Chapter I

Introduction

Salman Rushdie, one of the most original, uninhibited and controversial writers of the present century, is at once a social chronicler and a gifted imaginative artist who explodes all notions of historical narration both in content and structure. Rushdie has chosen controversial political and religious issues as the major themes of his novels and has always tried to keep himself at arms length from ideologies and isms. He is of course a committed writer but his commitment is only to literary expression and not to any school of thought, ideology or technique. He has been variously described as a postcolonialist, postmodernist, magical realist and an anti-establishment writer. Each of these labels is appropriate in some ways though none of them is conclusive within the total fabric of Rushdie’s writings.

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay on 19 June 1947, two months before India gained independence. His father, Anis Ahmed Rushdie was a barrister turned businessman. Rushdie had his education at Rugby School and King’s College, Cambridge. After obtaining his M.A. Degree in History in 1968 he joined his family in Karachi and worked in television production and publishing. In 1969 he returned to London where he acted and worked in television

Both thematically and stylistically Rushdie's fictional prose marks a deviation from the conventional Indian models established by Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. In his use of language and narrative techniques he often invites comparison with Gunter Grass. Rushdie has openly declared his admiration for postmodern writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass and for the precursors of postmodernism like Lawrence Sterne and G.V. Desani. Rushdie believes that the conventional fictional technique is insufficient for presenting the contemporary reality as there has been an unprecedented change in the attitude of people towards life and its problems. In an interview with David Brooks, Rushdie has stated this explicitly:

the 1960's represented a kind of shift in people's perceptions. The simplest of these was the perception that reality was no longer something on which everyone could
agree, which it had been at the time of the great age of the realist novel. For realism to convince there must be a fairly broad agreement between the author and the reader about the nature of the world that is being described. I think that for Dickens, George Eliot and others, that would by and large be true. But now we do not have that kind of consensus about the world. (Reder 57)

There are many striking correspondences between Rushdie’s treatment of fiction and the theories of postmodernism formulated by writers like Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Patricia Waugh and Ihab Hassan. But throughout his writings Rushdie has denied the label of a postmodernist for himself. Post-independent India with its fabulous fantasies and harsh realities demanded a new mode of fiction for the presentation of its fragmented self. By adopting certain postmodernist narrative strategies, Rushdie tried to create a new narrative method for projecting the complex and bewildering realities of contemporary life.

Rushdie has explained his brand of postmodernism in an interview with David Brooks: “you become a post-modernist writer by being a very traditional one” (Reder 59). This apparently paradoxical statement is true of the entire corpus of Rushdie’s fiction. The impact of postmodernism on contemporary aesthetics and literary sensibility has perhaps been stronger than that of any other critical or
philosophical discourse. But any attempt at differentiating the traditional and postmodern strategies would perhaps be inappropriate because what has been admitted today as postmodern sensibility was anticipated and to some extent practised by many earlier writers. What was once considered as belonging to the mainstream is now sidelined and things at the periphery have been pushed to the centre. There seems to be a consensus among critics that postmodernism is a continuation of the Romantic and Modernist tendencies with certain dominant changes in themes, characterization and narration. Patricia Waugh sees postmodernism as a late flowering of Romanticism:

Instead of accepting Postmodernism on its own terms as a radical break with previous Western modes of knowledge and representation, it may be more fruitful to view it as a late phase in a tradition of specifically aestheticist modern thought inaugurated by philosophers such as Kant and embodied in Romantic and modernist art. In these terms; Postmodernism as an aesthetic and body of thought can be seen as a late-flowering Romanticism. (3)

Akbar. S. Ahmed in Postmodernism and Islam reveals a similar line of thinking:

The continuity with the past, however apocalyptic the claims, remains a strong feature of postmodernism. The umbilical cord is not cut although it threatens sometimes to
suffocate the baby. Underneath the dross, the faddishness, the desire to be up-to-date are the positive features, like the philosophy of tolerance, the availability of choice, the accessibility of information, the democratization of public life, which would not have been possible without modernity and the past which forms it. So as we recognize Barthes in Flaubert, Foucault in Nietzsche, Derrida in Hegel we also glimpse in the magical realism of the postmodernists an even more ancient past going back to the Greek and Semitic myths. (16)

Rushdie’s themes have always been the normal ones found in traditional writings – politics, power, religion, identity crisis, love and the lack of it – all within the larger background of history and its subversion. Novels like Midnight’s Children, The Moor’s Last Sigh and Shame can be read as reinterpretations of the history of India and Pakistan in their depiction of politics, power and internal and external enslavement, while Fury may be read as a story of disintegrating family relationships, commitment to ideologies and the issue of terrorism. The narrative techniques in Midnight’s Children, The Moor’s Last Sigh and Shame have much in common with the narrative strategies of ancient Indian myths and legends and The Thousand and One Nights. The rambling yet centrifugal plots, sub plots and apparently disparate minor stories emphasize the presence of a
consummate artist who has all the reins in his hands, even while appearing to be going off at a tangent.

