even greater impetus.\(^{41}\) *The Moor's Last Sigh* made it to the short list for the Booker Prize. It was also the recipient of the Whitbread Novel Award and won Rushdie the British Book Award's Author of the Year.

*Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947-1997* (co-edited with Elizabeth West) (1997) was published to mark fifty years of India's independence. It is a compendium of thirty-two selections from fiction and non fiction. Excerpts from novels, memoirs, speeches and stories constitute this anthology.

Situated in a world of pop music, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) reworks the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in the context of modern popular music. The analogy is between the Ormus Cama-Vina Apsara and the Orpheus-Eurydice pair. Set in Bombay, England and America, the novel traces the story of Ormus and Vina's love story and the phenomenal success of their rock band VTO. Vina, the hugely popular singer is literally swallowed by a devastating earthquake. The novel charts their story and that of the narrator Rai who is Ormus' childhood friend and Vina's secret part-time lover. The book is peopled with larger than life characters, figures from popular culture, twins who can communicate telepathically from beyond the grave, skeletons from peoples' past and a materialistic society. Its canvas is the globalised world. Rushdie himself has stated: "This book is not a novel about rock'n'roll, but an attempt to respond to the evolution of world culture in the last half-century".\(^{42}\)
Rushdie’s *Fury* (2001) is set in New York at the beginning of this millennium. Malik Solanka, an Indian born fifty-five year old former professor at King’s College Cambridge, tries to find a new life in New York City. As his wife and son lay asleep in their London home one night, Malik found himself poised over his wife with a knife. His murderous rage frightens him into escaping to New York. Subsequently, he lives alone in a richly appointed Manhattan apartment at the opening of the novel. He has created an animated philosophising doll, Little Brain, which has its own successful TV series. In New York he has blackouts and violent rages and becomes involved with two women: Mila, who looks like Little Brain, and a beautiful freedom fighter named Neela Mahendra. The themes of exile, metamorphosis, rootlessness, migrancy, angst and loneliness find their way into the novel.

*Step Across This Line* (2003) is a collection of non-fiction from 1992-2002. Most of the essays were written under the threat of the fatwa. They explore a range of topical issues including Rushdie’s reactions as well as those of the media and various governments, to what Rushdie calls his “unfunny Valentine” – the pronouncement of the fatwa on St. Valentine’s Day.

*Shalimar the Clown* (2005) also had the distinction of being shortlisted for the Booker. It was the recipient of the Crossword Fiction Award in India and a finalist for the Whitbread Award in Britain. With epic sweep the narrative moves from California to Kashmir and from Nazi-occupied Europe to the contemporary world threatened by terrorism. It tells the tale of two Kashmiri villages whose inhabitants gradually get caught up in communal violence. The reader is introduced to the daughter of a Hindu pandit, the dancer Boonyi Kaul, and her childhood sweetheart Shalimar the clown, son of a Muslim theater troupe leader. Their passion culminates in a marriage solemnised by both Hindu and Muslim rites that are part of a secular Kashmiri society.
living in a state of harmonious coexistence. The triangle to this love story comes in the form of Maximilian Ophuls, a charismatic former U.S. ambassador to India. Boonyi’s life changes when she is smitten by Max Ophuls during her dance performance for him. Ophuls reciprocates her affections. Boonyi chooses to escape from her husband Shalimar and a seemingly unpromising future, by eloping with Max. The result is Shalimar’s initiation into the terrorist league. The book opens in Los Angeles in 1991. Max Ophuls is found murdered in broad daylight on the doorstep of India, his and Boonyi’s illegitimate daughter. The murderer is none other than the cuckolded Shalimar the Clown, Max’s chauffeur. The drama parallels events unravelling in a troubled Kashmir. Intensely political and historically informed, the novel captures the pulse of our global era as it interweaves lives and countries.

