Chapter IV

The Grotesque and the Fantastic: Rushdie’s Art of Characterization

Rushdie’s postmodern fiction negates the possibility of character analysis in the traditional sense, as his fictional world is peopled by men and women who are grotesque, fantastic, hybrid, alienated and marginalized, either physically or psychologically. His characters are marked by fragmentariness, deference and multiple identities. The complex, grotesque and hybrid protagonists signal his approach to contemporary life. Multiple identities are imposed on Salman Rushdie’s characters ranging from Flapping Eagle of *Grimus* to Solanka in *Fury*. On the basis of the multiple identities of the protagonists, Rushdie’s characters could be called incoherent and endlessly deferring postmodern protagonists. Thomas Docherty highlights this multiplicity inherent in postmodern characterization:

In postmodern characterization, the narrative trajectory is from the assumed homogeneity of identity (as in the nameable identity of Menelaus, say) towards an endlessly proliferating heterogeneity, where by identity is endlessly deferred and replaced by a scenario in which the “character” or figure constantly differs from itself. Every mention of the same proper name, for instance, operates to release a new
narrative, one which is at odds with the narratives previously ascribed to that proper name in the fiction. (185)

As multiple identities are imposed on the protagonists, they are never stable; they fall into incoherence as Saleem Sinai of Midnight's Children. S.P. Swain observes how Saleem is "too romantic to be rational and too subjective to be polemical, he is a veritable postmodern hero that fits squarely into the mode of postmodernist fantasy in his ability of splitting into doubles and multiples" (39). This multiple and elusive nature of Rushdie's characters could be treated as a salient feature of postmodern characterization:

At every stage in the representation of character, the finality of the character, a determinate identity for the character, is deferred as the proliferation of information about the character leads into irrationality or incoherence and self-contradiction. There is never a final point at which the character can be reduced to the status of an epistemologically accessible essential quality or list of qualities and "properties". What is at stake in this is the entire notion of "representation". (Docherty 183)

The reality of the character as a unified and separate entity is marred in Midnight's Children. Saleem has no stable identity, but he assumes many identities. He is at the crease with Polly Umrigar at the Barbourne stadium, he unravels the gossip in Film Fare about the
dancer Vijayanthi Mala, he is a congress party worker Babu, the clown at the circus, a Kerala peasant who votes for the communists, a landlord in Uttarpradesh ordering his peasants to set his surplus grain on fire and starve to death. He was inside Morarji Desai when he “took his own water” (MC 174). He became Jawaharlal Nehru. He is a Cutia dog in the Bangladesh war. He becomes the Buddha and he is everything. And as he himself has stated “to know me, just the one of me, you’ll have to swallow the lot as well” (MC 9). As Ron Shepherd observes, “the novel is an expose of Saleem’s mind, replete with all the ambiguities and confusions of his mind, so that the meaning of the story is simply Saleem’s ‘desperate need for meaning’ ”(42).

Roots and parentage assign identity to individuals, and for Rushdie, one way to suggest multiple identities is to leave the question of parentage in doubt, and this technique is employed in most of his novels. The multiple identity of Saleem is the result of his multiple parentage. Saleem is descended from the ancestral line of Adam Aziz, a Kashmiri Muslim, who can never completely rid himself of his alien ness in India. Later he discovers himself to be the child of William Methwold, last of the British in India and Vanitha, the snake doctor Sehaapsteker who saves him from death also becomes a father figure for Saleem. Saleem’s mother’s extra marital relationship with Nadirkhan suggests the possibility that Saleem is the son of Nadirkhan. Thus, bastard parentage is Saleem’s tragedy. Not only Saleem but also several other characters like Flapping Eagle in
Grimus, Omar and Sufiya in *Shame* and Moraes in *The Moor's Last Sigh* are characterized by multiple parentage.

In *Grimus* Flapping Eagle's mother dies on delivery and no one knows who his father is. His sister who gives him the elixir of life becomes his mother surrogate. When he reaches Calf Island, he realizes that his life had been shaped by Grimus for an existence on Calf island. Grimus bequeaths his name and authority to Flapping Eagle and thus becomes a father figure for Flapping Eagle. Omar in *Shame* never knew his parentage. The Shakil sisters did not tell him the name of his actual mother, though it should be one among the three. They themselves did not know the name of the father. He remains the bastard son of the Gala night till the end.

