CHAPTER 2

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY

The term postmodernism refers to an epistemological shift that impacts in architecture, literature, film, art, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the human sciences in general and transcends the limitations, prejudices and illusions of artistic modernism represented by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust and Gertrude Stein in literature, or the historical avant-garde represented by Surrealism, Cubism, and Expressionism in art. Postmodernists generally tend to view the past as a vast, inchoate, fragmented, decontextualized and synchronic congeries of forms, media, genres and ideas. Postmodernist historiography reconstructs the notion of objectivity of historical narratives. History when narrativised is subject to personal choices and selection; historical narrative is, therefore, characterized by subjectivity that conforms to the postmodernist notion of knowledge as not merely objective, but subjective and even intuitive.

For the postmodernists the “past,” irredeemably absent and accessible only by way of spoors, fragments, and traces, is the space of memory, reverie and fantasy, and therefore of imagination, rather than a space of past human actions that can be recovered and represented more or less accurately as it really was. Postmodernists are more interested in the meanings which can be artistically produced by reflection on pastness than in the concepts of truth understood as a finite set of statements about discrete periods of history.
attested by a documentary record. Indeed, postmodernist treatments of “the past” are found predominantly in artistic works: historical novels like Coetzee’s *Foe*, Roth’s *American Pastoral* and *The Plot Against America*, historiographic metafictions like Atwood’s *Blind Assassin* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, epic films like Attenborough’s *Gandhi*, Richardson’s *Charge of the Light Brigade* and documentaries like Lanzmann’s *Shoah* and so on.

Much of the postmodernist experimentation in the representation of the past is derived from a dissatisfaction with empirical history’s inability or reluctance to deal effectively with the “extreme” events connected with the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century: the Holocaust, ‘industrialized genocide,’ the use of atomic weaponry (Hiroshima, Nagasaki) and other arms of mass destruction (firebombing, anti-personnel mines, long distance rocketry), world population explosion and migration, new kinds of diseases like AIDS and globalization. A universal demand on the part of populations, which had been treated as peripheral to the great events of history, for representation of their experiences of such extreme events resulted in new genres of testamentary literature, video and film. The opposition between history and memory is questioned, and history as the corrector of memory is evolved; this results in the concept of history as the suppressor of the memory of the oppressed. As memory of the oppressed is absent in the narrated past, there is a demand to rewrite history as a way to retrieve the past.
Walter Benjamin’s brief on behalf of the anonymous and the neglected of history received wide recognition as a critique of historiography’s identification with history of “victors.” Its interest primarily lies in the actions of great men, and association with centres of power and patronage. Movements on the margins of writing, like feminism, women’s history, postcolonial studies, cultural studies and oppositional historiography, contributed to the general and growing disinterest in professional historical research demeaned for its specialization, its preference for micro-phenomena and its search for truth as against the quest for meaning. The demand for meaning, or interest in the past of the oppressed, call for inclusiveness in history’s subject-matter, rejection of specialization and fascination with the experience of “witnesses” to the extreme events of history. The belief that these extreme events augure the advent of a new kind of historicity promotes attitudes towards the past and the study of it which correlates with the principles of “scientific historical research” inherited from the early twentieth century.

Postmodernist treatments of the past and history are typically criticized by historians for such beliefs that the past has no reality, that history is nothing but a text, that the principal problem of historical representation is that of narrativization, that, in representing the past there is no important distinction between fact and fiction, and that historical phenomena
are understood or conveyed by storytelling rather than by model building and causal analysis of chain of events.

The postmodernist conception of history considers the value of narrative in the writing and experience of history. Important analysts in this area include Paul Ricoeur, Louis Mink, W.B. Gallie and Hayden White. Their approach draws fictional and historical narratives closer together. According to Ricoeur, there remains a perceived “fundamental bifurcation between historical and fictional narrative” (*Time and Narrative*, Vol 1:52). The theory of narrated history (or historicized narrative) holds that the structure of lived experience, and such experience narrated in both fictional and non-fictional works (literature and historiography), have in common the figuration of “temporal experience.” According to Ricoeur, figuration is the way a narrative encompasses the ability to “grasp together’ and integrate into one whole and complete story[ the] composite representations” of historical experience (*History and Truth* 173). Figuration is primarily a way of storytelling, a form of narration. In this context, Louis Mink observes: “…the significance of past occurrences is understandable only as they are locatable in the ensemble of interrelationships that can be grasped only in the construction of narrative form” (148). Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson also analyzes historical understanding this way. He remarks: “history is inaccessible to us except in textual form … it can be approached only by way
of prior (re)textualization” (82). He means that history can only be discursively constructed or narration of history is a textual practice.

In his essay, “Society must be Defended,” Michel Foucault posits that the victors of a social struggle use their political dominance to suppress a defeated adversary’s version of historical events in favour of their propaganda which may go so far as historical revisionism. Nations adopting such an approach would fashion a “universal” theory of history to support their aims with a teleological and deterministic philosophy of history used to justify the inevitableness and rightness of their victories. Ricoeur points to the use of this approach by totalitarian and Nazi regimes, “exercis[ing] a virtual violence upon the diverging tendencies of history” (History and Truth 183). For Ricoeur, there is no unified, teleological philosophy of history. He observes: “We carry on several histories simultaneously, in times whose periods, crises, and pauses do not coincide. We enchain, abandon, and resume several histories, much as a chess player who plays several games at once, renewing now this one, now the another” (History and Truth 186). For Ricoeur, Marx’s unified view of history may be suspect, but it is nevertheless present as:

the philosophy of history par excellence: not only does it provide a formula for the dialectics of social forces—under the name of historical materialism- but it also sees in the proletarian class the reality, which is at once universal and concrete
and which, although it be oppressed today, will constitute the unity of history in the future. From this standpoint, the proletarian perspective furnishes both a theoretical meaning of history and a practical goal for history, a principle of explication and a line of action. (History and Truth 183)

Walter Benjamin believes that Marxist historians must take a radically different viewpoint from the bourgeois and idealist points of view, in an attempt to create a sort of history from below. It would be able to conceive an alternative conception of history, not based, as in classical historical studies, on the philosophical and juridical discourse of sovereignty, an approach that would invariably adhere to major states’s (the victors’) points of view.

George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four is a fictional account of the manipulation of the historical record for nationalist aims and appropriation of power. In the novel, he observes: “He who controls the present, controls the past. He who controls the past, controls the future.” The creation of a “national story” by way of management of the historical record is at the heart of the debate about history as propaganda. To some degree, all nations are active in the promotion of such “national stories,” with ethnicity, nationalism, gender, power, heroic figures, class considerations and important national events and trends, all clashing and competing within the narrative.

In the mid1980s, the New Historicists invoked the concept of “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (Louis Montrose 8).
Umberto Eco’s novel *The Name of the Rose* became an instant critical success when published. Widely celebrated as a postmodern historical novel, this dazzling mixture of profound historical research and popular detective fiction invited its readers to view historical fiction as an academically respectable genre and a vehicle for recovering and reimagining the past in unconventional ways. Four years later, Eco responded to readers of his novel in an eclectic text called “Postscript to *The Name of the Rose*.” An eighty-page mixture of short, fragmentary chapters, photographs, and illustrations of medieval architecture and manuscripts, the “Postscript” is partly a poetics designed to help us understand how to solve the technical problem which is the production of a work. Eco explains how the historical fiction writer must become immersed in historical evidence: to tell a story, “you must first of all construct a world, furnished as much as possible, down to the slightest detail” (55). Eco’s “Postscript” is also a manifesto proclaiming the authority of serious historical fiction: the characters in a historical novel may not appear in encyclopedias, but everything they do could only occur in that time and place. Made-up events and characters tell us things “that history books have never told us so clearly,” so as “to make history, what happened, more comprehensible” (75). By reimagining the past, the novelist thus performs the analytical role of the historian, by “not only identify[ing] in the past the causes of what came later, but also trac[ing] the process through which those causes began slowly to produce their effects” (76). The conventional causal
analysis in terms of cause and effect is replaced by contemporary analysis involving reimagination and identification.