Yet another streak of tradition in Rushdie is his commitment to artistic creation, not toeing the line of any theory, system, government, ideology, reform or rebellion. He did not consider extra-literary matters as a threat to an artist, as the greatest risk for an artist is creation itself. He has spelt out this idea in clear terms:

Literature is not in the business of copy righting certain themes for certain groups. And as for risk: the real risks of any artist are taken in the work, in pushing the work to the limits of what is possible, in the attempt to increase the sum of what it is possible to think. Books become good when they go to this edge and risk falling over it – when they endanger the artist by reason of what he has, or has not, artistically dared. (I H L 15)

Such a view is very much traditional as it considers literary creation almost in romantic terms, attaching values of life and survival to the work of an author. Though traditional themes like history and politics are the central issues discussed in Rushdie’s novels, his first novel, Grímus itself exemplifies the postmodern condition described by Ihab Hassan: “it is rather the Denaturalization of the Planet and the End of Man. We are, I believe inhabitants of another Time and another Space, and we no longer know what
response is adequate to our reality” (395). As a result instead of the artistic unity of the modern age “Postmodernism has tended towards artistic Anarchy in deeper complicity with things falling apart – or has tended towards Pop” (Hassan 400). Ron Shepherd in his study of Salman Rushdie’s use of fantasy makes an attempt to define postmodern literature and arrives at the conclusion that the artistic creation of postmodern writers like Rushdie is a kind of writing which is centered on uncertainty of perception and of meaning; it is a literature which seeks solutions knowing that solutions are not possible, and it is therefore a literature of frustrated desires; it is a polemical literature which engages a kind of underground resistance, though remaining fearful of the brutality of the enemy with a fear that almost amounts to paranoia: it is a confessional kind of literature in which the dimly discerned goal seems to be self-revelation; it is a literature which sets out to deliberately subvert any easy notion of objective reality, and is intent on holding reality up to constant and unremitting interrogation. (35)

Catherine Cundy who agrees with Timothy Brennan’s view that Rushdie is a “Third World cosmopolitan”, highlights another aspect of Rushdie’s fiction. According to her,
Rushdie exhibits his own brand of metafiction and “Third World postmodernism” which is distinct from that of its primarily First World exponents. This style for Brennan is “not so much an exception to as a different type of postmodern writing” – exhibiting a playful, parodic exterior, but nevertheless centrally rooted in historical and political realities. (Salman 95)

This suggests that it is possible to identify postcolonial features in Rushdie’s novels.

The war of ideologies marking the twentieth century, especially between postcolonialism and postmodernism (though they are not in the main mutually exclusive) have generated a cluster of technical terms and concepts like marginality, lack of a centre, lack of coherence, absence of encompassing structures, fragmentation and multiple perspectives. Some of these have been appropriated by one ideology and some by the other, while others appear in the narratives of both. Thus migrancy, search for identity, and marginality have been associated with postcoloniality, while lack of coherence, lack of centre and absence of meta narratives are thought to be features of postmodernism. Rushdie himself is a migrant and a lot of critical attention has been focused on the effect of migrancy on his fiction. This migrant perspective is central to an understanding of Rushdie as a postmodern writer.
It has been argued that the migrant condition offers Rushdie a vantage position to look at the happenings in India and the world from a detached perspective and his views are more or less unbiased. But Rushdie himself is ambivalent and sceptical about the so-called advantages of being an emigrant writer. Rushdie remarks:

Literature can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts. But is this a proper function of those of us who write from outside India? Or are we just dilettantes in such affairs, because we are not involved in their day-to-day unfolding, because by speaking out we take no risks, because our personal safety is not threatened? (IHL 14)

In fact he has gone to the extent of indirectly calling homeland – critical writings by migrants a sham by stating that there are no personal risks involved for such writers. This is true even in the case of Rushdie who is still the target of Islamic fundamentalist Fatwa, though he has been able to keep the threat at bay living outside India, Pakistan or any Islamic nation.

