Chapter III

History Re-visioned: Midnight’s Children and Shame

History and politics are the major thematic obsessions of Salman Rushdie who has called himself a political animal. Rushdie’s political novels delve daringly into the politics of the times, because he believes that “politics and literature, like sport and politics, do mix, are inextricably mixed, and that that mixture has consequences” (IHL 100). Rushdie’s perception of history is not that of a historian, but that of an imaginative artist looking at past events with hindsight and commenting on people and happenings with a humorous, postmodern irreverence. He moves forward and backward in time, rearranges men and matters, plays with chronology and interprets events more on the side of imagination than from a historical angle.

In fact all creative writing is political/historical in the sense that writers directly or indirectly aim at influencing the way people think or present a worldview filtered through their consciousness. But in a more specialized sense, a piece of writing like a political novel is one “in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting” (Howe 19). M.K. Naik defines the political novel as “a piece of fiction devoted to a presentation of political ideas, or a species of fiction, in which action, characters and setting are all firmly grounded in politics” (qtd in Kapadia 218). Both these definitions imply that a political/historical novel is realistic in
nature, even though the characters may be fictitious versions of real life figures. Even when allegory and satire are used in the delineation of political events as in *Animal Farm*, a parallel is often maintained between the real and fictitious events.

Rushdie’s presentation of history has invited comments like “Rushdie brought the Indian novel to the mainstream novel of the world and in line with the aesthetic and cultural style of postmodernism” (Dhar 159). Salman Rushdie has added a new dimension to the Indian novelist’s encounter with history. He incorporates all the earlier phases of the Indian English novel – the historical, the social, the political, the psychological, the metaphysical – into a unified whole in his masterpiece *Midnight’s Children*.

Rushdie has explained the relationship between history and literature: “Works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and that the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history” (*IHL* 92). Consequently we “cannot divorce text from context. Put differently, the production of any literary work is culturally conditioned; subsequently the responses to the literary work are likewise culturally conditioned” (qtd in Malak 183). But more than being mere reproductions of a cultural and political milieu, Rushdie’s fiction depicts political and historical events and characters suitably disguised, adapted or caricatured in his major novels like *Midnight’s*
Children, Shame and The Moors Last Sigh. But one chief feature of his political and historical novels is the fictionalization of fact, whereby the novels become historiographic metafiction. The result is not a recounting of history, but a depiction of historical events that reflects the emotional and intellectual impact left by men and events.

Midnight’s Children, Rushdie’s historiographic metafiction, makes an imaginative recreation of Indian history of the pre and post independence era; Shame, the companion piece to Midnight’s Children portrays the political scenario of Pakistan dominated by religious fundamentalists and political dictators. The Moor’s Last Sigh highlights the growth of Hindu fundamentalism in post independent India. The policy of segregation followed by the British towards the Asians is the main political theme discussed in The Satanic Verses.

Certain common characteristics can be traced in the treatment of politics and history in all these four novels. Historical and political events are viewed from the perspective of a migrant so that fragmentation and not cohesion becomes the focus. Political and historical personalities like Indira Gandhi, Bal Thackeray, Bhuto, Zia, and Nehru are demythified by highlighting the incidents and events associated with them. The presence of grotesque characters and situations challenges the official version of history and a general disbelief in emancipatory projects like religion, politics, family and government set off these political and historical novels that debunk
those very notions. Narrative devices like parody, irony and satire take these novels beyond the realm of the traditional historical novels.

_Midnight’s Children_ fictionalizes seventy years of Indian history from 1900 onwards. The postmodern writer is interested in the immense possibilities offered by history as the official version throws up avenues of interpretation, subversion and rewriting. For the postmodern novelist the world seems to offer nothing truly new, only a history to be reconstructed or subverted. In Rushdie history is not a mere record of the worn out past but an imaginative recreation of the past from the perspective of an artist. For him history always exists “at a slight angle to reality” (SH 29).

Rushdie’s historical novels may be called historiographic metafiction. By focusing on the very process in which a novel comes into being, postmodern fiction becomes a work of metafiction. When this self-consciousness is extended to the realm of history, concentrating on the problems involved in writing about the past, it becomes a work of historiographic metafiction. According to Linda Hutcheon “such fiction consists of novels which are intensely self ‘reflexive’, and re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge” (qtd in Dhar 167). By destroying continuities and recognizing heterogeneous discourse it also accepts that historical meaning is unstable, contextual, relational and provisional. Dhar is of the view that in such
a framework, novels may become either alternate representation of the past or representation of the repressed voices. Rushdie's novels combine both the views. They are alternate representations of the past written from the perspective of the marginalized. Though a desire to question the accepted dogmas and beliefs is shared by many writers, the subversion of existing beliefs and customs is mainly a postmodern device. In order to suggest the unreliability of all historical narration and to reveal the immense possibility of subverting the prevailing ideas and idols Salman Rushdie chooses religious and political establishments as the targets of his criticism. According to Amin Malak, Rushdie uses history to probe rather than propound, question rather than confirm, doubt rather than dictate. History is in the eye of the beholder or projector; we do not have one history but histories. And Rushdie does not hide his hostility towards any belief system that posits "history" on fixed, sanctified grounds. Like all postmodern writers he sees reality as an unfinished project, a flux phenomenon that resists containment or closure and remains open to multiple renditions and projections. (182)

To the postmodern writer nothing is sacred. No one is great. There is nothing called absolute reality. Reality is only a perspective and it is always shifting. So all meanings are contextual. All
postmodern writers reveal a marked indifference towards the sacred and the divine. In Amin Malak’s view, “To Rushdie as to all postmodernists, no one is sacred, nothing is static, and everything is open to question, to parody, and to subvert” (182). This may account for the conflicting interpretations his works have invited.

Neil Ten Kortenaar is of the view that “Rushdie’s books feel as though they belong in the company of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak rather than with Mulk Raj Anand or R. K. Narayan” (“Salman” 230). Rushdie believed that something of significance has been repressed, left out or unarticulated in our traditional representation of history. Crucial social interests are at stake in these repressions. The challenge for the contemporary historian is to create the possibility for their representation and this unwritten history forms the central thematic preoccupation in Rushdie’s novels. Characters in Rushdie’s novels are the parodied versions of the high and mighty in society. In Midnight’s Children we get the “widow”, “the urine drinking dotard” and other “sleeping members” of the Indian Parliament. In Shame Rushdie attacks Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder who represent Zulfiker Ali Bhutto and Zia Ul Haq. In The Moor’s Last Sigh Raman Fielding is ridiculed and he stands for Bal Thackeray, the Hindu fundamentalist. In The Satanic Verses prophet Muhammed himself becomes the target of Rushdie’s attack. Indira Gandhi and the Emergency period are among the important political issues discussed
in *Midnight’s Children*. Viney Kirpal compares the treatment of political history in Raja Rao and Salman Rushdie:

When Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* had spoken of the cardamom-laden carts groaning under the crushing burden of the colonial regime the attempt had been to record the injustice done to India and to create awareness among fellow post-colonials of the exploitative aspects of colonization. But when Rushdie evokes the history of India since the coming of the Mughals, through British colonization, India’s independence and the imposition of the Emergency and its consequences, the objective is not to raise public consciousness or to inspire empathy. The effort, rather is, to direct a frontal attack at the State for its ideology of power and authoritarianism against its own people. ("Postmodern" 26)

*Midnight’s Children* is an interpretation of a period of about 70 years in India’s modern history from the massacre at Jallian Walla Bagh to the period of the Emergency. The details are meticulously enumerated and linked with the crucial turns in the Sinai family story. Saleem records the past from random shards of memory. There is no sentimentalisation or glorification in his analysis of history. In a playful manner Rushdie observes and presents the striking aspects of
the freedom struggle. The novel could also be read as a subversion of the official history of the subcontinent.

