Conclusion

Rushdie’s novels are mostly imaginative recreations of history from the perspective of the artist. They demonstrate the unreliability and the element of fantasy inherent in all historical narration. In his historical novels Rushdie shows a general disbelief towards the theory of the Enlightenment and an incredulity towards metanarratives like history, politics and religion. Rushdie violates rules and conventions regarding the historical narration of events because, as Linda Hutcheon points out, “Facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events” (Politics 54).

Rushdie’s novels tend to obliterate the dividing line between fact and fiction, theme and technique, and the traditional and the modern or postmodern. Unlike many writers of the past and present, Rushdie’s source for his novel is the inexhaustible fund of history imaginatively recreated for fiction. He is not a historian reproducing events with conventional objectivity, but an artist finding his raw materials in the mines of history. His imagination is fundamentally historical as he fictionalizes history and historifies fiction. In this process public and private histories, told and untold events, real and imagined facts and themes and style coalesce to shape Rushdie’s historical imagination. The triumph of Rushdie’s historiographic metafiction “lies in wedding that sense of the absurd to the festively
antinomian world of carnival, through a reliance on folk motifs and fantasy, through the linguistic energy and improvisatory nature of its own performance” (Gorra 128).

A contemporary writer like Rushdie cannot escape being called a postmodern writer. John Mepham postulates how “the postmodern is for ever being unearthed in surprising places and will no doubt soon be discovered in Homer” (153). Even when a certain degree of exaggeration in Mepham’s view is allowed for, it refers to the current tendency of labelling most contemporary writers postmodern and Salman Rushdie is not an exception. Rushdie is at once traditional and postmodern since most of the characteristics attributed to postmodernism are not new or sui-generis; they have been seminally present in writers of the past.

Rushdie’s writings are rooted in tradition since an artistic goal of depicting the human condition can be discerned in his fiction. This is in contrast to postmodern writings, which celebrate the lack of coherence, meaning and wholeness in life and existence. Creative writing becomes merely a linguistic experimentation in much of postmodernist fiction; they are often intellectual or verbal exercises which amount to no concrete signification except the lack of significance in anything. But in Rushdie the traditional concerns of artistic creations like theme, characterization, style and worldview are very much present though a postmodern playfulness runs through
these traditional concerns. His novels *Grimus, Midnight's Children, Shame, The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Fury* depict historical, political, social or intellectual themes that are the normal ones for the traditional writer. The sense of alienation that haunts his characters is quite a familiar feature as alienation presupposes the relevance of roots; without roots the very concept of rootlessness is impossible. Despite the linguistic experiments that Rushdie undertakes, his language is in a sense traditional in that it conveys meaning as opposed to the impossibility of conveying meaning suggested by most postmodernists.

Rushdie has admitted his indebtedness to the Indian tradition and his kinship with particular Indian authors: "What ever language we Indians write in, we drink from the same well. India, that inexhaustible horn of plenty nourishes us all" ("Damme" 57). "*Midnight's Children* stands as an attempt to preserve the spirit of India's secular and democratic independence – a process that Saleem describes as the 'chutnification of history'" (Gorra 148). Rushdie shows his awareness of the Indian philosophical tradition by using moral and philosophical issues as well as different modes of perception of the world by rejecting the belief in man's ability to perceive and present history objectively.

In his 1983 interview, Rushdie criticised present-day Indian fiction in English for being too serious and pleaded for a
return of the traditional, satirical 'clown figure' of Indian folk narrative to the novel. To an extent, his own work has tried to make good that perceived 'lack' of what one might call a *vidushak* perspective in the 'Indian' English novel. (Nair 63)

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie does not present a pessimistic world. It is a rich celebration of the cultural hybridity of India. The novel concentrates upon the contributions of the teeming multitude in shaping the future India. He considers India as an experiment in coexistence. The heterogeneous Indian experience is tolerant towards everything exotic and attempts a gradual Indianization, which creates a hybrid, colourful Indian culture. Rushdie celebrates, the cultural hybridity of India because he thinks that the acceptance and celebration of the cultural hybridity alone will save India from the threat of religious fundamentalism.