The notion of migrancy and the simultaneous elevation of the status of the migrant are central to Rushdie’s writing. The emphasis that Rushdie places on ideas of cultural eclecticism and the experience of migrancy in particular is often interpreted as the celebration of a postmodern cultural condition. Rushdie’s works are experiments in fiction which urge the reader to break free from the
bonds of realism and view the cultural plurality, ethnic complexity and the socio-religious and political controversies of the Indian experience from a postmodern perspective. To Salman Rushdie migrancy is a blessing in disguise. Rushdie declares: "To be a migrant is, perhaps, to be the only species of human being free of the shackles of nationalism" (*IHL* 124). The migrant's version of reality will be different from that of others because migrants have been "forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us. We can't lay claim to Olympus and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, whether writers or not, perceive it from day to day" (*IHL* 12-13).

Rushdie is very much conscious of his limitations as a migrant author but at the same time he is of the view that being a migrant he is capable of presenting the socio-cultural scene of his country in a more authentic manner than is done by the writers who live and experience the situation directly. Rushdie suggest that:

the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. This may enable him to speak properly
and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. (IHL12)

Though Rushdie writes on a variety of subjects of universal significance and appeal, a sense of alienation haunts almost all his novels. His presentation of India and Pakistan is radically different from that of the traditional native writers. Rushdie himself has said that this is the new perspective of the expatriate, which makes palatable the unsavoury facts of history and culture by mixing reality and fantasy – the outcome of his partial perception. The writer's inescapable condition of the sense of migrancy is very clear from the choice of his protagonists. Almost all the major characters in Rushdie's novels are migrants, including Flapping Eagle, Saleem Sinai, Gabriel Farista, Saladin Chamcha, Omar Kam the Moor, Vina Apsara and Solanka.

It is axiomatic that there are as many brands of postmodernism as there are writers depicting the present-day human condition, and no writer writing in this time and place can probably escape being called a postmodernist. The many forms of postmodernism "express the sense that our inherited forms of knowledge and representation are undergoing some fundamental shift" (Waugh 7) spelling the end of modernity. Critics in various fields of knowledge have attempted to provide a coherent definition of postmodernism. Yet no single definition has gained complete acceptance. Malcolm Bradbury notes
how "over the decades the term has come to mean different things to
different people:" (qtd in Ahmed 8).

The virtually opposite views on postmodernism expressed by
John Barth in his two influential articles, *The Literature of Exhaustion*
(1967) and *The Literature of Replenishment* (1970) will be of much use
in evaluating Rushdie as a postmodern writer. Akbar. S. Ahmed
remarks:

In the first essay, he [Barth] saw the dominant influences on
fiction as Nabokov and Borges, and suggested that their
fictionalist spirit revealed the "used-upedness" of literary
forms, leaving us in an age of quotation, pastiche and
parody. In the second, he identified the central figures as
Calvino and Marquez, and saw them as representatives of a
new spirit in late twentieth-century writing, which had
departed Modernist elitism and become the "best next
thing", drawing on magical realism and fantasy". (Ahmed 8)

Both these currents of influences identified by Barth are discernible in
Rushdie's fictional writing.

All the current theories of postmodernism express the view that
the postmodern age is dominated by irrationalism and helplessness.
In this world not only the self, but also consciousness is found to be
adrift. In the postmodern condition truth or reason itself is
decentered: "Opposition and confirmation have collapsed so
indiscriminately into each other that we can no longer talk of Art at all. 'Style' is commodity, art loses its identity along with its autonomy and like everything, including knowledge, is recycled as a consumer product" (Waugh 8).

Foucault's influence is quite discernible in Rushdie's treatment of history in *Midnight's Children, The Moor's Last Sigh* and *Shame*, where man is not the central, unifying power, but a mere floatsam in the rush of multiple movements. Steven Seidman in his *Contested Knowledge: Social Theory in the Postmodern Era* attempts to study the social relevance of the postmodern theories by Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard in the contemporary world. These social theories are central to an understanding of Rushdie as a postmodern writer since he has chosen politics and history as the main thematic and ideological issues in his novels. Foucault questioned the theory of the Enlightenment and wanted to abandon much of the Enlightenment historical vision, because "totalizing theories are reductionistic and exclusionary. Such theories arbitrarily privilege particular social dynamics and political agendas while excluding or marginalizing others" (Seidman 234).