Since the publication of Eco’s novel a number of contemporary novelists, who are not exclusively or even principally known as writers of historical fiction, have been similarly immersing themselves in the language, the texts and the material culture of the past to produce some remarkable works of fiction. What they share with the New Historicists, and what distinguishes their novels from traditional or classical historical fictions and allies them with postmodern fictions, is a resistance to old certainties about what happened and why; a recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events, and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by eccentric and/or multiple narrating voices.

Postmodern historical novels, labeled as “historiographic metafictions” allow different voices and alternative, plural histories by subverting the historical documents and events that they refer to. Based on the postmodern understanding of history, we can say that historiography not only represents past events but also gives meaning to them: it is a signifying system, and turns historical events into historical facts. Historiography, while constructing historical facts, singles out certain past events while omitting others for ideological reasons. This inevitably leads to the fact that marginalized groups
are denied an official voice by hegemonic ideologies. History is, therefore, regarded as monologic, representing the dominant discourse.

The postmodernist view of history argues against conventional history writing, which is ideologically shaped by the dominant discourse, and against its claim to represent historical events truthfully and objectively. In order to falsify the objectivity of conventional history writing, it bases its arguments heavily on the poststructuralist theories which claim that language creates and shapes reality. In this regard, Aruna Srivastava argues: “Historical events then have no immanent structure,” “but only one imposed by an ideologically conditioned historian. The act of creating histories, then, is an ideological act, designed to support political and moral systems” (66). The poststructuralist view entails the idea that there are plural meanings and truths as opposed to one meaning or one “Truth.” It is a denial of the empirical concepts of history on which traditional historical novels before the introduction of postmodernist views were based.

The postmodernist historical novel questions the clear-cut division between history and fiction. In this context, Greenblatt and Gallagher point out in *Practicing New Historicism* that history has become more literary and literature more historicized as a result of the postmodern condition. By means of their overt metafictionality, postmodern texts challenge the capacity of history to represent reality outside the text, and the truth-value of historical knowledge. The fact that they are highly self-reflexive novels points
to the process of constructing, ordering and selecting, which presupposes that history is a linguistic construct as literature is. Postmodernist historical novels, therefore, attempt to insert history into fiction to subvert historical “facts” and rewrite them from a perspective different from the accepted interpretation. In such postmodernist texts, which question the problematized relations between history and fiction, the hitherto silenced histories of marginalized groups are sometimes foregrounded through this rewriting and subverting of historical materials.

The postmodern philosophy of history - an understanding of history and historiography under the influence of poststructuralist thoughts-constructs the theoretical background to the analysis of historical novels written in the postmodern era. Postmodernism has become influential in many disciplines, including history. Postmodernism refutes both the fixity of language and text and the assumed connection between language and reality when applied to the field of history. Postmodernism denies the fixity of the past, of the reality of the past apart from what the historian chooses to make of it, and thus of any objective truth about the past. The postmodernist view of history argues against conventional history writing and its claims to present historical events truthfully.

The scientific aspect of history in the nineteenth century claims that the past could be reflected as it actually happened. Traditionally, history was seen as an empirical search for external truths corresponding to what
was considered to be absolute reality of the past events. Thus, it was a scientific search for knowledge. This view is opposed by later historians like Hayden White, who argue that historical facts cannot be represented objectively because they cannot exist independently of the historian. Historical events can only be reached through documents and other texts and historiography turns historical events into historical “facts.” Such an argument stresses the role of the historian as a determining factor in giving significance to certain historical events and inserting only these events into historical accounts while ignoring others, sometimes for ideological reasons.

The postmodern philosophy of history bases its arguments on poststructuralist theories which claim the textuality of reality. Poststructuralist thought makes it clear that history is a text. The past can never be attainable in a pure form as historical events; it can only be reached through chronicles and archival documents. Poststructuralist impacts open the way to a historicist study of literary texts, analyzing literature in the context of social, political and cultural history, and regarding literary history as part of a larger cultural history. This perception of history in literary studies is formulated by Louis Montrose as a concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history. He observes:

By the historicity of texts I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing... By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can
have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material
existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the
society in question […]; and secondly that those textual traces
are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when
they are construed as the ‘documents’ upon which historians
ground their own texts, called ‘histories.’ (20)

This conception initiated by Montrose aborts the notion of history as a mere
reflection of events happening out there. Even though it may seem to
represent an external reality, history as a text is a construct. A text always
serves to reproduce, conform or perpetuate the power structures in any
society. So, history, like literature, is “a product of language … and a
narrative discourse” that consists of representations of historical conditions
and a similar power-structure (Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer 373).
Moreover, historians can no longer claim that their study of the past is
objective and is able to represent unproblematically the external reality: the
“past is something we construct from already written texts of all kinds which
we construe in line with our particular historical concerns” (G. Douglas
Atkins and Laura Morrow 188). The existence of contradictory histories in the
plural as opposed to a single “History” has emerged as another subsequent
assumption. The postmodernist view of history, according to Cox and
Reynolds, “rejects the idea of ‘History’ as a directly accessible, unitary past
and substitutes for it the conception of ‘histories,’ an ongoing series of human constructions” (New Historical Literary Study 4).

Hayden White elaborates on this new concept of history, mainly in his *Metahistory*, by founding his arguments on the theories of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and Genette. He determines the aim of metahistory as finding answers to questions concerning the epistemological status of historical explanations and the possible forms of historical representation. For White, narrative form is the only possible form of representation in the writing of history. He proposes in *Metahistory* a theory of narrative that draws parallels between history and literature. History writing consists of the process of “emplotment” in which chronicles turn into stories. To him, it is a necessary operation since “histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles” (83). It is generally believed that chronicle facts make no sense at all on their own, for the historical record is thought to be “fragmentary and always incomplete.” This is the reason why the historian is obliged to make a plausible story out of facts through “the encodation of facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures” (*Tropics of Discourse* 223). Such an obligation to make “stories out of chronicles” is the reason for the presence of some story elements in history writing. White explains how these elements bring history writing
to the level of literary composition:

the events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like – in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (*Tropics of Discourse* 223)

This suggests that historical facts, as White claims, “can be emplotted in a number of different ways, so as to provide different interpretations of these events and to endow them with different meanings” serving different ideologies and worldviews (*Tropics of Discourse* 224). The process of emplotment allows for the historian’s choice of events and figures and their arrangement in a sequence based on the prominence given to them as per his will or imagination. Since emplotment involves personal selection, it brings in subjectivity to historical narratives.

White also draws attention to the fact that the historian can trace past events in historicized records, documents or archives, but he can never reach the contexts of past events in any definite way. Therefore, the historian has to invent the contexts in order to make past events significant and meaningful. He indicates that the milieu in which those documents take place is not accessible, hence not “given” but invented as well (*Tropics of Discourse* 228).
As a result of the process of emplotment, historical works are “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (Tropics of Discourse 222). E. H. Carr describes briefly how the process of transforming past events into historical facts is actually the interpretation of the historian himself. He contends:

> It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context …. The only reason why we are interested to know that the battle was fought at Hastings in 1066 is that historians regard it as a major historical event. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar’s crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossings of the Rubicon by millions of other people … interests nobody at all. (11-12)

Although Hayden White draws attention to the general reluctance to consider historical representations as verbal artifacts, the above arguments bridge the gap between history and literature, the gap which was widened by the attempts of those historians who tried to equate historical accounts with sciences. A new kind of “fictional” history emerges when the distinction between history and fiction gets blurred. It is therefore, safe, to say that
history has become “metafictional” rather than fictional; for, the ultimate aim of postmodernist history is to lay bare the devices whereby past reality is constructed through the writing of history. Hence the prefix of meta-in White’s celebrated title *Metahistory*. The title, according to Susana Onega, draws a parallel between the metafictional awareness in fiction and the metahistorical trend in history. Metafictional self-consciousness gives way to a metahistorical self-consciousness in history writings as White claims:

By drawing historiography nearer to its origins in literary sensibility, we should be able to identify the ideological, because it is the fictive element in our own discourse. We are always able to see the fictive element in those historians with whose interpretations of a given set of events we disagree; we seldom perceive that element in our own prose. So, too, if we recognized the literary or fictive element in every historical account, we should be able to move the teaching of historiography onto a higher level of self-consciousness than it currently occupies. (235)

White relates the fictive elements in the historical narrative to ideology of the historians on the one hand and self-consciousness of the genre on the other. The emphasis of the postmodern theory of history on the role of the historian in interpreting past events entails the fact that historical events are described through a subjective eye and interpreted through historians’ own perspectives.
This also mean that historical information is in no way pure and innocent since historical narratives do not reveal meanings that are always there, rather they construct meaning as fictional narratives do. If historical narratives do not represent the external reality, they must represent something else and in doing so they will inevitably be political. Mainstream history is believed to be the history of the dominant power structures and it suppresses the history of minority people. In this regard, Elisabeth Wesseling states: “the absence of ethnic minorities from... history does not result from some sort of natural, automatic process, but from deliberate exclusion” (166). The idea justifies the endeavour of postmodern fiction to give voice to the history of the suppressed. Therefore, postmodernism is a way of releasing history from the influence of the dominant totalitarian and patriarchal ideologies and it celebrates a multiplicity of histories.