Magic realism is one of the recurrent literary devices used by Rushdie to recapture the collective will of India. Syed Mujeebuddin remarks:

The mode of magical or fabulous realism offers Rushdie freedom to move between the modernist / postmodernist and the folkloric traditions of India. Out of the dialectics of this juxtaposition comes his peculiar hybrid tale of India, incorporating a complex web of Hindu and Islamic (and even Christian) motifs, the philosophies of Maya and Karma and
Sufism and interweaving private / personal and public/political histories of the Indian subcontinent. ("Indian Context" 151)

Postmodernism in Salman Rushdie's works is a matter of technique as well as theme. Rushdie's use of postmodern literary devices owes significantly to the theories of Foucault, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Patricia, Waugh and many other exponents of postmodernism. Like these critics Rushdie evinces a distrust of metanarratives and organized systems of thought like religion, history, cultural theories and different forms of socio-political philosophies. His perception of the world is conditioned by his migrancy which is part of the hybridity and multiplicity celebrated by the postmodernists. His treatment of history differs from the traditional kind in its lack of linearity, lack of respect for historical personages and events and deliberate falsification of history. His fiction is often self-reflexive, like that of most postmodern novelists. He is also concerned with the process of artistic creation which becomes a thematic concern within the structure of his novels. As the story or theme unravels, the readers are invited not only to the world of the story, but also to the creative process involved in the telling of it.

Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* is central to an understanding of the entire body of his writing. His later novels may be considered as
an artist developments of the ideas and insights already present in *Grimus*. His concern with history, politics, religion, myth, literature, the process of artistic creation, narration, biography, autobiography and characterization is clearly prefigured in *Grimus*. It is a novel which may pass for different genres at the same time like fantasy, science fiction, the quest novel, religious/philosophical fiction and literary autobiography. The condition of migrancy that informs most of Rushdie's fiction is central to *Grimus*. The protagonist Flapping Eagle may be considered a migrant and quester rolled into one. The quest theme invites references to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Holy Grail, the Golden Fleece, Jason and many other mythical, historical and literary works, stories and characters. The intermingling of the traditional, the modern, the postmodern, the absurd, the comic and the tragic create an atmosphere reminiscent of Bakhtin's concept of the carnival.

Intertextuality is a striking feature of *Grimus*. The work has overt and covert references to literary masters like Dante, Boccaccio, Kafka and Gogol; literary works like The Mahabharatha, The Ramayana, *Kathasarithsagar* and *The Arabian Nights* in addition to The Koran and The Bible. The modes of science fiction and fantasy are discernible in theme, characterization and narrative devices. Narrative techniques like parody, irony, subversion and satire lend the novel a dense structure. The satiric mode invites comparison with the Menippean satire, which reveals Rushdie's traditional attitude
towards literature. The characters in *Grimus* are flat in that they remain two-dimensional. This lack of roundness must be intentional, as Rushdie's postmodern sensibility cannot recognize depth or roundness to the simulacral people of contemporary society. Bird-Dog in *Grimus* is the forerunner of Rushdie's strong female characters, though they lack depth in the traditional sense.

*Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* may be called historical novels as they deal with the history of India and Pakistan. But Rushdie is not a historian recording events for posterity. Instead, his novels are historiographic metafiction that incorporates history, fiction, public events and private experiences into an artistic creation that is both history and fiction. Parody becomes a very effective narrative device for the subversion of history. Rushdie's historical imagination, which "acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition" realizes that "the history of representation cannot be escaped, but it can be both exploited and commented on critically through irony and parody" (Hutcheon *Politics* 55). Historical events and people are subverted, parodied, caricatured and vulgarized with a view to demythifying them. A postmodern irreverence of metanarratives informs Rushdie's treatment of politics and history.

Rushdie's historiographical metafiction uses a migrant perspective for the narration of events. The migrant, being out of the country, is deemed to be free of the inhibition, fears and
commitments of a writer living in his own country, and hence able to provide an unbiased view of things. But at the same time his expatriate status cuts him off from experiences that a resident writer normally takes for granted. Rushdie's migrant condition enables him to look at history with a humorous irreverence often inaccessible to natives.

Rushdie's continuous attempt to reinterpret history arises from his belief that "redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (*IHL* 14). Though a hilarious mood pervades Rushdie's narration of historical events, in his attempt to give voice to the voiceless Rushdie makes very astute and serious comments on the contemporary political and cultural scenario. He mixes the serious and silly and creates "an overflowing cauldron of influences – Hindu cinema, Pakistani politics, English liberalism, Middle Eastern Islam, the writings of Joyce, Indian painting – because for Rushdie, history is forged not out of the silence of the past but out of its cacophony" (Morrison 133).

If *Midnight's Children* fictionalizes Indian history before and after independence, *Shame* depicts the history of Pakistan after its formation. The major events and people of Indian history are subverted and caricatured within the larger framework of the story of the midnight's children. The Jallianwalla Bagh, the Nehru family, the Emergency and other events are subverted and equated with the
personal experience of Saleem Sinai, the narrator hero of the novel. The historical facts are so bizarre that only a fictionalized version can make them appear normal or credible. The personalization of history is carried to the extreme when Saleem Sinai’s face is compared to the map of India.