Foucault identifies the qualities of effective history which disrupts all the traditional notions of history:

History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our
emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. "Effective" history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millenial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. (370)

As a result, in effective history "the traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled" (370).

Foucault realized that political oppositions were not organized around class politics and "Revolts surfaced around psychiatry, sexuality, gender, and education, in universities, families, cultural institutions, and prisons, and was initiated by prisoners, students, gays, women, professionals and laborers" (Seidman 233). Foucault's major works *Madness and Civilization*, and *The History of Sexuality* examined human sciences like psychiatry, criminology and sociology. Foucault, in fact tried to investigate the social effects of these branches of knowledge and asserted that discourses that aim to reveal the truth of the abnormal personality or human sexuality or the criminal, actually help to create and control the very object that they claim to know. In Rushdie's *Grimus, Shame and The Moor's Last Sigh,*
such revolts by the marginalized sections of the society, especially women suppressed by male supremacy, authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism are focussed. In *Shame* and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* the revolt centering around sexuality and gender are the novelist’s main thematic preoccupations.

Foucault does not assign a high status to the historian as a narrator of absolute truth. According to Foucault,

the historian effaces his proper individuality so that others may enter the stage and reclaim their own speech. He is divided against himself: forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry, to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adopt a faceless anonymity. In this world where he has conquered his individual will, he becomes a guide to the inevitable law of a superior will. (373)

Rushdie voices a similar opinion when he describes his inescapable condition from history as he is handcuffed to history. Foucault believed that it is language and discourse that are the agents of knowledge and history. He rejected the grand emancipatory hopes of modern social sciences. The denial of freedom of choice and the attempt to impose homogeneity and unitariness leads to social injustice and anarchy, which finally mark the disintegration of the
society and the failure of emancipatory projects. To him western superiority is only an excuse for colonial plunder and imperial intervention. This awareness led to an increased enthusiasm among postmodern writers and thinkers to study the predicament of the marginalized in the socio-cultural fields of the present-day.

Foucault deviated from liberal and Marxist representations of modern society as an organic social system having a centre, such as the idea of progress. He viewed modern society as fractured, lacking a social centre that gives it unity and meaning. Foucault never believed in the redemptive power of social and political theories. He is of the view that social, religious, ethnic and sexual conflicts are meaningless as the various social structures like patriarchy, capitalism, bureaucracy, secularism and democracy have proved ineffective in bringing about social changes beneficial to the oppressed. He saw society as influenced by heterogeneous forces and institutional orders giving birth to a series of social conflicts. Throughout his writings Foucault has emphasized the failure of universal systems of knowledge and emancipatory projects to accommodate what is contingent and heterogeneous. As a postmodern writer, Rushdie has been influenced by Foucault’s theoretical rejection of Cartesian binary opposites, body/mind, reason/emotion, object/subject and the like. His distrust of history, religion, politics, government and science finds expression in *Grimus, Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses, Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh.*
The linear, comprehensive narration of history commonly adopted is lacking in Rushdie and he employs a technique of fragmentation and multiple voices in treating history. Steven Connor observes how

The conditions of extreme cultural interfusion, with the meetings and conflicts of cultural traditions brought about by large-scale migrations as a result of war and postcolonial resettlements, have combined with the growth of an even-more inter-dependent global economy to create a splintering of history in the post-war world, a loss of the vision of history as one and continuous. (135)

Saleem Sinai in Midnight's Children gives his own version of history, even distorts historical facts for him to be at the centre of events. Even well known historical facts are attributed to causes not mentioned in history. Dates are distorted and memory is relied on for the reclamation of the past. Gossips and newspaper cuttings are incorporated into the grand narrative of history for the debunking of history. All these techniques employed in Midnight's Children bring to mind Lyotard's scepticism of grand narratives. Lyotard's notion of the collapse of grand recites or master narratives formulated in his book The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, is similar to Foucault's Critique of Enlightenment. Lyotard questioned the legitimacy of pre-determined narrative systems of thought: "I define
Postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (482). Postmodern fiction rejects absolute standards, universal categories, and grand theories in favour of local, contextualised, and pragmatic conceptual strategies. It envisions the universe as unstable and unpredictable. According to Lyotard “The humanist principle that humanity rises up in dignity and freedom through knowledge is left by the wayside” (486). Postmodernism thus dismantles the glory attributed to the theory of the Enlightenment, the superiority of scientific knowledge and the redemptive power of religion.