In *The Modern British Novel*, Malcolm Bradbury marks a tendency in British fiction toward history, especially in the novels of the “eighties”:

Certainly exploring past and recent history, at a time when its progress seemed either ambiguous or disastrous, and many of the progressive dreams of the earlier part of the century had plainly died, did become a central theme of Eighties fiction. (432)

For Bradbury, this tendency is the outcome of the developments that we have mentioned concerning the field of history which show that “writing history
is more like writing novels than we often choose to think” (432). Bradbury particularly stresses Hayden White’s influence on this tendency in novel writing toward history and historical themes. He acknowledges that “what we understand by history, the means by which we construct significant histories, and the way we relate those histories to our understanding of our own situation” has been reshaped by the recent philosophy of history (432). The historical novels in the eighties- the era being marked with the flourishing of many fictions written in the postmodern novel genre- differ greatly from the historical novels written in the previous years. Postmodern fiction rejoices in the coming into existence of this recent postmodern understanding of historiography. Postmodern historical novels insert historical documents, events and historical personages into the fictional worlds of their works, drawing attention at the same time to the process of both history and fiction. Literary critics foreground the intense preoccupation with history in the works of many contemporary novelists like Graham Swift, Peter Ackroyd, D. M. Thomas, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, John Fowles, Jeanette Winterson and Angela Carter.

The works of all the major writers can be analyzed as double-voiced discourses where the dominant voice of history is refracted through subversion and gives way to other voices that have been suppressed. The major features of this genre include the metafictional elements of the texts, self-reflexivity, non-linear narrative and parodic intention to pinpoint
the refraction and the co-existence of plural voices. As a result, historiographic metafiction is proved to be a liberating genre for feminist and postcolonial writers that enables other histories to be verbalized.

The particular themes and techniques that Salman Rushdie employs in his novels allow him to be labeled both as a postmodern and a postcolonial writer. Keith M. Booker points out that Rushdie’s “use of irony, parody, and exuberant carnivalesque imagery and language, have for many critics made him a paragon of postmodernism” (*Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 2). But, “his particular cultural roots and the particular subject matter of his fiction have led many critics to see him as an exemplary postcolonial writer” (*Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 2). The postmodern qualities of Rushdie’s novels can be said to assert themselves more dominantly and thus water down the postcolonial politics in his writing, at least for European readers. Rushdie informs us that his novels are regarded as realistic novels of history and politics by Eastern readers. Yet, his novels always make the representational systems of Western thinking their subject matter and question their objectivity. History is one of these systems that Rushdie parodies and challenges in his novels. Actually, it can be said that his novels emerge out of the engagement in the discursive use of history that has been dominant in literary theory and criticism. The overt political issues that find place in Rushdie’s novels are seen as the direct outcome of the interest in postcolonial studies in literary theory (*Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie* 2).
Accordingly, the novelist’s *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* are concerned with Eastern cultural traditions and history. This shared quality of the novels makes them in turn the objects of postcolonial literary criticism. In *Shame*, Rushdie writes: “[the East] is a part of the world to which, whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands” (28).

History and marginality are of utmost importance as themes in postcolonial writing. The general tendency to insert historical events by the postcolonial writer is to subvert these events and thus to undermine the ideology behind them. Rushdie is no exception. He draws on a variety of postcolonial theories to create new ways of conceptualizing the past and to generate alternative forms of writing which encompass its difference from the Western way in its presentation and its pluralism. The accounts of the historical events depicted in Rushdie’s novels contradict their already known official versions. By means of creating alternative explanations and accounts, Rushdie tries to subvert the historical account of the colonizer. As a result, it is indicated that postcolonial novels like Rushdie’s can “write back” to the imperial center and “decolonize Britain,” as Rushdie argues in his essay titled “The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance.”

Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* offers its central figure Saleem’s “his/story” as an individual mode of history writing that depends on and elevates individual experience as opposed to the conventional scientific historiography which attempts to totalize individual experience. This consists
of personal historical accounts of Saleem which are mingled with magic realism and the self-reflexive, non-linear and unreliable narration of the text. There is an attempt to make the silenced individual in the grand narrative of history to speak as an individual and become the centre; his voice is now in conflict with the dominant voice(s) and hence makes the text multiple/multivocal. Thus, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* can be analyzed in terms of historiographic metafiction, in which “ex-centric” voices that are pushed to the sidelines of “official” histories are re-presented.

The novel opens with Saleem’s confessing the exact time of his birth. He feels obliged to utter the fact that he was born at the exact time of the independence of India. As a result of Saleem’s particular position as a midnight’s child born at the time India gained its independence from the colonial rule, his life story goes hand in hand with that of the nation. Saleem blends his life with the political life of his country. He claims: “I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country” (9).

When the novel unfolds, it is seen that the whole plot is developed according to this belief of Saleem’s, and he is seen as the comic hero of the postmodern novel to whom history becomes handcuffed rather than the opposite. The repetition of this claim in the novel overemphasizes the significance of the relation of his birth to the liberation of the nation itself. This “historical significance” of his birth gives the opportunity to Saleem
to comment on the political and historical events in the Indian past. Since Saleem is handcuffed to history by his accidental birth, his autobiography reflects not only his individual life story but also the entire history of postcolonial India. This is the reason for the presence of historical personages and events in the novel that are referred to along with the life story of the protagonist from his birth to adulthood. The mingling of the real with the personal, the historical with the fictional, gives way to Saleem’s “his/story” conflicting with the official history of India. All the major events in Saleem’s life are made to correspond to important political events in Indian history. A parallelism is created between the life story of the protagonist and the history of the nation ironically in Saleem’s imagination. This parallelism is created through mere coincidences as Saleem says, “such historical coincidences have littered, and perhaps befouled, my family’s existence in the world” (27). Among the most prominent past events are the Emergency Rule, the civil war between India and Pakistan, Partition, and Amritsar Massacre. Rushdie includes various historical figures like Mian Abdullah, General Zulfiqar, Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi as his characters in the novel.

In *Midnight’s Children*, the subversion of the objective historical discourse is achieved through the intermingling of metafictional strategies and historical reality. As *Midnight’s Children* is about its central figure’s struggle to write his autobiography, the novel is by its very nature about fiction writing itself. In the process of constructing the individual mode of historiography,
Saleem strives to position himself at the center of a history that he creates, carving out an individual identity in a manner that has national implications. In order to serve such an aim, to operate literally active, he appropriates the historical facts, alters them and gives new meanings to these events so as to prove his central position. Rushdie, in his *Imaginary Homelands*, provides explanations for the unique characteristics of Saleem’s narrative. He confirms that Saleem “wants to shape his material (so) that the reader will be forced to concede his central role. He is cutting up history to suit himself” (24). This constitutes the ground where impersonal historical reality is contrasted with a subjective perception of reality.