The protagonist of *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes, though believed to be Abraham's son, knew that his mother had a number of extramarital relationships. It was also known that he was born nine months after his mother's meeting with Nehru the then Prime Minister of India. His character is a blend of Catholic, Jewish, Arabic, Spanish and contemporary Indian influences. By birth Moraes is the only male heir to the spice-trade-n big business of the De Gama–Zogoiby dynasty of Cochin. At the outset of the novel he echoes Martin Luther: "Oh, you Moor, you strange black man, always so full of theses, never a church door to nail them to" (*MLS* 3).
In *Ground Beneath Her Feet* Vina Apsara, the rock star, is also the progeny of multiple parentage. She has five different parents, being an American born child of a Greek-American mother and an Indian father. After the divorce her mother marries again; this time an American by origin, but the second marriage drives the mother mad and she commits suicide. Vina, the only spared child lives with American relatives. But they transfer her to the girl’s Indian relatives who agree to keep her as their own daughter. Because of the ill treatment she receives there, she reaches the narrator’s house and his parents decide to look after her. Thus “Rushdie’s novels faithfully delineate the predicament of people with a ‘partial’ identity. The emphasis and the sense of urgency may vary from one novel to another, but the issue is never absent from his mind” (Pathak, *Identity* 112-113).

Other than multiple parentage, migrancy that contributes towards multiple identity and the subsequent fragmentation of the individual is also a theme in Rushdie’s novels. Michael Hensen points out the difference in the treatment of the theme of “identity” in traditional novelists and Rushdie. In traditional novels, “a person’s character is determined by the environment she or he grows up or lives in. This is questioned in Rushdie’s novels because most of the protagonists are migrants who do not see place as a feature by which a person’s character is moulded” (168). As a result rootlessness and the sense of having too many homes become another major thematic
pre-occupation in Rushdie. The feeling of lost home and the sense of isolation shared by the protagonists of Salman Rushdie infact voice the writer's own condition of perpetual migrancy. In *Shame* the narrator describes the tragic predicament of the migrant:

> All migrants leave their pasts behind, although some try to pack it into bundles and boxes—but on the journey something seeps out of the treasured mementoes and old photographs, until even their owners fail to recognize them, because it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging . . . . (*SH* 63)

At the same time in *Imaginary Homelands* and *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie states that there are certain advantages for a migrant. He observes: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (*IHL* 15). In *The Satanic Verses* Rushdie asks: "How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?" (*SV* 8). Rushdie's novels are attempts at answering these questions.
This newness is brought to the world by migrants who oscillate between two cultures as in the case of Salman Rushdie, Flapping Eagle, Saleem, Saladin, and Solanka. Alongwith the multiplicity of cultures these migrants bring with them the agony caused by the sense of belonging nowhere. It is true that they bring newness and multiplicity to the world, but are always isolated by the majority. This makes them fragmented individuals. Presentation of individuals with fragmented psyche is a postmodern feature of Rushdie’s novels. Kathleen Flanagan points out how “divided selves in Rushdie’s works are the products of crises of faith in political and religious institutions”(38). This is true of Saleem Sinai, whose body starts disintegrating at the onslaught of history and Sufiya who is transformed into a beast due to the oppressions she suffers under the totalitarian and fundamentalist political set up of Pakistan.

The migrant condition experienced by Rushdie is shared by his protagonists also. Rushdie remarks: “If The Satanic Verses is anything, it is a migrant’s-eye view of the world” (IHL 394). The novel begins by introducing two Indians, Gabriel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, the only survivors of the exploded plane The Boston. Saladin is immediately confronted by the question, “Who am I?” (SV 10). This according to Goonetilleke is, “a philosophical matter, especially problematical for immigrants: what is the truth about themselves?” (75). Rushdie describes the arrival of Saladin and Gabriel as “a drastic act of immigration” (qtd in Goonetilleke 75).
Salahudeen was the great champion of medieval Islam and he defeated the crusaders and restored Sunni Islam to Egypt. But as Rushdie’s Salahudeen does not wish to continue his relationship with his Indian culture, he anglicizes his name to Saladin. Like the Indians at the Methwold estate in Midnight’s Children who tried to slip into the Oxford drawl, he starts aping English accent, English dress, English manners and tries to establish relationship with an English woman. But his Indian friends remind him that it is impossible for him to become an Englishman. Zeeny tells him: “You know what you are, I’ll tell you. A deserter is what, more English than, your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag, and don’t think it’s so perfect, it slips, baba, like a false moustache” (SV 53).