In this postmodern condition the quest for a general theory that would permit us to legislate truth and moral righteousness is undesirable because no language or set of concepts can describe the heterogeneous ways that people think and speak about reality. In this postmodern society, the quest for systematic order is undesirable and Lyotard considers postmodern society as manifesting a kind of generalized revolt against centralizing authorities by marginalized and excluded groups. Peter Brooker observes: “postmodern theories have helped to bring the marginal, the repressed and unvoiced into view and into hearing” (25).

Whereas a central psyche characterizes traditional and modern literature, postmodern literature celebrates a multiplicity of centres. The lack of a centre, the “hole in the middle” is a recurring image in postmodern writers like Rushdie. Postmodernism challenges the
logocentric, the ethnocentric and the phallocentric. As a result, fragmentation becomes an exhilarating phenomenon, symptomatic of the postmodern age, which suggests our escape from the embrace of fixed systems, thoughts and ideas. Postmodern literature thus distorts the principle of a single final definite meaning. Postmodern writers stress the role of the undecidable and this indeterminacy undermines the principle of unity in texts and narratives. In short any creative endeavour which exhibits some elements of self-consciousness, fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, heterogeneity and intertextuality would come under postmodern literature. These new social theories formulated by Lyotard, Foucault and Baudrillard enabled the artists and social reformers to view the contemporary society from a different perspective, resulting in the emergence of a new style and sensibility.

Baudrillard’s investigation of the impact of communication, television and advertisement on postmodern sensibility has added another dimension to our perception of contemporary reality. According to Baudrillard, the postmodern era is an era of the simulacra, signalling the death of the original and the spectacular:

The end of the spectacle brings with it the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium such as advertising or photography. Through reproduction from one
medium into another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death, but it also draws strength from its own destruction, becoming the real for its own sake, a fetishism of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denegation and its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal. (454)

Baudrillard thinks that in postmodern society, there are no originals; only copies or what he calls “simulacra” are the only possibility. This simulacra parade as reality. The changing nature of reality and its superimposition of fantasy upon reality can be attributed to the visual media culture.

Critics like Walter Ong also see postmodernism as the outcome of the electronic culture. Ong considers postmodernism as a paradigm shift, which has resulted in a fundamental change from the alphabetic culture to the cinematic or electronic culture just as the earlier shift had been from the oral to the alphabetic. Movies and movie making figure frequently in Rushdie’s novels. Cinematic technique in Rushdie provides a continuity to the events and at the same time they highlight the fragmentary nature of modern life.

Leslie Fiedler who has made significant contributions towards the evolution of a postmodern theory calls postmodernism a de-Eliotisation movement in literature. According to Fiedler, “Postmodernism signifies a total break with the elitist modernist past”
(Bertens 126). Fiedler identifies a tendency towards pop art as the characteristic feature of postmodernism. As he puts it,

the new postmodern novel would draw upon the Western, upon science fiction, upon pornography and would close the gap between elite and mass culture. This postmodernism would be "anti-artistic" and "anti-serious"; it would create new myths – although not the authoritative modernist myths – it would create "a certain rude magic in its authentic context", it would contribute to a magical tribalisation in an age dominated by machines and make "a thousand little Wests in the interstices of a machine civilization". (Bertens 126)

Postmodernist literature takes to rebarbarisation of culture and attempts to close the gap between art and popular entertainment. Hans Bertens also points out the emergence of a new postmodern culture which "incorporates pop culture, but borrows also . . . from pre-modern and non-modern cultures in its anti-modernist refusal to privilege Euro-American attitudes" (131). Fredric Jameson suggests that the absorption of culture by multinational capital is the hallmark of postmodern culture, which marks the final overcoming of the partial independence that art and theory had been permitted by earlier forms of capitalism. Jameson sees "postmodernism not as a style but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for
the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (559). Like Fiedler, Jameson also identifies the mixing of opposites as the most important feature of postmodernism. According to Jameson it is a period which saw the effacement “of the older frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern . . .” (558).