The mode of individual historical discourse Rushdie proposes as an alternative gives the individual the opportunity to create personal meaning from history by highlighting some events and overshadowing others according to his personal view. This emerges as a threat to the objectivity of totalitarian history. Accordingly, it is claimed that Saleem creates personal meaning from history, assigning historical events significance in relation to himself as an individual. He creates personal and fictional explanations and makes up fictitious causes and effects for the already known historical facts. This means the blend of fact and fiction in his account, a quality which, subverts the official version of history. In narrating the historical past, Rushdie blends fact with fantastic elements and fairy stories. By means of including fantastic elements in depicting historical events through magic
realism in the novel, Rushdie attempts to question the possibility of objective historical reality.

Midnight’s Children seeks to parody the historical discourse imposed by the colonizing power through the novel’s protagonist. Saleem’s autobiography makes changes in the known versions of historical events, gives us wrong dates, and comes up with his own explanations and causes that are conflicting with the officially accepted “facts”. As a result, he challenges the authority of the totalitarian history which Rushdie finds inadequate to reflect multiplicity. Saleem regards himself as the victim of such totalitarian history writing where only “great figures” like Indira Gandhi can hold the centre and where he is denied a role. He tries to put himself into the centre in Indian history and offers an individual mode of history writing that elevates individual experience as opposed to conventional historical discourse. In Shame, the same decentralizing of the great historical figures in history is achieved by the writer by means of rewriting the recent political history of Pakistan through the perspectives of his peripheral characters. The history of Pakistan is told simultaneously with the stories of the people who are victims of past events and the tyranny of the political personages whom Rushdie satirizes in the novel. In Rushdie’s counter-narrative, the individual plays an active role and vies for the centre, and his/her voice is in conflict with that of the dominant. Therefore, the monolithic discourse of history can be opened to multivocality in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and Shame.
In his novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie mixes history, fantasy, fable and magic to create a novel of great enchantment. The novel, which he describes as his “most researched,” moves with astonishing speed and energy from the court of Emperor Akbar to Renaissance Florence in Europe journeying through various destinations on the way. Rushdie pits the East against the West, explores assimilation and identity, and invites the readers to think about the power of story-telling and its role in defeating obscurantism and intolerance.

Rushdie creates a world that spans centuries, fiction and “reality,” continents and cultures, sweeping from Central Asia to India, from Florence through Ottoman Turkey to the New World in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Departing from the twentieth century setting of his earlier novels, he mingles history and legend in this novel. The plot is carefully thought out and it is full of intriguing historical references with a thorough accompanying bibliography. *The Enchantress of Florence* is influenced by historical Romances like Ludovico Ariosto’s “Orlando Furioso” and postmodernist fantasies like Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*.

The novel incorporates fictional characters, along with historical figures and events set during the Mughal Empire in India and the Medici family's period of influence in Florence. Rather than the blend of magic and realism that generally defines his work, this novel is structured as a fable. The novel itself is a view of the Europe and the Near East in the sixteenth century,
from Florence to India. A fascinating analysis of medieval Florence and Mughal India, the novel depicts all the geographic and emotional roads that connect the ancient world. He writes of leaders of two great civilizations, men who actually thought about the proper uses of all the power they had gained-Emperor Akbar and Niccolo Machiavelli.

Rushdie claims to have done extensive research for the various elements of the novel. It is ambitious in its varied sixteenth century settings, from Medici Florence to the court of Mughal India at Fatehpur Sikri, with brief sojourns in the lands of the Ottomans and in the Americas. The novel portrays how the Emperor Akbar of Hindustan, and the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli are connected through the Enchantress of Florence, a “woman such as he never met, a woman who had forged her own life, beyond convention, by the force of her will alone, a woman like a king. This was a new dream for him, an undreamed vision of what a woman might be” (The Enchantress 390). Both Emperor Akbar and Niccolo Machiavelli are important, though they are not the central characters. Rushdie weaves a fantastical and enchanting tale about Florence and the Mughal Empire, interweaving the two stories and the fates of a blond European and the Emperor Akbar. The plot focuses on the unfolding of the blond European’s story of how he is related to Akbar through a lost princess. In between the plot, Rushdie plays with the themes of religious tolerance and the emperor’s own individuality. The novel also deals with the predicament of women
throughout history. One woman, the Enchantress of Florence, weaves her way from land to land, and Rushdie follows her like a lovesick boy. It allows him to connect worlds that were never connected in history.

Historical works, according to Hayden White, are literary artifacts, the contents of which are imagined or invented. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie has taken certain events and figures from history and has developed an exuberant story out of it. In doing so, he has reimagined and reconstructed those historical figures and events. Rushdie has reinvented the life of the sixteenth century Mughal India and Medici Florence. The novel is a dreamlike novel of flesh and thought, of Italy and India, of story-telling, honesty and lies.

The main ideas discussed in the novel are the interaction between historiography and fiction, the nature of identity and subjectivity, the question of reference and representation, the intertextual and ideological nature of past. Any type of history is a mediated narrative. It is mainly characterized by subjectivity. The element of subjectivity is brought in through the process of narration. In the novel, the identity of Mogor dell’Amore, the narrator, is always in question. Though attributed with historical traits, he is purely a creation of Rushdie’s imagination. Thus, he is a hybrid with the qualities of both fiction and history. He considers himself, and is introduced in the novel, as the uncle of the great Mughal emperor Akbar. Though a fictional character, it is he who initiates the story.
Postmodernists believe that history is qualified with subjective elements because the historian has his own choices. His processes of selection are personal and subjective. The historian takes some past events and makes story out of them. The events selected will be his personal choice. In that selected events he makes his preferences as to which element should be given prominence. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Rushdie deals with Mughal, Florentine and Turkish history. But prominence is given to the story of Qara Koz, the titular enchantress. In telling her story, the author has subordinated the history of Mughal, Medici and Turks. Even though the central character is a woman, she is only a puppet in the hands of men and their imagination, like all others female characters.

In trying to re-create the past, Rushdie has re-imagined it. Umberto Eco in his “Postscript to *The Name of the Rose*” explains how the historical fiction writer must become immersed in historical evidence: to tell a story, “you must first of all construct a world, furnished as much as possible, down to the slightest detail” (75). Eco’s “Postscript” is also a manifesto proclaiming the authority of serious historical fiction. By reimagining the past, the novelist thus performs the analytical role of the historian, by “not only identifying in the past the causes of what came later, but also tracing the process through which those causes began slowly to produce their effects” (Eco 76). He means that the past controls the present as well as the future.
Most of the stuff in the novel is fictionalized and most of the people in the novel never existed. Even the ones who did exist, the writer has really re-imagined them. The character like Agostino Vespucci is an example. There was somebody by that name, who was clearly a friend of Machiavelli, and who worked with him in what was called the Office of the Second Chancery, which was basically the Foreign Ministry of Florence. He was a distant relative of Amerigo Vespucci. That is what we all know about him. But, the historical record does not really tell what kind of person he was. The author has to invent him, in the same way as he did with the really great historical figures like Akbar and Machiavelli. So, the author still has to perform the novelistic act: to get inside their heads and make them come to life.

Jalal ud-din Muhammad Akbar (1542-1605), the greatest Mughal Emperor of India, who, though illiterate, was gifted with a unique syncretic vision which he tried to concretize in his own lifetime, by creating a new religion, Din-i-Ilahi or the Divine Faith, that sought to bring people of all faiths under the same roof. It is this leader, who dominates the novel with thoughts much ahead of his times. Rushdie's Akbar muses at length on the questions of God and Man. He is a tortured, faltering, fallible man - past his prime, beset with anxieties, and disillusioned at the failure of his dreams.

The novel focuses on a fictionalized version of Akbar, the Great, who championed religious tolerance and reason. Akbar, who is granted a depressing vision of a future in which his dreams of civility and civilization
give way to sectarian violence and hate, initially appears like an intriguing hero. A brilliant military commander as well as a sort of philosopher-king, he is given to bouts of loneliness and soul-searching, and he worries constantly about who among his courtiers and his sons he can truly trust. Akbar, who struggles with the existence of God, the divine right to rule, is truly the only arbiter of power. This portrayal of Akbar enables the author to ruminate the ideas regarding the power of travel and imagination, truth and deception, the East and the West, religious tolerance and reason.