Rushdie's historiographic metafiction incorporates the problematics of writing history. The self-conscious narrator admits that a disinterested chronological account of the past is humanly impossible. According to Jaidev "He is conscious, like no one else in the field of Indian fiction in English, of the problematics of his medium... What is especial in Rushdie is that he incorporates this problematics in his texts themselves" (31). The inclusion of the problems faced by the historical novelist makes Rushdie a unique Indian Postmodern writer of historical fiction. The problematisation of history, the presentation of alternate history and the representation of repressed voices characterize Rushdie's novels.

Like most of his western counterparts, Rushdie problematizes historical discourse by employing the historiographic mode. In *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, Rushdie views the history of India and Pakistan from a specific standpoint. These novels also problematize the nature of historical discourse and pay attention to the problems unique to historical reconstructions of India and Pakistan. Rushdie problematizes history mainly by rejecting the concept of the reliability of the historical narration throughout his novels.
Rushdie begins *Midnight's Children* by dismantling the glory attributed to the historian. He is no more the maker of history but a victim of history. Traditional historians believed themselves to be the makers of history. But Rushdie doesn't make any such tall claims for him as a historian. Saleem admits that his involvement with history was "a dangerous sort of involvement" (*MC* 9). Saleem's coming into the world at the precise hour of India's independence was an accident; he was "mysteriously handcuffed to history . . ." (*MC* 9). He actually "tumbled forth into the world" (*MC* 9) and for him there was no escape from history. He had no say in it. He admits: "I couldn't even wipe my own nose" (*MC* 9). His becoming a historian was not a great event or an achievement, but only an accident. The same predicament haunts his son who was born thirty years later:

On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms . . . at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged . . . he was mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his country . . . He, of course, was left entirely without a say in the matter; after all, he couldn't even wipe his own nose at the time. (*MC* 419-420)

History's supremacy over the individual leaves him no choice but to be a victim. The narrator in *Shame* observes: "a man who catches History's eye is thereafter bound to a mistress from whom he will
never escape. History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes" (*SH* 124). Saleem becomes a victim of history, the sort of person to whom things have been done. Saleem finds himself “obliged, yet again, to accept responsibility for the events of my turbulent, fabulous world” (*MC* 270). Saleem’s view of history is signalled when he says: “I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens . . .” (*MC* 383). This view of man as a driftwood in the current of history challenges the notion of man as the maker of history and destiny.

Saleem who laments that he is “buffeted” by too much history admits that he is also conscious of the unreliability of his narration. He holds that his perception of reality is fragmented and partial because he was destined to see the world through a “perforated sheet”. As Goonetilleke observes, “History in *Midnight’s Children* is, in a postmodern way, fragmented, provisional, openly subjective, plural, unrepressive, a construct, a reading” (43). Rushdie who believes historical narration unreliable seeks the help of memory for reclaiming the past because, like history, memory is also unreliable.
According to Catherine Cundy, “One of the chief achievements of *Midnight's Children* is the way in which it serves as a testament to the importance of memory in the recreation of history and the constitution of the individual’s identity” (“Salman” 32). For recapturing the past memory becomes an effective tool for Saleem. But he is conscious of the unreliability of memory as is evident from the errors made by Saleem in indicating many major historical events. Official history depended on materials from accepted texts of history and data collected from the ruling classes. But here Saleem depends on memory for his data and thus subverts the very source of history. In *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem expresses his views about historical narration:

> I told you the truth ... ‘Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own’. (*MC* 211)

Rushdie by resorting to memory reveals his stand as a historian who is guided by the sensibility of a literary artist. He believes that the individual’s identity itself is a construct of memory. In “Imaginary Home Lands” Rushdie describes his indebtedness to memory when he describes how the past was restored to him through memory. The
sight of an old black and white photograph of his childhood-home in Bombay created in him the desire to reimagine the past and restore it to himself. Saleem also experiences similar situations. He reclaims his past through Parvati’s memory. It is her memory, which gives him back his name. The memory of the former life is symbolized by the silver spittoon, which keeps him in touch with the newly discovered identity.

In *Midnight’s Children* the reclamation of history is done with the help of different objects and artifacts. But these objects and artifacts are trivial and grotesque in themselves. The perforated sheet, the silver spittoon, the washing chest and the globes are all such artifacts. The letter from Nehru celebrating the illustrious moment and the photograph of himself as a baby from *The Times of India* are preserved for posterity inside Saleem’s old villa before the family’s final departure for Pakistan. Here, alongwith the reclamation of past through memory, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s history capsule is parodied. The employment of the trivial objects like the silver spittoon for the reclamation of memory is characteristic of the postmodern style which makes no distinction between the trivial and the noble, high art and low art. At the same time these silly objects add to the nostalgic mode of the novel. These artifacts, though silly for the grown ups are really precious for the child for the remembrance of the past.
Saleem admits that the act of reclaiming the past is subject to the vagaries of memory. Some of the errors in the text such as Ganesh sitting at the feet of the poet Valmiki and taking down the Ramayana or General Manekshaw accepting the surrender of the Pakistan army at the end of Bangladesh war, the date of Gandhiji's death, inverting the order of Saleem's own 10th birth day and the 1957 elections are the serious errors in Saleem's narration of history. Through such deliberate inaccuracies Rushdie subverts the notion of correctness in historical narrations and challenges the authenticity of all meta narratives. How the historical event get impinged upon the individual and the collective consciousness of the country is more important to the creative artist than fidelity to facts. Anuradha Dingwaney observes: "Saleem's admission of his fallibility - a mark of his humanness . . . shores up the credibility of his accounts" ("Authorizing" 160).

Rushdie distorts history because he believes that meaning and significance are impossible in the postmodern history. Saleem says: "in my desperate need for meaning . . . I'm prepared to distort everything - to re-write the whole history of my times . . ." (MC166). Postmodern writers like Salman Rushdie celebrate the distortions in history to show that history writing is only "the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as our tool" (IHL 24). With unreliable memory as its source, the myth of history as an exact record of events is challenged and the problematic
nature of the past as an object of knowledge for the present is exposed.

Linda Hutcheon remarks:

Though Saleem Sinai narrates in English, in ‘Anglepoised-lit writing’, his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled: they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, films, and literature and, on the other, from the west – *The Tin Drum*, *Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and so on. (*Politics* 62)

In his fictional techniques and approach to history Salman Rushdie has very often been compared to writers like Gunter Grass, Louis Ferdinand Celine, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and American writers like Saul Bellow, Normal Mailer, Philip Roth and John Barth. Barth once said:

If you are a novelist of a certain type of temperament, then what you really want to do is re-invent the world . . . and this impulse to imagine alternatives to the world can become a driving impulse for writers. I confess that it is for me. So that really what you want to do is re-invent philosophy and the rest – make up your own whole history of the world. (qtd in Ali 131)

When Rushdie reinvents history it is to offer another equally plausible version obtained by his perception as a migrant. Rushdie
believes that the migrant writer has certain advantages over the native writer. Through his access to imaginative truth the migrant writer can draw better maps of reality. As Anuradha Dingwaney observes, a migrant writer like Rushdie can "write alternate accounts of reality, which may include those suppressed by the people in power" ("Salman" 366).

Goonetilleke observes how Rushdie, who "is free of the blinkers of a national/ cultural identity, is able to offer the reader a critical, alternative view of India and its destiny, and 'give the lie to official facts'" (21). Taking advantage of his migrant position Salman Rushdie presents an alternate history of India and Pakistan different from the authoritative version. As a result the marginalized protagonists Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam question the hegemony of the state and subvert the official versions of history through other available public versions like newspaper reports, popular gossip, folk songs, diaries, private conversations, letters and jokes. As a result it becomes a sort of pop history. Historical novels can no longer represent the historical past; they can only re-present our ideas and stereo types which thereby become pop history.