Omar Khayyam in Shame too voices this dilemma of the migrant: “I too am a translated man. I have been borne across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation.”(SH 29). This is true of Saleem also whose “exile undoubtedly shapes and colours Saleem’s perspective on life” (Pai 39). His removal from his true and pseudo parental home makes him miserable. Saleem becomes a homeless wanderer; his sadness and gloom echo the expatriate’s condition. His first exile is in losing his real parental home of Vanitha and Wee-wille winkie, as a result of the baby swapping done by Mary. The discovery that his blood group belongs to neither his father Ahmed’s nor his mother’s results in his being sent away to his uncle Hanif and aunt Pia. This displacement leaves him in a shock from
which he never recovers. When the family moves from Bombay to Karachi, Saleem is exiled from the place he dearly loves; he never forgives Karachi for not being Bombay. Then he suffers the exile from his own self. He looses the voices of the Midnight's Children after a nasal operation. These series of exiles finally lead to his disintegration and fragmentation. Moraes in *The Moor's Last Sigh* too experiences the agony of exile. The Moor exiled from the land of his home and birth feels the loss. He says: "Mine is the story of the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed: . . . and of my banishment from what I had every right to think of as my natural life by my mother Aurora."

*(MLS 5.)*

The condition of migrancy, which results in a quest for identity, is indicated through the periodical change in names of the characters. Names and nicknames are profusely used in Rushdie's novels. It is the name that gives identity to an individual. But in Rushdie names change as identities shift and nicknames indicate a crisis in identity. Saleem Sinai forgets his name and he becomes Budha in the end. As a young boy Saleem was more popular in his nicknames like Snot nose, Baldy, Sniffer and Piece of the moon than in his real name. Sufiya in *Shame* is identified as the beast; Omar Khayyam has the name of a poet who became famous only through translations; Moraes Zogoiby is known as the Moor. In *Grimus* Joe Sue becomes Bird-Dog and Born From Dead becomes Flapping Eagle; in *Midnight's Children*
Mumtaz becomes Amina, Nadirkhan becomes Quasim khan Laylah becomes Parvathi and Mary becomes Mrs. Braganza.

The condition of migrancy and exile creates in the individual a feeling of being lost between worlds as he has more than one identity to choose from, and any single one may not be satisfactory in a given situation. Depiction of such multiple and fragmented identities poses serious challenges for the artist as he finds it impossible to offer a clear perspective of reality. Rushdie overcomes this artistic impasse by presenting characters who may be considered as alter egos to the major figures in his fiction. In *Grimus* Flapping Eagle appears to be Grimus’ alter ego and Shiva is the alter ego of Saleem in *Midnight’s Children*. This duality is present in Omar Khayyam and Sufiya in *Shame* and Moraes and Uma in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. What this entails is not that these characters are mutually complementary, but that their identity is being constantly deferred. The clash with the environment naturally leads to the fragmentation of the individual. But unlike the romanticists, fragmentation is not lamented by Rushdie, it is celebrated as done by Saleem’s grandfather who saw his wife through the “perforated sheet”. Rushdie’s protagonists and even the minor characters reveal signs of fragmentation.

Docherty also points out fragmentariness as a recurring feature of postmodern fiction: “Postmodern narrative . . . insists on offering the merest fragments of character, without ever allowing for a fully
coherent construction of an identifiable whole: it is, as it were, like a series of torn photographs, a photo-montage" (173). Saleem Sinai also refers to the notion of fragmentariness: "O eternal opposition of inside and outside! Because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of everywhichthing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next" (MC 236-237). For Rushdie, identity is the product of cultural hybridity. Michael Hensen endorses the view in his remark that "today identity arises out of cross-border and cross-continental exchange" (174).

Saleem’s psychic split is emphasized by his continually speaking of himself in the first and third persons. Saleem compares his fragmentation to the broken glass:

now, as the pouring-out of what-was-inside-me nears an end; as cracks widen within – I can hear and feel the rip tear crunch – I begin to grow thinner, translucent almost; there isn’t much of me left, and soon there will be nothing at all. Six hundred million specks of dust, and all transparent, invisible as glass . . . . (MC 383)

Saleem’s fragmentation is associated with India’s fragmentation. Like India, Saleem Sinai finds himself cracking up into pieces like the pieces of his grandmother that his grandfather fell in love with, and the pieces of his father that his mother tried to love. His grandfather
never succeeds in seeing his wife whole, and his mother is never able to love her husband wholly. Like these individual compartmentalization the nation is also divided on the basis of caste, language and culture. The partition of India becomes inevitable and subsequent disharmony between India and Pakistan is also inevitable. In Rushdie's narration partition of India is in fact the fragmentation of the subcontinent.