The novel abounds in enchantresses and seductresses of all kinds, but the most interesting of them all is the imaginary Jodha, a being created by Akbar's all-powerful fancy. As a historical character, her significance arises from her marriage to the Mughal emperor Akbar. She was also the mother of Emperor Jahangir, her husband's heir. Her name, as recorded in the Mughal chronicles, was Mariam-uz-Zamani. She has also been referred to as Jodha Bai, although she was never known as such during her lifetime. Neither the Akbarnama (biography of Akbar commissioned by Akbar himself), nor any historical text of the period refers to her as Jodha Bai. Tuzk-e-Jahangiri, the autobiography of Jahangir, does not mention Jodha Bai either.

Making her character imaginary serves two purposes in the novel. In the novel, Rushdie celebrates, among other things, “a time when the real and the unreal were not segregated forever and doomed to live apart under different monarchs and separate legal systems” (The Enchantress 324).
The best attestation of that fact in the novel is the character of Jodha Bai, Akbar's fantasy transfigured. The other purpose she serves is technical. There has always been a lot of controversy surrounding the historical character of Jodha Bai: who she actually was and whether she existed at all. By making her imaginary, Rushdie solves in one brilliant stroke the problem of the controversy over her identity.

History is a collection of theories about the past. We revise our view of the past on the basis of our present concerns. So, there is a degree of fluidity in history that is useful to the fiction writer. History is never entirely factual. What is fascinating about Rushdie is his ability to make history into a fantasy. Fictionalizing facts is another way of bringing subjectivity in a narrative. On one level, *The Enchantress of Florence* is a platform for the fictionalized Akbar, the Great, to ponder over the deep questions of humanity: a politically powerful man portrayed as being on the cusp of intellectual greatness as well. Fictionalizing Akbar enables the author to discuss topics which have far reaching effects on humanity. On another level, this is a historical novel with wonderful information about the sixteenth century India and Florence. On another level, there is the story itself, full of characters and their back-stories, and those characters' respective adventures. This layered story interweaves, moves back and forth across time and place.

Using history as his base, Rushdie launches a tale that spans many centuries, and includes his favourite themes: love, sexuality, mirages, illusion,
and the fluidity of time and space. The lives of the artists, writers and rulers, when given more space, are far better served. The whole novel is haunted by a sly, gentle account of Botticelli’s muse, at the centre of two of the loveliest paintings in Florence, *La Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*, and the shadowy relationship between Machiavelli and the Medicis is humanely teased out in a totally fresh way. The author of *The Prince*, Machiavelli, is brought to life as more than an intellectual thug. The account of his torture, imprisonment and exile is brilliantly melancholic. Machiavelli, associated forever with amoral political schemes, is portrayed not unsympathetically as a melancholic, but as a washed-up formal official who pens his manifesto in the vague hope of winning back some of his lost glory. It is legends and not actual lives, the author seems to be saying, which are the true paths to immortality.

Machiavelli was actually a person quite unlike what is now thought of as Machiavellian. He was a republican who disliked totalitarian government. He was an honourable and non-corrupt servant of the Florentine Republic in those years when the Florentines ousted the Medicis, and he suffered terribly when the Medicis were back in power. They tortured and exiled him. He spent the rest of his life very unhappily; he was not allowed to go to the city that he loved: he had to stay on his small farm outside Florence. There is a real letter that exists from his friend Agostino Vespucci (who also appears in the novel), which was sent when Machiavelli was away on business of the state, requesting him to come back soon because there was no one to arrange
the fun. Machiavelli was the man who arranged the fun for his friends. He was the author of the most successful comedies written during the Renaissance: his play, *The Mandrake Root* (*La Mandragola*), was a tremendous success, as was *Clizia*. He was a comic writer of some skill. It is interesting that one of the ways in which his bad reputation grew is mostly through the Elizabethan theatre. Machiavelli is the most realistically drawn character in the novel. He attracts sympathy in this novel for the disappointments he has suffered. Thrown out of power, he tried to curry favour by writing a book for the new ruler, who rejected it. His book *The Prince* is now considered a classic.

Historicity is imposed on certain characters in the novel. This is another tool used by the writer to impart subjectivity to his narrative. The titular enchantress Qara Koz, the story teller Mogor dell’Amore, and the mirror, maid of Qara Koz, are all such characters. In Qara Koz, the princess whom history forgot, Rushdie has created one of the most enigmatic and romantic female characters since Sheherazade. For, it is around that one strand that Rushdie has woven his entire story and has created the elaborate web which eventually snares all his characters and his readers. Through the portrayal of the fictional character Qara Koz, questions are raised on mob mentality: “Did the crowd enhance one's selfhood or erase it?” (*The Enchantress* 176) Also on the inability of the East and the West to see
each other clearly: “We are their dream,” Akbar's imaginary queen tells him, "and they are ours" (*The Enchantress* 60).

*The Enchantress of Florence* is a dreamlike novel that weaves fact and fiction so tightly together that it is hard to distinguish between them. The more substantial part of the novel is the exploration of the levels of reality and of their interactions both within the fictional universe projected by the text and within the text itself as a multilayered narrative construct. In a way, the novel is a fictional account of real historical events. The novel is thoroughly researched, as the appended bibliography indicates. It, therefore, demands of the reader a certain amount of historical knowledge about the periods in question. Despite being written in the language and narrative of fantasy, the novel does not depart too much from empirical history. Apart from the constant interference of purely fictional characters in the development of historical events, there are a few deviations from official accounts. Such deviations can easily be defended by the fact that they occur in the intradiegetic story told by a character whose reliability is constantly undermined and questioned by the omniscient narrator or by other characters in the frame of the narrative.

We cannot separate the historical from the magical in the fictional universe of this novel; this is because in the characters’ perception they belong to the same level of reality. If we concentrate on the relationships between the real and the imaginary, between dream and reality, between life
and art, between life and story, there are several episodes in the narrative that illustrate or allegorize the idea of free passage between these levels, of the permeability of boundaries between worlds of history and magic. Thus, one of Akbar’s queens, Jodha, lives on the threshold between dream and reality. A painter falls in love with his own creation and, in a reversal of the Pygmalion myth, flattens and disappears inside his own painting; the narrator-protagonist Niccolo Vespucci, or Mogor dell’Amore, after concluding his story, “crosses over into the empty page after the last page,” into the world of his own tale, to start “a new life inside it” (The Enchantress 343). Narrative/story is only an extension of life or life is a textual construct of history/magic.

Indeed, this is a world where creations often become something bigger than their creators, rewriting reality and subsuming identities. Akbar’s aura as an omnipotent king of kings, a royal “we,” prevents him from ever referring to himself with the intimate “I,” much to the humanistic king’s distress; while Akbar’s court artist Dashwanth, tasked with recreating the history of Qara Koz in paint, disappears when he paints himself into his own picture. The boundary between the real world and the imaginary world is not as fixed as we think. What we call inventions and discoveries, are all about things moving from the imagined world into the real world; that happens all the time. People imagine a light bulb before they invent it: “We are constantly imagining into being the world in which we live. So for things to
cross the boundary from imagination into reality is commonplace” (Salman Rushdie. Interview with Jeffrey Eugenides: The Enchantress of Florence, www.nypl.org/live). Imagination is an integral part of common life. Men often indulge in fictionalizing their own lives. Unable to find desired changes in their lives, men often write their fictional lives in imagination.