Rushdie’s latest work *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) is a testament to the nature and transformative power of narrative. The sixteenth-century Renaissance era frames the novel. The Mughal era of Emperor Akbar is conjured up alongside the Renaissance Italy of Niccolo Machiavelli. The writer makes the assertion that the Florentine city may have been distant from the Mughal capital geographically, but they were not so very different in actuality. An Indo-Italian makes his way into the palace of Emperor Akbar with the claim that he is Akbar’s uncle, and also the bearer of a letter from Queen Elizabeth of England. He relates his intriguing tale. History and legend blend with Italian epic and stories from the subcontinent. In the course of this romance the author deliberates upon larger themes of nation, love, death, politics, power and religion. Emperor Akbar is a liberal man with a syncretic outlook. He interrogates dogma, reflecting for instance upon whether mankind has created God in its own image. The work is a blend of history and postmodernist magic realism. Rushdie’s style and language rivet as it usually does.
The critical establishment has recognised and honoured Rushdie. He is the recipient of numerous awards and has been knighted in recognition of his contribution to literature. His works take the reader on a provocative journey into the world of contemporary history, literature, politics, culture and philosophy. As an engaged and engaging public intellectual he addresses many of the pressing issues that concern a globalising world. While many writers choose to steer clear of issues that a tumultuous contemporary context grapples with, Rushdie has usually tackled such issues head-on. His outspokenness has come at a cost but he maintains that to him it seems imperative to take sides. His essay “In Good Faith” defends the artist’s “freedom to challenge, even to satirise all orthodoxies, including religious orthodoxies”.43

It is difficult for a reader of Rushdie to be unaffected by the concerns he brings to the anvil and the eloquence of his prose. He is a challenging read with his sheer alacrity of thought, novelty of expression and his contemporaneity offering an enlightening look at our lives and times.

Critical Reception

As an impressive presence on the world literary scene the response to Rushdie’s work has been copious. Rushdie scholarship has been dominated by essays and reviews in academic journals and edited compilations, with very few book-length studies till date. Here is an attempt to offer a brief critical survey of Rushdie criticism.

Among the early critics to contribute to Rushdie studies in the 1980s were Uma Parameshwaran, Maria Couto and Meenakshi Mukherjee. The Perforated Sheet: Essays in Salman Rushdie’s Art (1988) by Uma Parameshwaran is an introductory study of his early work. It brings together her essays on Grimus, Midnight’s Children
and *Shame*. She makes an attempt to locate Rushdie in the pantheon of other writers in English in India and hails his experimentation with language.

A seminal early work of criticism on Rushdie was Timothy Brennan’s *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (1989). Brennan foregrounds the notions of nation forming and empire, in reading Rushdie. He considers Rushdie a “Third-World cosmopolitan”, an insider to the tribulations of the Third-World, with First-World literary tastes. He finds Rushdie’s fiction distinct from early anti-colonialist writers like Fanon and goes on to credit Rushdie with a novel and distinct variety of “Third World postmodernism” that is grounded in a historico-political context inspite of its parodic garb.


for liberation from imperial hegemonic strictures in the work of the writers under consideration. While the first three authors under discussion are content with combining myth and realism as an appropriate fictive strategy, Afzal-Khan contends that Rushdie’s accomplishment lies in his use of generic forms like myth, realism and comic epic only to debunk them.

The issues shared by Paul Scott, V.S. Naipaul and Rushdie assume centre stage in Michael Edward Gorra’s *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (1997). With regard to style and form the study aligns Rushdie with the likes of Grass, Márquez, Kundera, Calvino, and Thomas Pynchon. In contrast with Naipaul’s emphasis on a rationality that can lead to despair, Rushdie’s work is viewed as a force for change. *Contemporary Fiction* (2003) by Jago Morrison attempts to understand how the five writers under consideration, including Rushdie, address issues of historical responsibility in an age dominated by scepticism. *Vis-à-vis* an examination of *Midnight’s Children, Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie’s work is explored in terms of a ‘superabundance’ of history.

Viney Kirpal, G.R. Taneja and R.K. Dhawan have contributed to the growing number of edited collections in response to Rushdie’s work. A critical examination of the literature of the Indian sub continental diaspora forms the core of *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (1992) edited by Emmanuel Nelson. Two of the fourteen chapters therein are devoted to Rushdie. Vijay Lakshmi provides a discussion of the manner in which Rushdie’s worldview is shaped by the immigrant psyche and considers the absurdist-fabulist mode of his early work. Anuradha Dingwaney offers a discussion of the means by which Rushdie empowers himself as a writer and constructs the authority to write about the subcontinent. Emmanuel Nelson applies the paradigm of the diaspora to examine the work of almost sixty

M.D. Fletcher's *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the fiction of Salman Rushdie* (1994) is a significant contribution to Rushdie scholarship. This collection organises primarily previously published articles and some specially commissioned ones under the category of five of Rushdie’s novels i.e. *Grimus, Midnight’s Children, Shame, The Satanic Verses* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. It includes a comprehensive attempt to assess two or more of Rushdie’s novels. This significant tome is brought to a close with an appendix of writings by Rushdie followed by a bibliography of scholarly articles on his work.

*Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* (1999) by M. Keith Booker is another valuable tool for the researcher. It mainly brings together previously unpublished original essays, providing an even-handed assessment of the trends in Rushdie studies towards the close of the twentieth century. One half of the essays are categorised in terms of their focus on *Midnight’s Children* and the other half of the essays deliberate upon Rushdie’s other work up to *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. The book takes note of a reversal of critical interest back to *Midnight’s Children* in the post *Satanic Verses* period. The essays are principally expressive of the contemporary interest in postcolonial studies and regards Rushdie as complicit with the hegemonic forces of global capitalism, even as he is regarded as an exponent of global liberation.

*Midnight’s Children: a Book of Readings* (2003) edited by Meenakshi Mukherjee is a compilation of ten essays and one interview. These focal essays taken from journals and other publications have been covered in a chronological sequence. Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Joel Kuortti’s two volumes: *Salman Rushdie New Critical
Insights endeavour to bring together some of the critical essays written in the post-
Satanic Verses controversy period. The eight essays in the first volume and the nine in
the second, denote various critical and theoretical approaches to Rushdie. The essays
take into account Rushdie’s work from Grimus to The Ground Beneath Her Feet. An
expedient bibliography of Rushdie’s work and criticism has forms the appendix.
two volumes take into account individual critiques on his novels ranging from Grimus
to Fury.

Rushdie’s work has generally been well received. Midnight’s Children has
typically been acclaimed as a masterpiece. As M. Keith Booker observes, many of the
influential factors in Rushdie criticism were founded in that early period. Critics like
Maria Couto, Harish Trivedi, Nancy Batty, Mujeebudin Syed and Nalini Natarajan
responded to the ingenious and exuberant wielding of language, the infiltration of
Indian accents and idiom into English as well as its narrative aspects. Uma
Parameshwaran, Neil Ten Kortenaar, Edward Barnaby and Dieter Reimenschneider
among others, commented on Rushdie’s engagement with Indian history in the
novel. Midnight’s Children elicited comparisons with various other texts and writers
in addition to Grass and Márquez. Critics who pursued parallels include Rudolf
Bader, Patricia Merivale, Nancy Batty, Kumkum Sangari, Richard Cronin, Robert
Alter and Dieter Reimenschneider.

The publication of Shame only enhanced Rushdie’s critical reputation. Essays
by those like Cynthia Carey Abrioux, Seema Bhaduri, Santosh Chakrabarti, M.D.
Fletcher, Mujeebudin Syed and Aruna Shrivastava drew attention to the manner in
which the novel made an attempt to narrate and interrogate the nation of Pakistan.
Commentary on the work took note of the deliberate and explicitly metafictional
quality of *Shame* and highlighted Rushdie’s postmodernist strains. Critics like Aijaz Ahmed, Inderpal Grewal, Anuradha Needham and Ambreen Hai foreground the issue of gender in the text.\(^{53}\) Interestingly, it was only in the wake of the *Satanic Verses* controversy that *Shame* received significant critical consideration. In fact even *Midnight’s Children* witnessed a resurgence of critical notice following the commotion over the controversial *Satanic Verses*. M. Keith Booker goes on to substantiate via facts and figures the manner in which Rushdie studies has been eclipsed by the controversy.\(^{54}\)

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* also opened to largely favourable appraisals. In an initial review, Paul Cantor commended its engagement with postcolonial problematics.\(^{55}\) In her early essay, Bishnupriya Ghosh contends that though Rushdie’s work can be viewed in terms of a postmodern model, his postmodernism is of a typically Indian strain. She makes a case for situating and comprehending his particular postmodernism within its context.\(^{56}\) Farhad Idris embarks upon a reading of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* that draws parallels with Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. John Clement Ball and David Myers consider the text as an exposition of Indian politics and the fundamentalism overtaking the Indian nation.\(^{57}\)