Rushdie's portrayal of history is further coloured by subjectivity, which traditionally is inadmissible in historical narration. By introducing subjectivity in historical narration Rushdie tries to affirm that national history can never be free or isolated from personal
history. Personal likes and dislikes, prejudices and notions change
the flow of historical narration. As a result in *Midnight's Children*,
*Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie equates personal history
with national history and presents the artificially flavoured history of
India and Pakistan.

Several critics have justified the subjective element in historical
narration. Dominick LaCapra justifies subjectivity in the depiction of
history: “the historian of the period must overcome the kind of false
objectivity that is derived from a denial of one’s ‘subject position’.
What is needed instead is an understanding of the variety of affective
responses to the past, responses shaped by one’s location” (Mohanty
233). In Timothy Brennan’s view historical novelists like Salman
Rushdie project their views by “juxtaposing ‘real history’ with a highly
personal, subjective and often humorous account of the effect of those
real historical events on people” (222-223) who are unable to master
history’s flow. Saleem too subverts the notion that history is created
by great people. He points out that trivial actions of individuals can
trigger great issues in history. Personal rivalries, selfish motives,
revenge etc. are projected as sources of historical events. Saleem
admits: “I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both
actively and passively . . .” (MC 238).

The novel posits that autobiography of a common man contains
and participates in the making of history. Tai’s claim that he was at
Jehangir's deathbed is an extension of this participation. Rushdie told his interviewer Gordon Wise, that everything in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* deals with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history. Saleem is India. He is All India Radio. He is the Map of India. The temporal coincidence of his birth and India's arrival at independence puts himself at the centre of a vast web of stories constituting Indian history. Saleem says: "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (*MC* 9) which means that to understand India one must be familiar with Indian independence, the birth of Pakistan, the state of Emergency, Indian myths and culture.

By relating the family history of Saleem to the political history of India's freedom struggle, Rushdie tries to affirm the element of subjectivity in historical narration. Saleem's search for identity moves parallel to and is directly connected with India's effort to establish herself as a free nation. Saleem admits that he couldn't escape from history. He is conscious of his historical centrality. At the outset, he reminds his readers of his relationship with Indian history: "history pours out of [his] my fissured body . . ." (*MC* 38); "From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property" (*MC* 77). He considers his vengeful irruption into the history of his times as a serious affair. He claims that his coming to the world was nothing less than a historical necessity. According to R.S.Pathak, "The interplay of the personal and national histories is the most significant feature of
Midnight's Children” (“History” 123) which is continued in Shame and The Moor's Last Sigh.

The connection between personal history and national history is not accidental in Rushdie. Erhard Reckwitz is of the view that “Saleem’s history should be read as a counter image to the official Indian historiography which only notes that which is viewed as positive: victorious wars, industrial development and the construction of an atomic bomb” (qtd in Petersson Unending 121). This counter history is produced through Saleem’s sarcastic comment when he connects the national history with personal history. The national calamity finds its corresponding personal calamity through out the novel. The gravity of the historical situation becomes gruesome and ridiculous when it is presented in a satiric vein by connecting it with family history. R.S. Pathak quotes B.K. Joshi’s remark that Rushdie's aim in writing Midnight's Children “was to relate private lives to public events and to explore the limits of individuality in a country as big, as populous and culturally variegated as India” (qtd in Pathak, “History” 119).

Midnight's Children covers three generations of the Sinai family from 1910 to 1977. The fortunes of the protagonist are similar to those of the post independent India. The novelist weaves the personal story of Saleem in to the political history of India. Saleem Sinai's narration presents “the biography of his kith and kin, and the wider
realities stretching to the ends of time and space, intersect, criss-cross and cross-weave into a world where fantasy and reality, myth and fact, reinforce each other to give us a heightened picture of reality, the secret reality of history" (Rao, Raghavendra 153). The connection between the personal and national is obvious from the very appearance of the protagonist. Saleem's teacher compares his face with the map of India: "In the face of thees ugly ape you don't see the whole map of India?" (MC 231). She says "These stains . . . are Pakistan! Thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing; and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West!" (MC 231-232). Pakistan is a stain on the face of India. Thus the land of the pure becomes the stain on the face of India and it is this stain that is extended to Shame.

The comparison is carried further. The birth of the nation and the child are violent and blood-stained. The birth of India resulted in its partition. Jinnah proclaims the birth of Pakistan at the stroke of midnight on August 14, 1947. Amina Sinai gives birth to Saleem Sinai and the poor street singer's wife gives birth to Siva the same day. Ahmed Sinai's big toe broke at that time. As the doctors were busy with his broken toe, no attention was given to the street singer's wife. As a result she dies and Mary Periera swaps the babies following the Marxian theories of her husband. Sinai's coming to the world was celebrated by the entire country. Saleem says: "Sooth-sayers had prophesied me, news papers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified
my authenticity" *(MC 9)*. But unfortunately, like the mutilated India, Saleem also becomes a grotesque character, who was later variously called snot nose, stain face, baldy, sniffer, Buddha and a piece of the moon. Rushdie thus debunks the grand narrative of Indian independence by associating it with a broken toe and baby swapping.

The debunking of history is continued in the novel with most of the major historical events that are considered to be landmarks. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre is presented in a ridiculous manner:

As Brigadier Dyer issues a command the sneeze hits my grandfather full in the face. ‘Yaaakh-thooool’ he sneezes and falls forward, losing his balance, . . . More and more people seem to have stumbled and fallen on top of my grandfather. He becomes afraid for his back. The clasp of his bag is digging into his chest, inflicting upon it a bruise so severe and mysterious that it will not fade until after his death, . . . *(MC 36)*

Saleem himself is affected by the narrated incident: “My own hand, I confess, has begun to wobble; not entirely because of its theme, but because I have noticed a thin crack, like a hair, appearing in my wrist, beneath the skin . . .” *(MC 36-37)*.

The transfer of power is equalled on the personal level to the sale of the Methwold estate. The entire transaction is presented in a comic way. The estate was sold on two conditions, that the houses be
bought complete with every last thing in them and that the entire contents be retained by the new owner. The sale becomes funny when Rushdie describes the behaviour of the new occupants who were aping English ways. In *Midnight’s Children* the colonial background proves inescapable. Saleem’s schooling is in English, his family and friends live in a cluster of hilltop houses built by the British and indeed the cut-rate terms on which they’ve bought those houses from the English man Methwold stipulate that they are forbidden to throw anything away. At first they protest about the “budgies” and the “half-empty pots of Bovril” (*MC* 98) that the British have left behind. But soon they start drinking cocktails and “slip effortlessly into their imitation Oxford drawls” (*MC* 99). Saleem’s family stands as the very model of a native bourgeois family ready to take over the posts that the foreigner has vacated. Saleem himself admits, “The businessmen of India were turning white” (*MC* 179). The transfer of power, one of the most significant events of independent India thus becomes ridiculous when it is parodied as the sale of the Methwold estate.

The Language March of 1956 becomes a stampede and riots caused by a bullying rhyme in Saleem’s narration of the event. The demand for a fresh partition of the country grew, this time not on the basis of religion, but on the basis of language. The midnight’s child witnesses violent language marches with the participants demanding the partition of the state of Bombay. Saleem sarcastically remarks: “India had been divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally-
administered ‘territories’. But the boundaries of these states were not formed by rivers, or mountains, or any natural features of the terrain; they were, instead, walls of words. Language divided us” (*MC* 189). In Bombay the Samyukta Maharashtra Samithi which stood for the Marathi language and Maha Gujarath Parishad which stood for the Gujarathi language fell upon one other to the tune of Saleem’s little rhyme “Sooche? Saruche!” and the first of the language riots got underway in which fifteen were killed and over 300 wounded. He says: “In this way I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay, as a result of which the city became the capital of Maharashtra” (*MC* 192).