The use of black humour, a general mistrust of visible reality, the use of irony, parody, pastiche and a distrust of metanarratives are some of the characteristic features that Rushdie shares with the postmodernists. The utter helplessness and the resulting fragmentation of individuals in authoritarian social set-up is a recurring theme in Rushdie. Though this is a traditional theme, Rushdie views the problem from a different perspective and celebrates the fragmentariness with the characteristic postmodern playfulness. He appears to be sceptical about the incarnation of a Rama, Jesus or Mohammed to save humanity from its captivity and it is contingent on the captive to break the prison walls. The situation that the individual faces in contemporary society is tragic but the very concept of tragedy is inappropriate to the simulacra that parade as reality in contemporary life. Hence Rushdie uses comic, ironic and parodic language to depict the situations that are either serious or tragic. This
lack of respect for the so-called realities of life is one factor that differentiates Rushdie from the traditional novelists.

In his postmodern fiction Rushdie brings together history, facts, fantasy, magical realism and numerous other fictional devices often adopted by modernist and postmodernist writers. The elaborate use of postmodern techniques like irony, parody, subversion, intertextuality and pastiche is very common in Rushdie. The postmodern celebration of the superficial is intended to reflect the perceived lack of depth of socio-political realities and he resorts to irony and parody for their representation. It is often impossible to identify a determinate object or purpose for irony in postmodern texts. But in Rushdie there is a clear object of irony and we do know who and what is being ironied and parodied. Rushdie plays the role of the traditional "Vidushaka", who can take liberties with men and manners, the sublime and the ridiculous and the serious and the comic. Almost all the political leaders of India and Pakistan are parodied and the political situations are presented in an ironic and subverted manner in his novels.

The stress on reflexivity is another characteristic feature of postmodernism found in Rushdie. Introducing the author and the question of authorship into the text has become a recurring feature of postmodern writing. In *Midnight’s Children* Rushdie makes the reader participate in the aesthetic and philosophical problems that the writing of fiction presents today through the dialogue between Saleem
and Padma. In *Shame* the narrator voices his difficulties in presenting the realities in Pakistan as he had learned the country in slices. The problems faced by the expatriate narrator are also highlighted in the novel.

Postmodern literature is also marked by the predominance of fantasy as in writers like Borges, Barth and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Borge's short fictions like *The Garden of Forking Paths, The Lottery in Babylon, Deutsches Requiem* are typical postmodern texts that offer a fusion of fact and fancy. Rushdie makes extensive use of fantasy as a narrative technique along the tradition of magical realism established by postmodern writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass. As in them, in Rushdie also “Magical realism usually signifies that fantastic episodes take place without appearing to be problematic for the fictional characters” (Neil qtd in Petersson *Unending* 45). Rushdie himself has spoken about the nature and necessity of the use of magic realism in literature in his essay on Marquez:

*El realismo magical*, magic realism, at least as practiced by Marquez, is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely “Third World” consciousness. It deals with what Naipaul has called “half-made” societies, in which the impossibly old struggles against the appallingly new, in which public corruptions and private anguishes are somehow more garish and extreme than they ever get in the
so-called “North”, where centuries of wealth and power have formed thick layers over the surface of what’s really going on. In the works of Marquez, as in the world he describes, impossible things happen constantly, and quite plausibly, out in the open under the midday sun. It would be a mistake to think of Marquez’s literary universe as an invented, self-referential, closed system. He is not writing about Middle-earth, but about the one we all inhabit. Macondo exists. That is its magic. (IHL 301-302)

Fantastic characters like Grimus, Flapping Eagle, and Bird Dog in *Grimus*, the nightmarish experience in the Sunderbans, Saleem’s telepathic powers and his invisible journey in Parvathi’s basket, the portrayal of the Widow in *Midnight’s Children*, the fall from the jumbo jet which the main characters survive miraculously in *The Satanic Verses*, Sufiya becoming the beast and the doctor’s attempt in *Shame* to prevent his wife from becoming a beast, the presentation of fantastic characters like Aurora, Francisco, Lambajan and Flory in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* exemplify Rushdie’s use of the fantastic. The whole technique of narration itself is fantastic as he mixes fact and fiction, so that they become indistinguishable from each other.