*Shame* subverts the military history of Pakistan since its formation. It also becomes a scathing attack on Islam because the military terror unleashed in Pakistan has been carried out in the name of Islam. The movers and shakers of Pakistan are caricatured and major events are depicted as ensuing from private motives and petty bickering. Here also Rushdie fictionalizes history and maintains a delicate balance between fact and fiction. *Shame* is also an indictment of the patriarchal system that treats women as mere objects of pleasure and exploitation. The oppression of women is highlighted by presenting violent women characters who resort to horrible and bloody acts of vengeance. The demonized women characters like Sufiya Zinobia present the darker side of Pakistan politics that necessitates such reactions.

Even when Rushdie presents characters in extremes of human behavior, characterization in the traditional sense is lacking in his fiction. Postmodern fiction is marked by simulacral and fragmentary people who do not qualify to be characters and Rushdie’s novels delineate men and women who are mostly one-dimensional. They do
not develop into round characters. Fragmentariness, hybridity, alienation and grotesqueness characterize his men and women. Many characters lack identity or they traverse between identities. This absence of identity is often presented through multiple parentage as in the case of Saleem Sinai or Omar Khayyām. In a way they are all migrants who have lost their roots and parentage and searching for a real on imagined identity that could be called theirs. It is this constantly deferred postmodern identity or multiple identities that delineate Omar, Saleem, Aurora and the Moor.

Rushdie’s characters are often grotesque, subhuman, deformed physically or psychologically. Their eccentricities, idiosyncracies and unnaturalness and violence reflect the unnatural condition and events Rushdie portrays in his fiction. When Rushdie reimagines history, his characters are often represented as personifications of that history and hence prone to a multiplicity of experiences and the ravages caused by them. These characters thus become composite figures who cannot lay claim to a single identity. Rather, they have all identities and hence no single identity. His women characters are also pictured as extremes – the Devi-Kali dichotomy hovers around his female characters such as Naveed Hyder, Sufiya Zinobia and Aurora. The mother figures are often idealized versions though real mothers are mostly negative figures. Rushdie’s characters are in fact closer to being mimicry, caricature or exaggeration than realistic representations.
Much of Rushdie's fiction is an imaginative recreation of history where the manner of narration becomes more important than the matter. His fictionalization of history involves a range of narrative techniques drawn both from the traditional and the postmodern approaches to creative writing. Rushdie is often labelled a postmodern writer more for his narrative techniques than for anything else. His narrative voices range from the omniscient to the highly personalized autobiographical mode where the personal and public experiences merge to create a postmodern metafiction. His autodiegetic narration involves a narrator and narratee and at the same time addresses the larger community. As most of his hero narrators are migrants, a haunting sense of hybridity informs the narration also. The migrant learns of his country only in patches and hence the linear narrative is displaced by episodic narration, which looks at events in patches. Rushdie discards the notion of generic purity in his attempt to incorporate the historical imagination into the decentred structure of the novel.

The historical narration incorporates self-reflexivity, suggesting the lack of authenticity of the narrative. The narrator doubts, wonders and questions himself as to his right and suitability for the enormous task of narrating history. This self-reflexivity is connected to the Indian oral tradition of story telling. A digressive rambling style marked by lack of linearity and cohesion becomes symbolic of the postmodern experience of fragmentariness and multiple identities.
Subversion and parody of myths, historical events and figures of religion, politics and history are typical of Rushdie's narration. It has as its focus the larger goal of demythification arising from a distrust of metanarratives and organized systems of thought and ideology. Language becomes an end in itself and his narrators are carried away by wordplay and experimentation. Rushdie mixes his English with expressions from Hindi, Urdu and many other Indian languages, which indirectly questions the metanarrative of English as a refined language.

Rushdie's use of intertextuality in narration makes his fiction a palimpsest of numerous other literary works. Each subversion or parody of a text and system becomes a layer to which many other layers are added. Rushdie's postmodernism is evident perhaps to a greater extent in his use of language than in his theme or literary goals.

Rushdie's fictional imagination is essentially historical in that he narrates the story of the making of history and not history as it is. There is not just one history, but innumerable histories and any one narration is only one among the possible many. In other words, any narration is only a fragment and it is in this concept of fragmentariness that his imagination becomes distinctively postmodern. The narrative techniques he uses are postmodern though they are not unique to postmodern art. His narration mediates
between the traditional and the postmodern to provide the fictional experience that is at once richly traditional and innovatively modern.

Any reading of Rushdie is only one among the many possible readings and of necessity a number of other possible perspectives will have to be left out. The historical-fictional interface in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* will take up a volume by itself. His fiction can be approached from traditional, postmodern, postcolonial and diasporic perspectives. His novels as folklore narratives warrant extensive critical study. Rushdie's portrayal of female characters has often been criticized, and a comprehensive study of his works from the feminist point of view is likely to yield new insights into his vision and technique. All these interpretative possibilities point to the range and depth as well as the universal significance of his fictional art.