The Chinese invasion of 1962 is equated with the blocking of Saleem’s nasal passage:

> While parliamentarians poured out speeches about “Chinese aggression” and “the blood of our martyred jawans”, my eyes began to stream with tears; while the nation puffed itself up, convincing itself that the annihilation of the little yellow men was at hand, my sinuses, too, puffed up and distorted a face. (*MC* 299)

The Chinese having gained control over the Himalayan heights were apparently content and the papers announced ceasefire. On that particular day “While Indians attacked under cover of artillery, Amina Sinai planned my downfall protected by a lie” (*MC* 301). He was
admitted in the hospital for the operation of his sinus "depriving me of nose-given telepathy; of banishing me from the possibility of midnight children" (MC 304). Once again the comic personal comparison deflates the seriousness of a foreign aggression.

The Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1970 are considered to be wars for national honour by both sides. But Rushdie subverts the very idea of national honour by placing Saleem at the centre of events and attributing animosity against him to be the cause of these wars: "the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers; furthermore, I remained impure, and the war was to separate me from my sins" (MC 339). Saleem says: "the hidden purpose of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 was nothing more nor less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth" (MC 338) though "the exigencies of international diplomacy, and the politically-motivated manipulations of arms suppliers, prevented the wholesale annihilation of my family" (MC 344). On another occasion he claims: "not only did I overthrow a government – I also consigned a president to exile" (MC 291). Thus Saleem owns up the responsibility for the war also.

During the 1970 Bangladesh war Saleem serves in the Pakistan army as a human dog because of his acute olfactory senses and sniffs out Mujibur Rehman. Saleem describes the result of the Bangladesh war: "the biggest migration in the history of the 'human race' –
meaningless. Bigger than Exodus, larger than the Partition crowds, the many-headed monster poured into India" (MC 357).

Rushdie’s demythification extends to offering an alternate genealogy for India that represents a rejection of the accepted version. Saleem says that his genetic father was a profligate English hypocrite who had taken advantage of a poor Hindu’s wife. This radical stance that sees Indian history as a rape naturally irritated the Indians. Alternative genealogy expresses dissatisfaction with the national history and a rejection of the Indian nation – state itself as the bastard product of England’s violation of the subcontinent.

The glorious myth of the freedom at midnight itself is distorted and demythified when Rushdie describes the condition of post-independent India. The children who symbolized freedom have been exposed to strong political pressures and social forces which have stripped them of their illusions The myth related to Indian prosperity after Independence is debunked when he picturizes the unhappy side of Indian society: “When you have city eyes you cannot see the invisible people, the men with elephantiasis of the balls and the beggars in boxcars don’t impinge on you, and the concrete sections of the future drainpipes don’t look like dormitories” (MC 81). Further, the place was full of beggars, “cripples everywhere, mutilated by loving parents to ensure them of a lifelong income from begging” (MC 81).
The myth of Pakistan is debunked when Rushdie points out how newspapers quoted foreign economists:

> PAKISTAN A MODEL FOR EMERGING NATIONS – while peasants (un reported) cursed the so-called "green revolution", claiming that most of the newly-drilled waterwells had been useless, poisoned, and in the wrong places anyway; while editorials praised the probity of the nation's leadership, rumours, thick as flies, mentioned Swiss bank accounts and the new American motor-cars of the President's son. (*MC* 334)

A general distrust of the totalizing systems of thought and a tendency to undermine and contest the narrator's own statement runs throughout Rushdie's narration. The narrator's tries to reveal the suppressed history of the nation which could be achieved only by the debunking of official history. According to Neil Ten Kortenaar, "Rushdie's novel is a meditation on the textuality of history and, in particular, of that official history that constitutes the nation" ("Allegory" 29). Histories written by the historians had been coloured by political considerations. They are written to promote a desired view of the past. But Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* presents the "chutnified" history of India, which is different from the official history: "I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions
are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection" (MC 459).

What necessitates the construction of this alternative history is the contradiction between perceived facts and how they are reported. This is evident when Saleem tries to narrate the major incidents of the Indo-Pak war. Even Saleem, the participant of the war could not say what really happened during the war. The text ramifies into a series of ironic rhetorical questions, which allude to key events while acknowledging that the full truth may never be revealed. Saleem says:

Shaheed and I saw many things which were not true, which were not possible, because our boys would not could not have behaved so badly; we saw men in spectacles with heads like eggs being shot in side-streets, we saw the intelligentsia of the city being massacred by the hundred, but it was not true because it could not have been true . . . there were slit throats being buried in unmarked graves . . . Shaheed was staring at a maidan in which lady doctors were being bayoneted before they were raped, and raped again before they were shot. Above them and behind them, the cool white minaret of a mosque stared blindly down upon the scene. (MC 375-376)
These things never reported constitute the real history as perceived by Rushdie. Thus Rushdie subverts official history and presents his version of history.

The last part of the novel fictionalizes the emergency under Indira Gandhi. Rushdie's attack on Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency is one of the factors which made *Midnight's Children* controversial. Indira Gandhi loses her identity and she becomes the widow who is supposed to be a bad omen in Hindu mythology. The widow subjects Saleem to compulsory sterilization. He loses his connection with history, he is impotent and his history comes to a stop. Thus all hopes of future history ends in the *Midnight's Children*.

Indira Gandhi was a victim to power and astrology. For one who values individual freedom, the emergency was indeed the darkest period in the history of the nation. The fact that Smt. Gandhi had white hair on one side and black on the other is used by Sinai as a pointer to the two faces of emergency:

the Emergency had a black part as well as a white, and here is the secret which has lain concealed for too long beneath the mask of those stifled days: the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverizing, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight. (*MC 427*)
But the white part, the documented part for official historians, justified the Emergency. Mustafa remarks: “Already Indiraji is making radical reforms-land reforms, tax structures, education, birth control - you leave it to her and her sarkar” (MC 394).

Towards the end Rushdie sums up the story of the Nehru family with the purpose of showing the duplicity of history. Rushdie tries to demythify the dynasty rule in India by saying that Indira Gandhi “was not related to ‘Mahatma’ M.K.Gandhi; her surname was the legacy of her marriage” (MC 421). The inhuman nature of the widow is highlighted when Rushdie quotes her remark on the large scale vasectomy conducted on the midnight children. Though a quarter million lost their sexual potency, for the widow, it was “only a small percentage of the population of India” (MC 434). The civic beautification programme and mass sterilization of Sanjay Gandhi come under attack. Maneka Gandhi also becomes a target of Rushdie’s attack when he describes her as a “‘lanky beauty’, and who had once modelled nighties for a mattress company” (MC 429).

Religion, Muslim and Hindu fanaticism, the parliamentary system and international rivalries come in for Rushdie’s scathing sarcasm. The ritual of praying itself becomes farcical in Midnight’s Children. Muslim orthodoxy is ridiculed through Ghani sahib who permits Adam Aziz to examine his daughter through a perforated sheet. Tai realizes that Ghani considers the doctor, a good catch for
his daughter. As predicted by Tai, Ghani one day says, “Enough of this tamasha! No more need for this sheet tomfoolery!” (MC 29) when he finds that the doctor is sufficiently enamoured of his daughter and he cleverly arranges the marriage of his daughter with the England returned doctor.

Hindu fanatics also come under attack. The “Ravana Gang” is an anti-Muslim movement that burned down Muslim owned factories, godowns and other property. But Rushdie reveals the suppressed hypocrisy of the Ravana Gang:

behind this facade of racial hatred, the Ravana Gang was a brilliantly-conceived commercial enterprise. Anonymous phone calls, letters written with words cut out of newspapers were issued to Muslim businessmen, who were offered the choice between paying a single, once-only cash sum and having their world burned down. (MC 72)

Indian Parliament with its sleeping parliamentarians is another element coming in for ridicule. Saleem describes the parliamentarians as “motley, as raucous, as undisciplined as any bunch of five hundred and eighty-one ten year olds” (MC 227). Rushdie thus subverts all the aspects of history and politics traditionally held sacred and exposes the hollowness behind imposing facades.