In this fictional world, stories and story-telling have a central role to perform. The narrator in this novel is aware that his life depends on his skill, charm, and persuasiveness as a storyteller; the yarn he spins has the effect of influencing not only the worldviews and dispositions of the emperor, his immediate audience, but also the everyday existence of every man and woman in the city. As a novel about story-telling, The Enchantress of Florence has a sense of self-indulgence. In many ways, The Enchantress of Florence is a story about the story: a metafiction that looks at the line between invention and reality and crosses it. It may seem like a magical fairy tale, but psychologically, invention is behind most of our reality. Reality is tenuous. The characters are imagined, yet given “space” and relationship. Painters disappear into their own paintings. The story-teller feels himself fading away to nothingness when kept from telling his story. Women appear as mere echoes and mirrors of someone or something, to add to the tenuous atmosphere created by questions of identity and reality. They whisper and murmur, but they are ghosts as they glide behind curtains and veils. Rushdie shows us that story has power: the power to enthrall, the power to rend apart
and the power to create. In *The Enchantress of Florence*, Salman Rushdie continues to explore his interest in how the supernatural can be brought to life through the power of storytelling. He contemplates the power of the narrative to create and give meaning to life and to explore the ability of the individual to control or change the narrative. Storytellers have the most power of all people. Characters in one location or time have mirrors in another (and Qara Koz has her own Mirror who travels with her); events and phrases occur and recur, and questions of religion, identity and truth are brought in again and again. At its core, *The Enchantress of Florence* is about the power of story.

By inserting various sub-plots, the author raises the question as to where history ends and fiction sets in, and even makes us doubt the power of language to tell the truth. The novel attracts our attention to the meaning of storytelling itself. The omniscient narrator questions the veracity of the reality he portrays as much as several of his characters do. They also experience their differing versions of true love and sexuality, home and abroad, dream, enchantment and reality, secret and betrayal, past and present: all interwoven in a story about the enchanting Qara Köz, also called Lady Black Eyes, Angelica and the Enchantress of Florence.

Rushdie has been careful in reminding the readers about the historicity of his subject-matter by adding a five-page bibliography at the end of the novel. Rushdie has spent years researching this work and in interviews he claims that much of what one might think the most fantastical, including
the Shi’a monarch who used his enemy's skull as a drinking goblet, are in fact the ones that are true. In addition to Akbar, the Great, there is a veritable list of famous people on parade through this novel: from Lorenzo de’ Medici, Machiavelli, Savonarola, Botticelli, Andrea Doria, and even Elizabeth I. Each of these figures has his/her own story and a multiplicity of names and incarnations; enough to create a novel from each of them.

_The Enchantress of Florence_ can be viewed as a historiographic metafiction. The novel is self-reflexive as it is a story about storytelling and, moreover, it deals with real historical events and figures. _The Enchantress of Florence_ is written in story within story within story mode. In the novel, the author is not just telling a story, but he tells a story about somebody telling another story. The Italian, Mogor dell’Amore, himself has a story to tell the emperor. That story constitutes more or less the entire novel. Most of the time, we forget that we are inside the inner stories. The inner story is where we hear about the character in the title: the Enchantress, the most beautiful woman anyone has ever seen or ever will see. Her mere presence causes otherwise stoic men to fall to their knees and either pray for her or pray for themselves: even the men themselves are not clear which it is. The city to which Mogor dell’Amore arrives is one of the grand cities of the world in both scale and wealth. Even the nearby lake seems to be made of gold. This, of course, is just an illusion brought about by the setting of the sun, but it is an
appropriate introduction to the story since it will become difficult to separate the real from the imagined as the story progresses.

With postmodernism there arose a sea change in the quality of literary narratives. One of the trends of postmodernism is the victory of heterogeneity over consensus. This healthy trend of postmodernism is reflected in its narratives. Narratives have become intertextual. Several texts are incorporated to the narrative of a text. The novel *The Enchantress of Florence* is characterized by intertextuality. Various discourses such as travelogue, psychoanalysis, myth, occult and history are integrated into its text. It is a multivocal discourse about storytelling, imagination, mob psychology, female sexuality and power.

First and foremost, *The Enchantress of Florence* is about story telling. The novel has stories within stories within stories. The first key story concerns a young European, who arrives at the court of Emperor Akbar, claiming to be the emperor’s uncle. To prove this, he tells a spell-binding tale of the world’s most beautiful woman who makes a progress from the East to the West, “enchanting” various powerful men, until she ends up in Florence—the second key of the novel. Within these, there is also the wonderful story of three young Florentine boys, who go on to impact the world in ways they do not expect.

The central narrative figure of Mogor dell’ Amore is convinced that he “would die without telling his story” because all “men needed to hear their
stories told.” Even Akbar, his most patient listener, believes that Mogor “wants to step into the tale he is telling and begin a new life inside it” (*The Enchantress* 256). The basic motif of storytelling is the human need to establish our identity, our home with family and friends, our own city, country and world since if all our stories faded away, we would drift “vaguely into the white.” Even Akbar feels this need although he had, as he ruminates, till recently conceived of himself as “this swallower of worlds, this many-headed monster who referred to him in the first person plural.” But he had, of late, begun to “meditate … about the disturbing possibilities of the first person singular - the ‘I’” (*The Enchantress* 38). This transformation of the narrative voice from the generic plural “we” to the intimately singular “I” is significant. It symbolizes a change of perspective, from the emperor to a man, as well as a change in the texture of the novel, from the all-encompassing story of the omniscient narrator to the story of a skeptical Akbar.

*The Enchantress of Florence* can also be read as a travelogue. In the novel, there are two kinds of people: those who travel and those who prefer not to. Jodha, as the queen who never leaves the palace, thinks of travel as something that removes you “from the place in which you had a meaning, and to which you gave meaning in return by dedicating your life to it” (*The Enchantress* 59). In this, she is like Ago Vespucci, the Florentine, who believes that it is not “necessary to go questing across the world and die
among guttural strangers to find your heart’s desire” (*The Enchantress* 201). Yet, stories travel only because people travel—people like Mogor dell’Amore, Argalia and Qara Koz herself. Qara Koz becomes the ultimate traveller in this cross-cultural tale. Connected to travel is the notion of time. Mogor dell’Amore tells Akbar that in the new world, “the ordinary laws of space and time did not apply,” that time had been introduced to this world by the European voyagers. The point of the novel is not that one culture is superior to the other but that both are equally fantastic, that both abound in stories, and that travellers ensure that these stories, which are really mirrors of one another, travel back and forth.

The bibliography at the back of *The Enchantress of Florence* cites hundred odd works of history and literature pertaining to Renaissance Italy and Central Asia, where the story is set. The novel takes its cue from Ludovico Ariosto’s “Orlando Furioso” and Matteo Boiardo’s “Orlando Innamorato,” sixteenth century Italian romantic epics that resemble fairy tales on steroids. These are vast, action-packed yarns full of sorcerers and mythical beasts, fantastical journeys and enchanted castles, brave knights and the distressed damsels they love and rescue. Like the Italian Romances, Rushdie's novel takes place in a semi-legendary version of the real world, where magic and history intertwine. Despite its battles and its worldly ruminations on such topics as religious conflict and the proper exercise of power, the predominant theme is love. Angelica, the fictional character in “Orlando Innamorato”
is the inspiration for the character Qara Koz in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Besides Ariosto and *The Arabian Nights*, another influence Rushdie tips his hat to in *The Enchantress of Florence* is the vast Indian oral tradition surrounding Hamza, an uncle of the prophet Mohammed and the hero of countless popular tales. There are familiar Scheherazade-esque stories within stories within stories, and interminable Tristram Shandy-esque digressions that circle around and around.

The concept of intertextuality reminds us that each text exists in relation to others. In fact, texts owe more to other texts than to their own makers. In this context, Michel Foucault explains:

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network… The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hand… Its unity is variable and relative.

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The novel explores the relation between history and narrative through an intertextual framework: the main text of history/narrative is entwined with fiction, travelogue, occult, magic, poetry, power, sexuality and politics.
Another important characteristic of *The Enchantress of Florence* is its use of polyphony. Polyphony is a feature of narrative, which includes a diversity of points of view and voices. The concept was invented by Mikhail Bakhtin, based on the musical concept polyphony in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art* (1929). Polyphony in the novel does not refer, as the term may suggest, to the simple co-presence of harmonizing voices. The polyphonic novel is defined by the quality of the relationship between the narrator and the character, in that the former allows the latter right to the final word. The character’s voice is never ultimately submerged by that of the narrator. For Bakhtin, this layering of voices within one voice is nowhere more obvious than in the novel. The novel's epic mode permits the writer to embed voices within voices (for example, character speech within narrator speech, narrator speech within authorial speech, and so on.), and to orchestrate a dialogue among them.