Saleem feels that he is a social outcast whose "clock-ridden, crime-stained birth" (MC 10) itself is a curse. Devoid of any clear sense of purpose, he develops symptoms of schizophrenia. He finds himself "elusive as rainbows, unpredictable as lightning, garrulous as Ganesh" (MC 195). He admits that he is totally confused and hence not able to view things properly. He laments the disintegration of his self in the face of a hostile milieu: "Please believe that I am falling apart . . . I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug . . . In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration" (MC 37). The physical disintegration is also indicated in his words: "I am tearing myself apart, can't even agree with myself, talking and arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging in to chasms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more" (MC 421-422).
Omar Khayyam in *Shame* is a “Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac” (*SH* 25). He had the sense of being a creature of the edge, a peripheral man “a fellow who is not even the hero of his own life; a man born and raised in the condition of being out of things” (*SH* 24) who will naturally have a fragmented psyche. As a child Omar Khayyam’s only demands to his three mothers were to let him out of that horrible house and to tell him his father’s name, which indicate his dislike for his surroundings where he was known as the “Devil’s seed!” (*SH* 43). Unable to locate a father, he had to discover a father for himself. When he approached Farah seeking companionship she drives him away saying, “there is something ugly about you” (*SH* 51). It was this isolation that prompted him to marry Sufiya the beast. But even then he couldn’t escape from his tragic fate. Finally he realizes the truth about his fragmented existence:

I am a peripheral man . . . Other persons have been the principal actors in my life-story. Hyder and Harappa, my leading men. Immigrant and native, Godly and profane, military and civilian. And several leading ladies. I watched from the wings, not knowing how to act. I confess to social climbing, to only-doing – my – job, to being cornerman in other people’s wrestling matches. (*SH* 283)
Both the domestic and political issues contribute towards Omar’s fragmentation. But in *The Satanic Verses* it is the isolation that Saladin experienced in the adopted country that accelerates his fragmentation. Saladin Chamcha who develops hoofs and horns in England realizes that in a foreign country he will always be an outsider. Here Rushdie points out racial brutality as the reason for Saladin’s fragmentation.

Characters in other novels too suffer from, and are emblematic of, a sense of fragmentation. In *The Moor’s Last Sigh* fragmentation is presented through the portrayal of both the protagonist and his mother. Though Aurora is not the central character, she is its focus. She becomes an orphan after the death of her mother Isabella and her mental derangement begins there. She could never love her grandmother Epifania, the matriarch. She falls in love with Abraham who is twenty years senior to her. After her marriage with Abraham she realizes that he is an underworld boss, a supplier of girls from southern temples for work as *devadasis* in the city of Bombay, a dealer in narcotics, who sells it under the guise of talcum powder. He later becomes sexually jealous of her. Her domestic troubles impel her to divert all her attention to artistic creation. She becomes an excellent artist. But it is mainly her fragmented psyche that is revealed through her art. In personal life she even neglected her children. Moor’s words reveal his ambivalence towards his mother: “First I worshipped my mother, then I hated her. Now, at the end of all
our stories, I look back and can feel – at least in bursts – a measure of compassion. Which is a kind of healing, for her son as well as for her own, restless shade” (MLS 223).

Through Aurora Rushdie presents “an alternative vision of India-as-mother, . . . a mother of cities, as heartless and lovable, brilliant and dark, multiple and lonely,” (MLS 204). Her paintings became symbolic of disintegration and fragmentation. In her earlier Moor paintings Aurora had created “a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation . . .” (MLS 227). But in later years her paintings began to be located in an environment of broken and discarded objects even though the Moor was still in them. The Moor figure sank into immorality and crime: “He appeared to lose, in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard-bearer of pluralism, ceasing to stand as a symbol – however approximate-of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi – allegorical figure of decay” (MLS 303). Towards the end, the Moor pictures also revealed signs of decay. Changes come to Moraes also. He gets alienated from his ideals when he becomes Main Duck’s Henchman. Moraes loses his earlier ideal status and gradually deteriorates and his deterioration is complete when he is expelled from his home. He laments his tragic predicament:

Where you have sent me, mother – into the darkness, out of your sight – there I elect to go. The names you have given me-
outcast, outlaw, untouchable, disgusting, vile-I clasp to my bosom and make my own. The curse you have laid upon me will be my blessing and the hatred you have splashed across my face I will drink down like a potion of love. Disgraced, I will wear my shame and name it pride—will wear it, great Aurora, like a scarlet letter blazoned on my breast. (MLS 295-96)

Moraes is completely shattered when he is disowned by his mother. But he accepts this alienation with calm resignation: “I fall in to my manhood. I am happy so to fall” (MLS 296). The fragmentation of the self is represented in The Ground Beneath Her Feet in the description of Vina Apsara: “Her name, her mother and family, her sense of place and home and safety and belonging and being loved, her belief in the future, all these things had been pulled out from under her, like a rug... she was a rag-bag of selves, torn fragments of people she might have become” (GBF 121-122).