David W. Price in his study of Midnight’s Children comes to the conclusion that all the three modes of history identified by Nietzsche
In his “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” – antiquarian, monumental and critical – are present in *Midnight’s Children* and he identifies Saleem as belonging to the critical mode. According to Price, “Saleem’s past affirms the creative power of the imagination to construct our ‘reality’; it is imagination, specifically metaphoric construction, that permits us to structure our world and make ‘true narratives’” (102).

Historiographic metafiction like *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* are not “ideological novels”. They begin by creating a world and then contesting it: “They do not seek through the vehicle of fiction, to persuade their readers to the ‘correctness’ of a particular way of interpreting the world” (Hutcheon, “Discourse” 108). The new historicists believe that history is the history of the present. They consider history as radically open to transformation and rewriting rather than being monumental and closed. In historiographic metafiction the historian makes the reader question his own interpretation. In *Midnight’s Children* Saleem Sinai writes the history of Indian independence several years after the attainment of freedom. The struggle was a noble act of martyrdom. But the post-independent riots and the political anarchy of the descendants of the leaders of the freedom struggle compel one to view the hard attained freedom from a different perspective. Thus Rushdie compels his readers to question his own interpretation and posits the view that absolute truth is non-existent. Truth and rationality are always socially and politically
constructed and their validity and applicability are necessarily limited to the particular context or situations. They have no general or universal validity.

Satya Brat Singh while making a comparative study of Ruby Wiebe, Paul Scott and Salman Rushdie suggests how *Midnight’s Children*, *The Temptations of the Big Bear* and *The Raj Quartet* are obsessed by the multiplicity and duplicity of history. According to him they “are revisionist history which subvert the official view and offer a critique of authority” for they show how in the end “violence imposes a single meaning on the multiplicity of truth” (155) and tramples underfoot the weak and the helpless. This postmodern pessimistic approach towards the future is borne out in *Midnight’s Children*.

The midnight’s children, who stood for humanity in the essentialist sense of the word, are now dead; they have been exposed to strong political pressures and social forces, which have stripped them of their illusions, alienated them from others and from themselves and finally defeated. Saleem Sinai himself is totally disillusioned. He realizes how “the small individual lives of men, are preferable to all this inflated macrocosmic activity” (*MC* 435) and comes to the conclusion that “What can’t be cured must be endured” (*MC* 435). Such a vision is fictional, not historical. For, in the final analysis *Midnight’s Children* is a work of fiction, not history. Rushdie himself has stated:
Saleem Sinai is not an oracle; he's only adopting a kind of oracular language. His story is not history, but it plays with historical shapes. Ironically, the book's success — its Booker Prize, etc — initially distorted the way in which it was read. Many readers wanted it to be the history, even the guidebook, which it was never meant to be; others resented it for its incompleteness, pointing out, among other things, that I had failed to mention . . . These variously disappointed readers were judging the book not as a novel, but as some sort of inadequate reference book or encyclopaedia. (IHL 25)

If *Midnight's Children* could be read as a parody of Indian history, *Shame* on the other hand narrates the political situation in Pakistan immediately after its formation. A playful postmodern irreverent tone is used for the presentation of Indian history. Rushdie pretends to be a clown making comments on the king. But in *Shame* Rushdie is very harsh and highly critical. The mood of playfulness disappears and a cynical tone pervades his narration. He uses irony and black humour for the portrayal of the land of the pure and makes scathing remarks on the military rulers who are responsible for the transformation of the land of the pure into the land of shame. Both *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are typical of the postmodern condition described by Ihab Hassan: "Meanwhile, the world breaks up into untold blocs, nations, tribes, clans, parties, languages, sects. Anarchy and fragmentation everywhere" (396). The fragmented and decentered society of
Pecavistan is also symbolic of the failure of emancipatory projects like religion and politics in providing dependable footholds to people left helpless. Thus the “land of the pure” becomes the “land of shame” like the Biblical Sodom. At the same time the novelist is conscious of his position as a migrant writer and admits that he had learned Pakistan in slices. Rushdie views the centralization of power and resultant corruption as the main reason for the moral and political disintegration of the land. The megalomaniacs in high places are focused through a series of events like the general elections, Bangladesh war, the behaviour towards foreign diplomats and the attitude towards women. Finally, characters from the periphery, especially women, “explode” to make the dictators repent for their sins.

The condition of migrancy, the centralization of power, the failure of emancipatory projects and gender and class war as the products of centralized power are viewed from a postmodernist perspective in *Shame*. If *Midnight’s Children* narrates Indian history through the Sinai family story, *Shame* presents the contemporary political situation in Pakistan through the story of the relationship between the two important makers of Pakistan’s history: Gen. Zia and Bhuto fictionalized as Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa.

For Rushdie fiction is not only a portrayal of social reality but also an element in social change. Confronted with “undeniable
intellectual, moral and political degeneracy of Pakistan and ‘a dictatorship that can no longer differentiate human beings from animals’, Rushdie has effectively used the art of the novel as a weapon to provoke change in the Pakistan situation" (Singh, Sushila, “Judgement” 23). Though the events narrated in the novel revolve round the personal and public life of Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder and their relationship with the Shakil family, the country referred to in Shame could be any country in the world ruined by political dictatorship and religious fundamentalism. Rushdie’s choice of political upheavals as subject matter in Midnight’s Children and Shame reveals his interest in the predicament of man manipulated by political powers for their personal gains disguised as common weal. Thus Rushdie, “by refusing to ‘mythologize’ history, has successfully avoided historical petrification” (Afzal Khan, “Postmodernist Strategies” 144).

The narrator in Shame, just like Saleem Sinai of Midnight’s Children, is a disinterested chronicler who observes the state of affairs in Pakistan. But he is not happy with the mess created by the ruling class. In Pakistan he finds a country where religion and politics have lost all propriety and sanctity. Shame has become a part of Pakistan and people in Pakistan are “grown up on a diet of honour and shame” (SH 115). In a sarcastically philosophic way Rushdie ruminates upon the nature of shame: “But shame is like everything else; live with it for
long enough and it becomes part of the furniture” (SH 28). Rushdie enumerates the shameful things done in Pakistan:

- lies,
- loose living,
- disrespect for one’s elders,
- failure to love one’s national flag,
- incorrect voting at elections,
- over-eating,
- extramarital sex,
- autobiographical novels,
- cheating at cards,
- maltreatment of women-folk,
- examination failures,
- smuggling,
- throwing one’s wicket away at the crucial point of a Test Match.

And they are done shamelessly. (SH 122)

To Rushdie, Pakistan symbolizes sharam or shame. But at the same time Rushdie admits that his criticism of the country may be wrong because he is an outsider in Pakistan. The self-conscious narrator admits: “Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch. Once I went for just two weeks. Between these sixmonthses and fortnights there have been gaps of varying duration. I have learned Pakistan in slices” (SH 69).

The slices that he has viewed present a dystopian world of moral, political, intellectual and religious slavery and impotent suffering. Black marketing, corruption and cheating were routine: “All over the city (which was, of course, the capital then) builders were cheating on the cement in the foundations of new houses, people – and not only Prime Ministers – got shot from time to time, throats got themselves slit in gullies, bandits became billionaires, but all this was expected”
(SH 81- 82). So the people of Pakistan are not shocked at these atrocities. They have accepted them as part of their existence as shame has become part of their life. Political dictators who posed themselves to be guardian angels of Islam taught the people to accept all these shameful things as part of life. Exploitation and corruption were veiled with the burqa of religious faith. Rushdie unravels the veiled history of shame by undermining the official history of Pakistan and attempting its rewriting.