The adoption of the fantastic in Rushdie could also be identified as the result of the encounter between two cultures, styles, attitudes and visions. According to Hutcheon, “Magical realism is in addition a
technique which might belong as well in postmodernism as in postcolonialism" (qtd in Petersson *Unending* 45). Many critics have named Salman Rushdie a postcolonialist because of his use of magic realism. Salman Rushdie turned to magic realism because he realized that this is the most suitable literary form for representing India – the land of fabulous fantasies. Rushdie has said: “I think of it [fantasy] as a method of producing intensified images of reality . . . One thing that is valuable in fiction is to find techniques for making actuality more intense, so that you experience it more intensely in the writing than you do outside the writing” (Reder 43).

Intertextuality is another stylistic device used by Rushdie. Cervantes, Sterne, Gogol, Kafka, Grass, Nabokov and Joyce are among the writers who are subjects of frequent intertextual references in his novels. Margareta Petersson has justified Rushdie’s use of intertextuality by arguing that “the denseness of intertext opens the novels to other works and enables a multiplicity of interpretative contexts” (*Unending* 45). Intertextuality reveals the novelist’s cosmopolitan outlook and it justifies the view that in the postmodern era, originality is impossible as every mode of representation and every aspect of human experience have been exhausted by creative artists and so what is possible is only the retelling of what had been already said.
The quest for identity and the search for roots form one of the central themes in Rushdie’s novels. It began with *Grimus* and still continues in his most recent work *Fury*. There is a general criticism against Rushdie that he is not a real Indian but an Indian who writes against India from England, though he has been categorically declaring his affinity to India. In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie says, “my India may only have been one to which I (who am no longer what I was, and who by quitting Bombay never became what perhaps I was meant to be) was, let us say, willing to admit I belonged” (*IHL* 10). He has also stated his reason for loving India and his views are not based on patriotism, nationalism or religion, in the conventionally accepted sense of these terms. Rushdie observes in his article “The Riddle of Midnight”:

My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature super abundant, heterogeneous, many things at once. But the India of the communalists is none of these things. (*IHL* 32)

This celebration of the hybridity of India is the political slogan of Salman Rushdie. The same effect may be produced by the blend of high and low cultures which is characteristic of the postmodern
tradition. The mixing of high and low cultures question the customary ways of evaluating art and literature, presenting a world view opposed to the metanarratives of the past.

Even though Rushdie shares the stylistic qualities of the western postmodern writers, in his themes and ideas he is deeply indebted to the Indian tradition. The subject matter as well as the locale of almost all his major novels is India or at least related to India while the style encompasses the traditional and the modern narrative methods of the East and the West. Rushdie declares:

One of the strange things about the oral narrative – which I did look at closely before writing *Midnight’s Children* – is that you find there a form which is thousands of years old, and yet which has all the methods of the post-modernist novel . . . you become a postmodernist writer by being a very traditional one. (Reder 59)

The present study proposes to examine Rushdie’s fictional world in the context of this apparently paradoxical statement and tries to argue that he has employed traditional, modernist and postmodern literary devices and conventions for creative expression while remaining committed to art, life and human values. It is also an attempt to analyze the dominant characteristics in Rushdie’s treatment of history in the light of his postmodernist aesthetics. Rushdie’s historical imagination subverts, distorts, parodies,
interprets and takes liberties with facts for artistic effect and also for
the expression of a radically new vision.

Chapter two of this study examines the major themes and
narrative modes in Rushdie's first novel, *Grimus*, as this novel gives
us an insight into the techniques that Rushdie has successfully
developed in his later works. *Grimus* reads like an epic fantasy full of
strangely echoing mysterious and extraordinary adventures. In it
Rushdie weaves together elements like allegory, parody, myths and
legends. The metafictional quality characteristic of Rushdie's later
works is in evidence for the first time in this novel as also his
preoccupation with protagonists of multiple parentage and his
masterly use of magic realism. The novel calls for multilevel
intertextual reading. This chapter also explores the predicament of the
immigrant in the changing postcolonial milieu and focusses on
Rushdie's experience as a migrant, which partly accounts for his
postmodernist temperament and commitments. As an immigrant,
Rushdie stands apart from the collective sites of humanity,
exemplifying an existential condition of homelessness and also a
condition of belonging to too many homes.

Chapter three discusses the treatment of history and politics in
*Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. Contemporary history is a central
concern for the postmodern novelist as the individual experience of
history is seen to be different from the official versions. Writers of
historical fiction like Ruby Wiebe, Paul Scott and Salman Rushdie try to give a comprehensive and comprehensible form to documentary history.