Rushdie delves into the minds of historical characters such as Akbar to string together a multi-themed narrative about time, travel, identity, power, desire and story-telling. The overarching metaphor that binds these themes together is the mirror: the hidden princess has a slave girl who is her mirror, the Florentine Argalia is, to an extent, the mirror of Mogor dell’Amore, Jodha has a mirror in the hidden princess, the Mughal artist Dashwanth who paints Qara Koz and the Florentine artist Filipepi who paints the other enchantress in the novel, Simonetta, are mirrors of one another, and so on. On a larger scale,
the Mughal Empire and Renaissance Florence mirror each other as well.
Mogor dell’ Amor tells Akbar: “This may be the curse of the human race…
Not that we are so different from one another, but that we are so alike”
(The Enchantress 392). As the stories twist and turn in front of mirrors, reality
becomes a mirage. The lake at Sikri is a mirror too, reflecting the shifting
fortunes of the city.

On account of its use of mirror imagery, trans-cultural characters, twin
settings that reflect the supposedly clashing civilizations, vivid descriptions of
painting and song, and the shadowy, recurring but silent figure of Dashwanth,
the artist, the novel also seems to be about how to make art; about the
relationship between politics and art and about the back-and-forth reflections
between cultures. The Enchantress of Florence mostly hints and insinuates
about art, politics and culture, rather than bringing the reader to some kind of
understanding. There are beautiful sections on landscape painting, on combat
at sea and on imprisonment, as well as brief, penetrating looks at the married
life and at the public miracles created by the Enchantress. The novel has
musty philosophical musings about the craft of storytelling and the
relationship between life and art.

The Enchantress of Florence can be viewed as a metanarrative. It is a
story about a story, encompassing and explaining other ‘little stories’ within
totalizing schemes. The main story is about a lost Mughal princess Qara Koz,
the hidden princess, which encompasses many other stories. Inside this main story are told the Turkish, the Medici and the Mughal histories.

Rushdie’s characters are reflective, as is the narration, with metalanguage and self-effacement that allow readers to keep up with his genius. They are larger-than-life, capricious archetypes that embody the virtues and flaws of humanity. The novel is altogether an adventure novel with pirates, grand battles, invasions and rebellions; it is a magnificent love story transcending time and death, a metaphysical story dealing with the divine, freedom of belief and the sanctity of man. It is a meditation on the nature of love, of imagination, of loyalty and friendship and the forces that move history. This novel is a classic of Rusdhie with its plethora of well developed characters, the brilliance in story-telling, and the signature magic realism. *The Enchantress of Florence* is not primarily a political novel, but it is a work of imagination about imagination. Enchantment, finally, is only a metaphor: “Witchcraft requires no potions, familiar spirits or magic wands. Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough” (*The Enchantress of Florence*, 326). This is a story about the power of story-telling itself, and how words hold a magic that can change the world, alter history, or even create life out of nothing.

The most important features of postmodern fiction are the use of techniques such as metafiction, magic realism, intertextuality, polyphony, parallelism, and multiple perspectives. All these techniques are widely used
in this novel. Texts, whether literary or non-literary, are viewed as lacking in any kind of independent fixed meaning. Every text is a mosaic of references to other texts, genres, and discourses. This is what is called intertextuality. The act of reading plunges the reader into a network of textual relations. Intertextuality results in heterogeneity. *The Enchantress of Florence* can be read as a metafiction which is told in story within story within story method. Metafiction is a kind of self-referential fiction which experiments with its own form as a way of creating meaning. One of the general issues of metafiction is foregrounding the fiction deflating the dichotomy of fiction and reality. For instance, fictional characters and historical figures are often juxtaposed. All these conditions of metafiction are fulfilled in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Metafiction questions the issue of intertextuality which argues that each text exists in relation to other texts. This novel is self reflexive and at the same time it lays claim to historical events and personages. So it can be viewed as a historiographic metafiction.

The novel is narrated in the style of magic realism. In his novel, Rushdie interweaves a sharply etched realism with fantastic and dreamlike elements as well as with materials derived from myths and fairytales. The character Jodha, who is known to be wife of Emperor Akbar, is presented as a creation of Akbar’s imagination. The Mughal artist Dashwanth, who disappears into his own painting, is also one of the finest examples of magic realism. During the course of narration, parallels are drawn between various
elements- between fiction and reality, between the East and the West, between various characters and between events.

*The Enchantress of Florence* brings to the forefront the issues of history and fiction. The novel asserts the parallel between writing history and writing fiction. History and fiction are so merged together in the novel that one cannot distinguish between the two. It is a world that spans fiction and reality. The novel incorporates fictional characters along with historical figures. The problematic relation of history and fiction is explored in *The Enchantress of Florence* through its formal linking of both genres. Both historical and literary texts are products of the linguistic functions of language: and they are manifestly marked by their nature of textuality. Rushdie’s novel appropriately fits into the concept of historiographic metafiction, which essentially is a metafictional work that concentrates on histories and the historical. Historiographic metafiction struggles with many of the issues postcolonialism attempts to grapple with: identity and subjectivity, reference and representation, intertextual nature of the past, ideology of the past, and the role of language. The novel challenges history and plays with the truth and lies of the historical record. It is here that postmodernism, metafiction, and postcolonialism meet to challenge the conventions of history and fiction. The novel questions universal truths and empirical histories by emphasizing that narratives, fictional as well as
historical, are subjectively constructed; they are, therefore, capable of appropriating and transforming fact and fiction.

John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is regarded as a compelling historiographic metafiction in contemporary British literature. The interweaving of historical and literary sources of Victorian Era is characteristic of the novel. This intertextuality reinforces the historical and verisimilitudinous connection with Victorian Age, and simultaneously it materializes Fowles’s constant conversation with other forms of literature and the Victorian world. With self-consciousness about the form of fiction and the intrusion of modern novelist-surrogate that interrupts the coherence of narrative, the illusion of Victorian historical reality is disrupted. Such paradoxes of fictionality/reality and the present/the past in the novel demonstrate Fowles’s breakthrough in the traditional literary narrative. Within the historiographic metafictional structure, Fowles employs the parody of Victorian romance – an imitation with critical difference – to reconstruct the Victorian world, to subvert the traditional fixed denouement and to create a unique woman of emancipation.

In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the dual epigraphs in each chapter, the footnotes and the Victorian medical and sociological documents are the instruments that Fowles employs to respond to the Victorian past. Through the play of intertextuality of Victorian social and literary sources that are applied to make Victorian historical connection with the Victorian social
milieu, the illusion of verisimilitudinous historical reality is produced. But the intrusion of novelist-narrator with the perceptions of the twentieth century disrupts this illusion of historical reality. Through the perspectives of modern novelist-surrogate, the present is blended into the Victorian historical past. Such an experimental and complex narrative of paradoxes functions to foreground Fowles’s critique of social and sexual rigidity in Victorian society.

This novel claims to be authentic historical account of Victorian England. Yet, it paradoxically shows how such accounts are made of words, metaphors and quotations. Fowles acknowledges that he has to cheat readers into believing that Victorian spoken speech is formal and archaic, since he finds that the dialogues of 1867 are too close to our time to sound convincingly old and are not stiff enough, not euphemistic enough. Throughout the novel, commentaries on the status and language of novel, as Fowles acknowledges, manifest itself as a consciousness of self-reflexivity. Such a paradox of text’s fictionality displays an intense self-awareness of the novelist-surrogate with regard to the process of literary creation.

At the same time, the autonomy of fiction itself is challenged by the intrusion of self-conscious novelist-surrogate. The novelist-surrogate fuses the critical point of view with his modernity, his perceptions back and forth between the nineteenth and the twentieth century consciousness, to continue the story of the novel. Though the plot and setting are Victorian, the narrative of the novel is self-referencing and metafictional. That the reader is invited
to the process of artistic production and to the alternatives of open
denouements is not only the challenge of the text’s autonomy but also the
manifestation of questioning the omniscient role of Victorian novelists.