History may have divergent versions and he knew that the new history of Pakistan was written by mohajiris, the immigrants from India, whose vision is tainted by violence, aggressiveness and bitterness and as a result the leisurely pace and continuity of the old way of life disappeared from their narration. Rushdie admits that like him Pakistan too is without a history, and it has a painful present of blood shed, violence, fanaticism and moral turbulence. Rufus Cook remarks: "Of all Rushdie's books, it is probably in Shame that the effects of cultural displacement are most fully discussed, that the benefits of an alienated 'off-centering' perspective are most persuasively argued"(23). The extraordinary events of Pakistan that Shame sought to depict demand out of the ordinary literary devices and Rushdie resorts to fantasy for the presentation of the chaotic political situation in Pakistan.
Rushdie is often compared with European magical realists and postmodernists for the employment of fantastical characters and situations in his novels. The abundant use of fantasy in his political and historical novels is also identified as a result of the dreamlike, isolated existence of the migrant: “As for me: I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change” (SH 87). The obvious way out was the employment of fantasy where realistic and gruesome details are couched in the veneer of the dreams, taking history to the higher realm of art. Reality in Pakistan is stranger than any fiction and hence it can be tackled only through the fantastic. In a classic understatement Rushdie lists all those events he cannot write about:

About, for example, the longago Deputy Speaker who was killed in the National Assembly when the furniture was flung at him by elected representatives; . . . . or about the issue of *Time* magazine (or was it *News week*) which never got in to the country because it carried an article about President Ayub Khan’s alleged Swiss bank account; or about the bandits on the trunk roads who are condemned for doing, as private enterprise, what the government does as public policy; or about genocide in Baluchistan; or about the recent preferential awards of State scholarships,
to pay for postgraduate studies abroad, to members of fanatical Jamaat party; or about the attempt to declare the sari an obscene garment; or about the extra hangings—the first for twenty years—that were ordered purely to legitimize the execution of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto; or about why Bhutto's hangman has vanished into thin air, just like the many street-urchins who are being stolen every day in broad daylight; or about anti-Semitism, an interesting phenomenon, under whose influence people who have never met a Jew vilify all Jews for the sake of maintaining solidarity with the Arab states which offer Pakistan workers, these days, employment and much-needed foreign exchange; or about smuggling, the boom in heroin exports, military dictators, venal civilians, corrupt civil servants, bought judges, newspapers of whose stories the only thing that can confidently be said is that they are lies; or about the apportioning of the national budget, with special reference to the percentages set aside for defence (huge) and for education (not huge). Imagine my difficulties! (SH 69-70)

Rushdie thus brings before the readers the unwritten history of Pakistan. Self-reflexivity, a characteristic postmodern narrative strategy is used effectively for presenting this hidden history.
Rushdie overcomes the obstacles a factual historian will have to face by transgressing the boundaries of fact and fiction. The fictional horrors in *Shame* encapsulate the gruesome and shameful incidents that have become part of life in Peccavistan / Pakistan and these incidents are seen as a direct offshoot of the political situation. The boundaries of fact and fiction collapse when the novelist self reflexively attributes the origins of Sufiya to three incidents in the real world. In the first, an immigrant Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such shame upon her family that only her blood could wash away the defilement. In the second, an Asian girl is beaten in a late-night underground train by a group of teenage boys. In retrospect, she feels not anger, but shame. In the third, a boy is found blazing in a park apparently having ignited spontaneously. Incidents like these are part of Pakistan’s social condition and a sensitive artist can never escape from the fear caused by such incidents. Characters like Sufiya, Omar, the Shakil sisters, Rani Harappa, Naveed, and Arjumand exist between worlds of reality and fantasy and the reader is at a loss to distinguish fact from fiction. As history is not “the property of the participants solely” (*SH 28*) and the terrible truth of Pakistan cannot be represented through real characters, Rushdie peoples his novels with fantastic and grotesque characters and situations that symbolize the evil pervading the society.
Shame is about power. According to Syed Mujeebuddin, Shame “tells the story of a very small group of people who are ‘responsible for the making of history and the controlling of power’ and for whom ‘politics is a kind of family quarrel’” (133). Linda Hutcheon’s analysis of Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby identifies three types of power – “class, racial, sexual” (“Discourse” 113) and discusses the protests these types generate in the contemporary society. All the three types of power centralization is found in Pakistan though the first and the last are more prominent. In Pakistan power is centered in the hands of a few people, of the ruling class who have violated all propriety of politics in their excessive desire for power and women. The story begins with the scandalous birth of its nominal hero Omar Khayyam born to three mothers. Omar is thoroughly grounded in shamelessness as suggested by the disgraceful background of his conception. The main action of the novel is however generated by the important people who get involved with Omar, particularly two national figures, General Raza Hyder and Chairman Iskander Harappa, who are modelled after General Zia ul Haq, and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was ousted and later executed by the military in 1979 on a murder charge. The choice of the conflict between power and powerlessness, centre and periphery emphasizes Rushdie’s postmodern sensibility in positing power as a dominant theme in his discourse. In Shame the peripheral characters like Rani, Sufiya and Omar are not only victims of power but also agents of
revolt who fight against the centralized authority. According to Linda Hutcheon, "Power is not just a general novelistic theme in this kind of postmodern fiction. It also takes on powerful critical force in the incorporated and overt discourse of protest, especially that of class, gender and racial protest" ("Discourse" 113). In *Shame* the gender protest becomes more effective than the class and racial protest.

The horrors of dictatorship are represented in the novel with the fictional energy of caricature and irony. The events narrated in *Shame* suggest that the political and religious forces have created a macabre world isolated from the real human world. In *Shame*'s gruesome world normal human behaviour is impossible because of patriarchal and tyrannical intervention. Women are the severest victims of such dictatorships. Naveed Hyder, Bilquis and Sufiya are the female characters through whom Rushdie reveals the evil effects of dictatorship. Men like Talvar consider women as mere machines of procreation. But Rushdie through the story of Bilquis and Sufiya reminds women of their inherent capacity for blasting these megalomaniacs. Through the story of Sufiya and the shakil sisters, Rushdie shows that long suppression makes women rebellious. According to Catherine Cundy,

In societal terms, it is the understanding that, for example, great sexual repression and extremes of uninhibited and unconstrained sexual activity can not only occur within the
same society but are interdependent; equal and opposite forces, with repression fanning the flame of abandon.

(Salman 56)

Sufiya Zinobia – the embodiment of the desire for revenge against the nation’s collective shame – serves as the ultimate manifestation of the destructive capabilities of female sexuality by destroying those who seek sexual union with her. *Shame* is the “presentation of an aspect of evil, mainly political evil” (Goonetilleke 61). Rushdie himself has remarked: “The book is set in Pakistan and it deals, centrally, with the way in which the sexual repressions of that country are connected to the political repressions” (Interview Aarhus 13).

Years of suppression make Pakistani women rebellious. Prof. Anniah Gowda’s comment on the *The Satanic Verses* is applicable to *Shame* also: “Rushdie’s main thesis seems to expose what he believes to be the central corrupting force within Islam, of male supremacy” (59). The story of Naveed is typical of Rushdie’s use of black humour and erotic language. Naveed “proved utterly incapable of coping with the endless stream of humanity flowing out between her thighs” (*SH* 207). But her husband was insatiable; and he “came to her once a year and ordered her to get ready, because it was time to plant the seed, until she felt like a vegetable patch whose naturally fertile soil was being worn out by an over-zealous gardener, and understood that there was no hope for women in the world . . .” (*SH* 207). As a result
mother-children relationship also deteriorated. She lost her charm and beauty. Her children were so numberless that she forgot their names. She made no more attempts to sit on her hair. According to Catherine Cundy Naveed becomes “an amalgam of the black burqa of shame and oppression and the ‘shameless’ autocracy of the ‘black widow’ Indira Gandhi as we see her in *Midnight’s Children*” (*Salman 56*).