*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* was greeted with mixed response. Christopher Rollason discerns reactions ranging from approbation to ambivalence and even hostility.\(^{58}\) While Rachel Falconer’s reading examines the mythical framework of the text, Silvia Albertazzi and Christopher Rollason deliberate upon its musical intertexts.\(^{59}\) Readings of the work have also underscored the issue of globalisation.\(^{60}\)

*Fury* has been regarded as Rushdie’s weakest work. Most of the response to it was negative, even dismissive. Reviewers found the plot unconvincing, the characters pretentious, the narrative lacking the usual vitality, Rushdie’s satire unable to
penetrate the surface or attempt a real understanding of the causes of fury. It was felt that the teeming references threatened to engulf the plot. John Sutherland was among the few who applauded the work. For all its limitations, Hasan Suroor reviewing Fury for The Hindu felt that it is ultimately partly redeemed by its contemporaneity.\(^{61}\)

Reactions to the rather recent Shalimar the Clown are largely limited to reviews. Reviewing the novel for The Hindu, Hasan Suroor argues that Shalimar the Clown is Rushdie’s most important book since The Moor’s Last Sigh. He finds the book “vintage Rushdie”.\(^{62}\) Writing for the New Statesman John Mullan applauded the engagement of the book with issues like “religious fundamentalism, the influence of America, the psychopath-ology of terrorism….\(^{63}\) A Time reviewer made similar comparisons noting that the novel is an exploration of political and religious fundamentalism. Despite its shortcomings, he reckons that it stands as a testament to the reasons Rushdie remains a “force to be reckoned with”.\(^{64}\) Reviewers generally conceded that the work marked a return in terms of Rushdie’s characteristic formal strengths.

M. D. Fletcher notes that the response to Rushdie’s fiction can be broadly divided in terms of its literary strategies - that have been viewed as an attempt to “de-colonize” English - and in terms of his political agenda, which has been regarded as an exposition of grand narratives like religion and socio-political issues. Much of the criticism is descriptive and tends to focus on the writer rather than his work. Rushdie criticism has deliberated upon his narrative mode: mainly magic realism, his writing within a postmodern, postcolonial cultural context, as well as his decolonising use of English. However, there is no study devoted exclusively to formal aspects of his work. There is also much scope for critique of his recent fiction.
The present study makes a comprehensive attempt to scrutinise history, politics and migrant identity as insistent concerns enunciated in Rushdie's major fiction. No full-length study of Rushdie's novels has so far been carried out from this standpoint. This study encapsulates six of Rushdie's texts, including his more recent fiction and enables the appraisal of one to illuminate and expound understanding of another. In view of the dearth of attention to Rushdie's more recent fiction, the present endeavour also focuses its attention on the later novels so as to reveal their significance. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet, Fury* and *Shalimar the Clown* offer much scope for interpretation in terms of multiple perspectives they bring in. The present study also brings under scrutiny the recurrent formal patterns in Rushdie's oeuvre - for instance, Metafiction, Magic Realism, Foreshadowing, Intertextuality - and concentrates on his linguistic strategies. In its attempt to analyse Rushdie's more recent fiction and through its adoption of a comprehensive approach, this study hopes to make a modest contribution.

**Plan of the Thesis**

This dissertation has been organised into six chapters inclusive of the introduction and concluding segment. The introductory chapter entitled "Of Imaginary Homelands: Introduction", takes into account the literary background and Rushdie's formative contexts. The critical survey considers the diverse approaches Rushdie's work has elicited and provides the framework within which this research is located.

The second chapter entitled "Problematising History, Politics and Identity: Re-reading *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*" examines the key concerns of the two novels in question. It considers *Midnight's Children* as a postcolonial critique of the
newly independent Indian nation. Rushdie’s subversion of history in this exuberant text is examined. The following section deliberates upon the explication of the politics and identity of Pakistan in *Shame*.

The manner in which the transcultural experience forms the crux of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury* is explicated in the third chapter titled: “Diasporic Dislocation: Traversing Transnational Spaces in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury*”. The texts are unified in their concern with protagonists who are migrant artists. Rushdie regards migrancy as a general ontological condition as well as a dominant trope of our time. The characters in both works give expression to the ambivalence of location that fascinates Rushdie. In terms of the bigger picture the novels engage with forces of globalization and chart the canvas of politics and society.