The variety of intertextuality characterizes this novel as a unique
historiographic metafiction that has a historical connection with the Victorian
Age. Intertextuality in various forms is a device that Fowles employs
frequently in the novel. Intertextuality mostly appears in the form of dual
epigraphs in the beginning of each chapter; others are interwoven in the
footnote and in the text itself. The Victorian medical and sociological studies
and contemporary poetics and prose are interspersed in the novel as the
sources of intertextuality. Such a strategy of narrative is Fowles’ innovation.
Through this device, Fowles not only creates an association with Victorian
history but also realizes his constant conversation with Victorian historical
past.

In addition, the function of intertextuality in the novel is to close the
gap between the past and the present of the reader; for, Fowles rewrites the
past from the viewpoints of the twentieth century. Within this narrative of
historiographic metafiction, we can recognize the blending of the paradoxical
pattern, the present/the past as well as the connection between the literary and
the Victorian historical past. History in the traditional novel is only meant to
authenticate the fiction and demarcate between the past and the present in the
novel. But historiographic metafiction situates itself in the world of discourses
on the past, the world of texts and of intertexts to blur the boundaries between
the past and the present. Accordingly, Fowles deploys this world, the play of
intertextuality, to represent and recreate his own Victorian history.

It has been noted that one of the most striking trends in the Indian
novel in English has been its tendency to reclaim the nation’s histories. This is
not surprising if one considers the fact that until recently, till the publication
and success of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* in 1981, it was the
“Western” vision of India, or, a vision created by the Westerners, that
remained dominant in the world of fiction written in English. The Western
formal and theoretical constructs of historiography remain hegemonic in
Indian history-writing until at least the beginning of the 1980s.

While British representations of India, from Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* to
Paul Scott’s *The Jewel in the Crown*, from E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to
India* to Richard Attenborough’s film *Gandhi*, are still dominant and Britain is
going through a nostalgic Raj-revival period, as manifested in the plethora of
television series and films made on the subject in the 1980s, Indian novelist
Shashi Tharoor sets out to present a history of India in the twentieth century
from an Indian perspective to his western(ised) readership. He has tapped, in
the post-Rushdie visibility of the Indian English novel, into the possibility of
foregrounding India in his *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). Tharoor himself
has remarked on his writing: “…my fiction seeks to reclaim my country’s
heritage for itself, to tell, in an Indian voice, a story of India” (*Bookless in Baghdad* 25).

Almost all literatures in major Indian languages have a long tradition of using history as source material. T. N. Dhar points out that in the nineteenth century the rising interest in Indian pasts, stimulated by the British presence in the subcontinent and the example of the English tradition of historical fiction, generated “a steady increase in the conscious use of history” in Indian literatures, especially novels (74). India’s twentieth-century history, with its twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies, offers a lot to draw from for novelists with interest in Indian history. The fiction of the 1980s is especially interesting not just because of Rushdie’s influence but due to the disillusionment caused by the State of Emergency and the subsequent mushrooming of novels that engaged with recent Indian history and social and political criticism. Some of the most interesting Indian English novels of the period fall in the category of what Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction,” that is, “novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge” (285-86). Historiographic metafiction also poses questions about positivist and fictive realist history-writing, and makes conscious efforts to foreground and even problematise the process of narrating history.
Some of the Indian English novelists engaging with Indian history continued the realist tradition, as in Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993). But many others followed in Rushdie’s footsteps into the realm of magic realism, mythopoeia and fantasy, often utilising his fragmentary mode of story-telling that activates multiple conceptions of India and Indianness. The idea of India is examined and explored and the old varieties of historiography are challenged in this fiction. In addition to *Midnight’s Children*, these novels include, Allan Sealy’s *The Trotter-Nama* (1988) and Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). These three novels, which deal with modern Indian history, problematise “the matter of India” and challenge some of the established conventions of traditional historical writing by using ancient Indian myths, oral tradition, digressive narrative techniques, and such literary means as satire, magic realism and/or metafictional devices.

*The Great Indian Novel* blends myth and history; two different times operate in the very beginning of the novel: mythical time and historical time. V.V. starts by recounting the genealogy of the characters, and the time of that myth-based genealogy does not match with historical time. Once the genealogy is cleared and the actual (hi)story gets going, mythical time gives way to historical time, which is then followed throughout the novel.

Realism often represents all that is synonymous with Western-style “‘progress”: rationalism, materialism, industrialism, technological innovation. *The Great Indian Novel*, with its metafictional devices,
oral narrative and basic structure of myth, is associated with the past, tradition, religious beliefs, mysticism and ahistoricality/stasis. It offers a powerful counter-(hi)story of India and an effective way of questioning Europe’s hegemony in prose writing, history as well as novels. While positivist historiography makes a clear distinction between history and myth, Tharoor’s novel invokes popular Indian myths in his representation of history. This challenges the tradition of history-writing, in Indian context at least, and the knowledge it produces. Whereas fictive historical realism follows the same conventions as Western-style (positivist) historiography, historiographic metafiction foregrounds the act of recording and narrativising history to question these conventions and problematise this model of writing history. In V.V.’s narration, this happens by means of commonly used postmodern historiography and fiction. In this context, Hutcheon remarks: “…there is a deliberate contamination of the historical with didactic and situational discursive elements, thereby challenging the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation” (92). She calls such narratives “contaminated.” This points to the heterogeneity of the narrative.

From the very beginning the narrator of this (hi)story of India is identified, there is a clear and visible narrator, and the act of narration itself. The narrativisation of history and V.V.’s ponderings about recording and representing history are made part of the story that is being told. Dictating to
a scribe, V.V. addresses his listener, and through him, the reading audience directly, which creates an effect of defamiliarisation: the listeners/readers are not immersed in a seemingly factual, objective and transparent account of twentieth-century Indian history, but are listening to/reading an account, which makes its audience acutely aware of the act of narration taking place. Tharoor’s V.V. tells a subjective story of twentieth-century Indian history, based on his own experiences.

The very objectivity of historical writing is also called into question, as “the facts” on which the depiction and interpretation of many of the incidents and events in *The Great Indian Novel* are based on rumours, hearsay, second-hand information and guesses. V.V. openly admits the subjectivity of his account and implies that all accounts of history are subjective:

> It is my truth, Ganapathi, just as the crusade to drive out the British reflected Gangaji’s truth, and the fight to be rid of both the British and the Hindu was Karna’s truth. Which philosopher would dare to establish a hierarchy among such verities? Question Ganapathi. Is it permissible to modify truth with a possessive pronoun? Questions Two and Three. How much may one select, interpret and arrange facts of the living past before truth is jeopardized by inacuracce? (164)

What he says is that there is no one, indubitable Truth; no one true, objective account of any period of history. In this, *The Great Indian Novel* is like
other postmodern narratives, which, according to Linda Hutcheon, “imply that there are only truths in the plural, and never one truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just other truths” (290). India’s past contains millions of stories, millions of ways of narrating them, and V.V. underlines that his story is only one of the possible histories of twentieth-century India, not an absolute or conclusive account of this period. The actual events of history can be made to constitute different stories, depending on the biases, selections, omissions and distortions of the historian.

The character V.V.’s historiographical position is analogous to that of the ideas of scholars like Hayden White on the writing of history: the historical facts contain an “infinite number” of stories, “all different in their details, each unlike every other.” (Tropics of Discourse 60) The historian must figure out what kind of stories can be found in the “facts” and what kinds of plot-structure ought to be used to make the story coherent; the meaning of the events is elicited from the story-structure that is imposed on them.

The postmodern novels are distinguished from traditional or classic historical fictions by their resistance to conventional certainties about what happened and why. A recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events, and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by multiple narrating voices characterize postmodern historical fiction, appropriately called historiographic metafiction. It is a quintessentially postmodern art form.
which relies on textual play, parody and historical re-conceptualization. Rather than viewing history as a transcendent or wholly definable object of inquiry or representation, historiographic metafiction sees engagements with history as necessarily discursive, situational, and above all, textual. These (re)visions to history allow for new perspectives and identities to emerge from culturally marginalized positions. While at once being eminently political, historiographic metafiction problematizes categories of essential unity and historical representation.