Sufiya the mentally retarded daughter of Raza is the most powerful woman character in *Shame*. She is called the “wrong miracle” (*SH 107*). Sufiya started blushing from the time of her birth because she knew that like her country she too was a wrong miracle. Her parents wanted a son. So they saw in her the murder of their second son who would never be born. Sufiya remained dry as the desert for want of love and her bestiality might have been caused by the neglect she suffered from the patriarchal fundamentalist society of Pakistan, which was still medieval in its social structure and held female children to be curses on the family. The feeling that she is an unwanted child torments Sufiya. The shame of her mother and the collective shame of the motherland distort her character and she becomes a beast of devastating fury.

The political deterioration of the external world is paralleled by Sufiya Zinobia’s rage and violence. When the girl finds that her mother objects to the Turkey farm of Pinkie Aurangzeb, she goes out
and kills all the turkeys with her bare hands. When general Raza Ryder's martial-law becomes the permanent political condition of the country, Zinobia becomes a female monster. As the martial law government gorges itself on political violence, terrorizes the country and cruelly tortures innocent people, the girl monster also begins her reign of terror, killing at random and spreading panic and terror all over Pakistan. Rushdie points out that reaction to totalitarian power manifests differently in the female characters like Sufiya, Naveed and Rani. Sufiya explodes, Naveed commits suicide and Rani takes revenge by weaving the shawls of Isky's shame. *Shame* like other postmodern novels such as *The Garden of Forking Paths* and *Gravity's Rainbow* fictionalizes the considerable anti-humanism found in most regimes of power.

If Sufiya symbolizes the victims of the patriarchal system, the story of the birth and parentage of Omar Khayyam Shakil embodies the revenge taken by these victims over the authoritarian establishment. When Iskander and Raza symbolize political tyranny, Old Mr. Shakil symbolizes the religious bigotry and oppression that characterize Pakistan society. Old Mr. Shakil has been a widower for eighteen years at the time of his death and he had kept his daughters Chunni, Munnee and Bunny in his Labyrinthine mansion in captivity who "Starting with the role of imprisoned fairies" become "avenging Furies" (Mathur 148). They were virtually uneducated. When old Mr. Shakil died the three girls were left penniless. Immediately after their father's
death, they decided to conduct a party to celebrate his death. It was a wild night with flowing liquor and western style music and dance, which acquired a demonic quality. The wild dancing and gaiety continued through the night and at the end of it one of the sisters was put into the family way. Omar Khayyam conceived of their sin was thus fated to be born to three mothers because no one could ever discover who the real mother was: “The Shakil sisters displayed passionate solidarity and transformed the public shame of unwedlocked conception into the private triumph of the longed-for-group baby” (Singh, Sushila, “Fantasy” 120). In a way the birth of Omar Khayyam is symbolic of the birth of Pakistan. Like Omar Khayyam Pakistan is the child of four parents – India, The Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the British Government, and no one could be certain as to the real father. If Omar Khayyam is a biological perversity, Pakistan is a political perversity.

Centralized power and family rule are presented as the causes of the upheavals in Pecavistan, embodied through Raza and Iskander. Raza and Iskander are cousins and the fact that they belong to the same dynasty displays the nexus between authoritarianism and family rule, which Rushdie exposes in Midnight’s Children through the Nehru family. In Shame, Rushdie identifies all the main political dynasties of Pakistan as members of the same family. Rushdie gives a family tree at the beginning of his novel with many details such as many illegitimate offspring, eleven legitimate sons, thirty two boys and
twenty seven children. The common people do not enter the picture. As Aijaz Ahmad observes, this plot device of turning all the antagonists into relatives is a wonderful technical resolution for reflecting "the monopolistic structure of dictatorial power and the very narrow social spectrum within which this power in Pakistan circulates" (qtd in Mujeebuddin 133).

Iskander is an ironic caricature and a subversion of the concept of the benevolent despot. His rule starts the reign of anarchy in Pakistan. He is faithful neither to the state nor to his family and is guided by erotic passions and selfish motives. Rushdie highlights Iskander's coming to power through false elections, his secret affair with Pinkie, his views about the people of Bangladesh and his melodramatic performance to impress the people to show the emptiness of his words and deeds, and an evaluation of the events directed by him will present the picture of an ungodly dictator who ruled the country in the name of religion. Iskander Harappa came to power through elections which were not totally straight forward and to Rushdie it can't be straight forward in that country divided into two "wings a thousand miles apart, that fantastic bird of a place, two Wings without a body" (SH 178). Arjumand remembers how in the elections thousands failed to cast their votes and thousands of others succeeded in expressing their preferences twelve or thirteen times.
In the election Isky won an absolute majority of the west wing seats in the new national assembly. The real trouble started over in the east wing when the “festering swamp” populated by savages, “breeding endlessly” “jungle-bunnies good for nothing but growing jute and rice, knifing each other, cultivating traitors in their paddies” (SH 179) won its elections in the east. A regional party led by Sheikh Bismillah gained an over whelming victory. The west could not surrender the government to the aborigines with an unpronounceable language, distorted values and slurred consonants. President Shaggy Dog dispatched an enormous army to restore peace. In the course of events that followed the “idolatrous nation positioned between the Wings backed the Eastern bastards to the hilt, for obvious, divide-and-rule reasons” (SH 179). A terrible war ensued in the west oil refineries and airports. Heathen explosives bombarded the homes of god-fearing civilians. The final defeat of the western forces led to the reconstitution of the east wing as an autonomous nation. This turn of events was actually engineered by outsiders- stone washers and damn Yankees. The Chairman stormed out of the UN General assembly saying, “ ‘My country hearkens for me! Why should I stay in this harem of transvestite whores?’ ” (SH 179) and returned home to take up the reins of government in what was left of the land of God. Sheikh Bismillah, the architect of division, became chief of the junglees. Through the story of Iskander and Sheik Bismillah, Rushdie narrates
the political history of Pakistan leading to the formation of Bangladesh.

The main beneficiary of the civil war was Harappa himself and people suspected his complicity in the whole affair, which ripped the country into two, and his histrionics often hid his intentions. At a rally attended by two million people Iskander Harappa unbuttoned his shirt and said:

“What have I to hide?” . . . “They say I have benefited; but I have lost fully half my beloved country. Then tell me, is this gain? Is this advantage? Is this luck? My people, your hearts are scarred by grief; behold, my heart bears the same wounds as yours”. Iskander Harappa tore off his shirt and ripped it in half; he bared his hairless breast to the cheering, weeping crowd. (SH 180)

In blatant imitation of Richard Burton in the film *Alexander the Great*. Through Iskander Rushdie exposes the shallowness and insincerity of the political leaders who decide the fate of millions.

The one political error that led to Iskander’s downfall was his appointing Hyder as the leader of his defeated army. He appointed Hyder general because he believed him to be his man and too compromised to be strong. But contradictory to his expectations, they started drifting apart when both of them wanted the love of Pinkie Aurangazeb, the wife of an ageing ex-Marshall. She invites both of
them to her garden party. Her choice of Iskander Harappa’s arm marks the beginning of their political rivalry. Raza’s defeat at this love game sets off the more serious and crooked political game in which they become the main contenders for political supermacy.

Rushdie’s political demythification is the most vehement in the portrayal of Raza Hyder who is pictured as foolish, unreasonable and unsuitable for his position. Rushdie narrates a series of funny incidents in which Raza is the central character to show the meanness of his character. Through the portrayal of Raza’s dealings with foreign delegates, his reaction towards the Soviet invasion of the land, using religion as a mask to cover up his selfishness, his illtreatment of Iskander who actually made him great and his final transformation in to a monkey, Rushdie condemns politics which has become a ridiculous monkey show.