“A Return to Roots: Revisiting the Imagined Homeland in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *Shalimar the Clown*,” is the concern of the fourth chapter. This segment scrutinises the complexity of the multicultural context that is India. It is the Indian nation that continues to be a fundamental thematic focus in both the texts regarded in this chapter. Rushdie takes a look at the history of India fraught with turbulence in the last century. *The Moor’s Last Sigh* employs the model of a hybrid Spain to probe what is supposedly a multicultural Indian society, while *Shalimar the Clown* deliberates upon the sensitive issue of the rise of fundamentalism in Kashmir, in the course of a love story.

Rushdie’s narrative genius simply cannot be ignored. It is his contribution to narrative and language that is explored in the fifth chapter: “Writing in a Postmodern/Postcolonial Space: Rushdie’s Narrative Landscape.” Rushdie’s most acclaimed work has been hailed for envisioning an interface between the postmodern and the
postcolonial. This segment brings under scrutiny some of Rushdie's narrative techniques namely metafiction, magic realism, foreshadowing, and intertextuality. It further embarks upon an assessment of certain linguistic devices that give Rushdie's writing its iconoclastic edge.

The concluding chapter attempts a unification of the various concerns dealt with in the study. It deduces that Rushdie's *oeuvre* is predominantly shaped and sustained by a historical and political vision of the subcontinent viewed via the consciousness of a migrant postcolonial. He attempts to recreate the cultural crisis in his imagined homeland and redefine it in the postcolonial context. He wields language to subvert and contest domination, and his writing has carved out a space in the English language of the empire. This section reiterates the reasons that Rushdie remains a formidable writer. His targets have included totalitarianism and oppression in its various *avatars*. Rushdie has also come to stand for the importance of stories and the need to continue telling them.
Notes


3 Naik 12.


5 Walsh 240.


7 Uma Parameshwaran qtd. in “Homage to Kamala Markandaya,” Francis C. Assisi, Indo link.21 May 2004, 9 Nov. 2005 <http://www.beilharz.com/>


Mukherjee, introduction, Rushdie’s Midnights Children 10.

Naik 199.


Rege 203.


Mittapalli and Piciucco, preface iv-v.

Rege 187.

Mee 127.

Mee 127.

Rajendra Yadav qtd. in Mukherjee, introduction 12.


32 Brennan 70.


35 Mukherjee, introduction 9.

36 Cundy 37.


38 Rushdie “In God We Trust,” *Imaginary Homelands* 377.


41 Cundy 110.

42 Salman Rushdie qtd. in Rollason 89.


44 Brennan, preface viii.

45 Brennan 166.

See, Vijay Laxmi, "Rushdie's Fiction: The World Beyond the Looking
Glass," Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson
(New York: Greenwood, 1992) 149-156; Anuradha Dingwaney, "Author(iz)ing
Midnight's Children and Shame: Salman Rushdie's Constructions of Authority,"
Reworlding 157-167.

M. Keith Booker, "The Development of a Literary Reputation,"

See, Maria Couto, "Midnight's Children and Parents: The Search for Indo
British Identity," Encounter 58.2 (1982): 61-66; See, for example, Harish Trivedi,
"Salman the Funtoosh: Magic Bilingualism in Midnight's Children," Mukherjee 69-94;
Nancy E Batty, "The Art of Suspense: Rushdie's 1001 (Mid-) Nights," ARIEL
18 (1987): 49-65; Mujeebuddin Syed, "Midnight’s Children and Its Indian Con-
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See, Neil Ten Kortenaar, "Midnight’s Children and the Allegory of
Photography, Realism, and Rushdie's Midnight’s Children," Mosaic, University of
<http://www.highbeam.com>; Dieter Reimenschneider, "History and the Individual in
Literature Written In English 23.1 (1984): 196-207; Jean M Kane, "The Migrant
<http://www.jstor.org>
51 For echoes of Grass in Rushdie, see Rudolf Bader, "Indian Tin Drum,"


53 Aijaz Ahmed, "Salman Rushdie's Shame: Postmodern Migrancy and the

54 M. Keith Booker, introduction 6-7.


58 Rollason 115.


60 See Rollason; also Mariam Pirbhai, “The Paradox of Globalization as an ‘Untotalizable Totality’ in Salman Rushdie's The Ground Beneath Her Feet,”

<http://www.highbeam.com>