According to Rushdie there is no single, unifying version of history, but one discovers a history depending on one's vision. History is constantly changing. The attempt to trace a chronological order in history is futile. History is always limited in time and space whereas the creative writer-turned-historian wants to transcend the limitations of time and space. Rushdie with a deceptively comic vision and a style of conscious mockery raises deeply disturbing questions regarding our society, our historical conditions, the institutions and values, the cultural patterns and the hierarchies of power, which threaten the very survival of India.

The history narrated in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* is the history from the perspective of a migrant. Rushdie's incredulity towards the metanarratives of history, politics and religion are discussed in detail as also his attempts to connect individual history with personal history. The evils of colonialism, the terrors of religious fundamentalism and the anarchy caused by political dictatorship are analyzed in the background of Rushdie's historical imagination. *Midnight's Children* covers the history of India from the Jallian Walla Bagh to the declaration of Emergency. It subverts the official history of India and presents an unofficial history based on newspaper
cuttings and gossips. *Shame* narrates the political history of Pakistan for a period of roughly thirty-six years – from the partition onwards through the East-West conflict, the execution of Bhutto in 1977 and about six years of the Zia regime. Political dictatorships supported by religious fundamentalism is the central issue discussed in *Shame*. Rushdie subverts the official history of Pakistan and presents the palimpsest that is the real hidden history of the country and through Sufiya, the mentally retarded heroine, Rushdie declares that Pakistan is the collective fantasy of a stifled people.

Chapter four discusses Rushdie’s art of characterization. As a postmodernist writer Rushdie shows a particular interest in the marginalized sections of society. He shows that the writers themselves form a marginalized section of contemporary society. Following the postmodern trend, Rushdie presents anti-heroes as the protagonists of his novels. Physical deformity and mental retardation are quite the norm in Rushdie’s characters. Political dictators are presented as devils and demons. Womanhood is subverted and human relations are distorted. Man-woman relationship is reduced to mere sex and motherhood to a routine exercise. Incest and impotence appear to be normal with Rushdie’s protagonists. Search for identity, a condition of disintegration, utter helplessness and fragmentation are characteristic of Rushdie’s heroes. Rushdie uses subversive strategies to startle the readers out of their complacency and to enable them to view history afresh. The political leaders of India and Pakistan are presented as
characters of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. *The Moor's Last Sigh* also depicts contemporary political situation characterized by religious fundamentalism, pseudo nationalism and a pastiche of discordant scenes through the history of the Moor family.

Chapter five analyzes Rushdie's narrative techniques. The historical experiences that Rushdie presents in *Midnight's Children* are so improbable and unrealistic that the novelist is forced to rely on fantasy for their proper representation. He also uses magic realism to explore and portray the connection between the individual self and historical situation. Following the tradition of postmodern writers, Rushdie uses a decentred narrative technique abandoning coherent meaning and linear plot structure. His sense of uncertainty about the constitution of his own self and the contingent nature of reality make him rely on a shifting narrative tone and a multiplicity of voices. Rushdie's novels become metafiction as the novelist narrates the episodes self-reflexively, conscious of the element of fiction in his narration. The extensive use of the devices of irony, parody, pastiche, language games and fantasy lends the narration a multi-angled perspective. Another aspect of narrative technique examined in this chapter is Rushdie's method of mixing of genres. In postmodern aesthetics generic distinctions are often blurred. Rushdie's novels are a pastiche of conflicting genres. In this mode of narration the ends of stories are contained in the beginning and the beginning in the end. Rushdie tries to contain an India whose stories are too innumerable
to be contained as stories develop out of other stories in a never ending cycle. Each end is the beginning of a new story which makes the narrative circular. The comic, the tragic, the real, the surreal and the mythical debunk one another. The serious and the trivial, the high and the low are mixed freely in Rushdie and it amounts to be a celebration of hybridity in theme and style in his decentered narratives.

The concluding chapter seeks to establish that Rushdie's imaginative perception of history as unreliable is a central part of his postmodernist vision. Rushdie shows incredulity towards metanarratives like history, politics, religion and the redemptive power of emancipatory projects. His major novels open up a new tradition of historiographic metafiction. His narrative and stylistic techniques despite their debt to Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass and Jorge Borges, express the working of a highly original and resourceful mind. His search for a narrative strategy for the life-like presentation of history has enabled him to extend the scope of postmodern fiction by relating it to the richness and variety of the Indian oral tradition.