Rushdie is satiric and ironic in describing the military and political exploits of Raza like the victory at Aansu ki Wadi. Aansu ki Wadi means “valley of tears”. The capture of the valley helped its conqueror to become famous. But after a while nobody knew what to do with that place because this Aansu Ki Wadi was so high and in accessible that even goats had difficulty breathing there. It was rumoured that the enemy did not bother to defend the place as there “your spit froze before it hit the ground . . .” (SH 79). The great hero did not benefit financially.
When the Angrez television interviewer asked Raza about Islamic punishments as flogging and cutting of hands being barbaric, Raza said that the law in itself was not barbaric. He justifies the savage punishment saying that it is justified by the Koran: “These are the holy words of God, as revealed in sacred texts. Now if they are holy words of God, they cannot also be barbaric” (SH 245). When he was informed of the Soviet invasion, he viewed it as a blessing as it would take attention away from his own misgovernance.

Hyder’s foreign policy was characterized by a childish meanness and lack of diplomacy. His behaviour towards foreign delegates was deprived of all propriety and decorum: “Ambassadors: he got through nine of them in his six years. Also five English and three Russian heads of mission. Arjumand and Iskander would place bets on how long each new arrival would survive; then, happy as a boy with a new stick and hoop, he would set about giving them hell” (SH 185). He summoned the Ambassadors to his office at three in the morning and screamed at them until dawn, accusing them of conspiring with religious fanatics and disaffected textile tycoons. He blocked their drains and censored their incoming mail depriving the English of their subscription copies of horse racing journals, the Russians of Playboy and the Americans of everything else. Rushdie uses all his sarcasm and irony at Raza when he says that the last of the nine Americans lasted only eight weeks, dying of a heart attack two days before the coup which dethroned Isky and ended the game. Raza used to say: “If
I last long enough . . . may be I can destroy the whole international diplomatic network. They'll run out of Ambassadors before I run out of steam" (SH 186).

Raza embodies the nexus between religion and politics characteristic of Pecavistan dictatorships. Religious fundamentalism is not born, but it is created and imposed on the people. Rushdie says: "So-called Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators" (SH 251).

Raza’s fall is symbolic of the fate of all dictators and a source of hope for the future because it suggests that every dictator has a built-in flaw which takes him to his grave. In Raza’s case it is his own daughter. He is very conscious of the threat his daughter poses. So he announces: "My daughter, the idiot with brain-fever, has become a human guillotine and started ripping off men’s heads. This is her photo, wanted dead or alive" (SH 244). Sufiya becomes Raza’s nemesis. Raza becomes a victim to the destructive fury of his own progeny.

*Shame* like *Midnight’s Children*, is written from the perspective of the marginalized. Though the chief political figures are Raza and Iskander, they are set off against Omar and Sufiya the peripheral hero
and heroine of the novel. Syed Mujeebuddin suggests that through the story of Omar and Sufiya one becomes conscious of “Rushdie’s own awareness of the powerlessness of the peripheralised native and more importantly the chosen or enforced silence of the indigenous intellectual when confronted by the wrath of a totalitarian state” (134). Rushdie’s writing is the outcome of this intellectual silence. *Midnight’s Children* was an eyesore to Smt. Indira Gandhi. *The Satanic Verses* was banned both in India and Pakistan, *Shame* was banned in Pakistan and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* was practically banned in India though there was no official declaration about the banning. So it is natural that the predicament of the indigenous intellectual is highlighted in all his major works.

Rushdie’s views on politics and history are conditioned by his migrant/exile status. The migrant represents the collective humanity isolated by the power centers of the world. Stephen Baker points out how “the emphasis Rushdie places on ideas of cultural eclecticism and the experience of migrancy in particular, is thus to be interpreted as the celebration of a postmodern cultural condition” (165). Rushdie says:

> The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things . . . The migrant suspects reality:
having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. (*IHL* 124-125)

Before partition, Pakistan shared the Indian culture with its plurality. But after the partition, monotheism and religious dictatorship were established in the country and this marked the end of multiplicity and ushered in an era of class, racial and sexual intolerance and oppression. An awareness of this historical deviation informs Rushdie's assessment of India and Pakistan. If India is a dream that exists in the collective will Pakistan is the "failure of the dreaming mind" (*SH* 87). Rushdie tries to analyze the causes of this failure. He ruminates over the very name Pakistan and sarcastically remarks: "P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the 'tan', they say, for Baluchistan" (*SH* 87). The East wing had no mention in it, and so "it took the hint and seceded from the secessionists" bringing disaster to people under this "double secession" (*SH* 87). For him Pakistan is "a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done" (*SH* 87). Rushdie implies that the very existence of Pakistan is determined by its relationship with India. Rushdie wants to give a name to his imaginary country not because the country needs a name but because, as Milan Kundera has said, "A name means continuity with the past and people without
a past are people without a name” (SH 88). Rushdie chose the name Peccavistan from a story attributed to the English General Napier, who sent the message Peccavi (I have sinned / I have Sind) on his conquest of the province of Sind.

Rushdie’s use of derogatory adjectives to describe his imaginary land shows his dislike of totalizing systems: “Al-Lah’s new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist” (SH 61); “a miracle that went wrong” (SH 87) and “the new, moth-nibbled land of God” (SH 67). Pakistan, the land of the pure is subverted to make it look ridiculous with its megalomaniacal rulers. Rushdie blames the partition of the country for the deterioration of moral and cultural values in Pakistan. He says: “Jinnah himself, the Founder or Quaid-i-Azam, doesn’t strike me as a particularly God-bothered type. Islam and the Muslim State were, for him, political and cultural ideas; the theology was not the point” (SH 251). In his characteristic postmodern style, Rushdie dismantles the glory attributed to Pakistan as a nation and Jinnah as the father of the nation.

Rushdie concludes that the political events in Pakistan in the last three decades have contributed towards changing the land of the pure to the land of sharam. Pakistan politics is the history of a series of coups and usurpations where unprincipled dictators sought self-glorification and the fulfillment of personal ambitions. Corruption,
anarchy and disregard for values have left the country in an area of darkness without any hope of redemption. As Aijaz Ahmed remarked, Rushdie's is "an Orwellian vision, complete with all the lovelessness, 'permanence and pervasiveness of betrayal' and conviction that resistance can only exacerbate one's torments" (qtd in Baker 169). Aijaz identifies this as the hallmark of postmodernist, anti-utopian ideology.

Political heroes are demythified to reveal their real nature and selfish intentions. Gen. Raza Hyder, Iskander Harappa, Khansi Ki Rani, Omar Khayyam, Virgin Iron Pants and Shaggy Dog represent major political figures who have shaped Pakistan into the dystopia it has become. Raza is shown as a ruthless person who will adopt any means to attain his ends - even his devotion to religion is a hypocritical gesture designed to achieve personal glory. On the other hand Iskander Harappa, a Western - educated, aristocratic playboy, but a brilliant and popular politician is in many ways an opposite of the dull General Raza Hyder though he too has his own faults, particularly an inordinate desire for power and women.

Through the elaborate narration of Raza's reign as a black spot in Pakistan's history Rushdie rails against dictatorship and religious fundamentalism and rejoices in the fragmentation that has resulted as it also predicts the end of totalizing systems. Thus the postmodern celebration of fragmentation, the general disbelief towards
emancipatory projects like politics and religion, the dislike of totalitarianism and the revelation of the unwritten history of the land are all voiced through *Shame*.

In *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* Rushdie demythifies political figures using literary devices like parody, irony, sarcasm, wordplay, mimicry and caricature. Subversion becomes a very powerful tool in Rushdie's hands for dismantling structures of authority and bringing on stage the decadent political scene. This demythification works mainly through characterization and modes of narration.