The fragmentation of the migrant is explicit in Rushdie’s latest work Fury. The protagonist Malik Solanka, the fifty-five year former Cambridge professor realizes the devastating side of his fury and to erase himself and to be free of attachment, fear and pain he comes to America. He cries out: “Give me a name, America, make of me a Buzz or Chip or Spike” (Fury 51). He realizes that the myth of America is only a dream and his vision is that of a disintegrating empire. America
too is breaking at its seamy side just as the Roman empire did in its height of glory. This empire also disintegrates from the weight of its own inner contradictions. Solanka knew that he was around America’s brilliance and vast potency. Like every other seduction, it too created an agonizing attachment. It made him want what is promised and eternally withheld. But he realizes that getting rid of the past is not easy. This makes him furious. This fury is the image around which the novel is built up. Solanka’s rage could be explained as the pathological angst of a man of the postmodern age. It could have its roots in the intellectualized vision of his own emptiness.

Solanka’s fate is the fate of every expatriate. Torn between the burden of history and the unreality of an unmade future, he finds his identity decimated. He could only recover it in fragments. However, hard he tries to bury his past, it pops up at the most inopportune of moments. It is like having a personal ghost of one's own whose sole duty is to take away one's peace. Fragmentation relates not only to the individual, but to the family also. Often individual alienation and fragmentation are the off shoots of such tendencies with in the family.

The well-knit family is supposed to be the backbone of the hybrid Indian culture. But Rushdie’s protagonists suffer from a feeling of orphan-hood and displacement. Rushdie’s novels challenge the traditional values attached to the family. By exposing the tyranny of
parents Rushdie subverts the hallowed concept of family by keeping in suspense the identity of the biological parents.

The family, especially the parents have been accepted as central to a person's identity. But in Saleem's case, he makes the reader think that his parents are Ahmed and Amina Sinai and he describes their life and experience in great detail. In the middle of the novel it becomes clear that Mary Pereira had swapped the babies. So he is Shiva, Vanitha's son by Methwold. Thus Saleem a Muslim becomes an Anglo-Indian by descent. This gradually makes him unable to love Jamila as his sister. He desired Jamila sexually but she rejected him. As Jamila was not his biological sister, he couldn't think of his love as incest. In fact Saleem does not know where he belonged. This sense of belonging nowhere makes it impossible for him to establish healthy human relationships. Saleem realizes that his mother before her marriage with Ahmed Sinai had loved and married Nadir Khan. But she was forced to divorce him, as he was impotent. But Amina even after her marriage with Sinai continued to love him. Saleem happened to be a spectator of their love scene at Pioneer Café. This was too much for Saleem. The realization that he is an orphan, and he is not the son of the parents whom he believed to be his parents, the extramarital relationship of his mother Amina and his biological mother's affair with Methwold are all unhappy events in his personal life that hastened his fragmentation.
In *Shame* it was the tyranny and oppression imposed on the Shakil daughters by old Mr. Shakil that inspired them to conduct the Gala night after the death of their father. Accidentally one was put in the family way after the party. Thus Omar is the product of their revenge on their father. Sufiya is also the product of hatred. The dislike for the female child is vehemently expressed by both Raza and Bilquis. This dislike is one of the reasons for Sufiya becoming mad. The suppression of her sexual instincts also leads to her transformation into the beast. Her Ayah Shahbanou tells her “They [husbands] are for money and babies. But don’t worry, bibi, money is no problem and babies aren’t for you” (*SH* 214). Shahbanou became pregnant and she was dismissed. Sufiya knew she couldn’t blame either the Ayah nor the man because Omar wanted a wife and in her “he never had a wife” (*SH* 219). Rushdie suggests that suppression of sexual desires in women is characteristic of both India and Pakistan. This transforms them into beasts and he justifies Sufiya as the “the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage; or even as if, sensing a change in the order of the world” (*SH* 263).

The neglect that Sufiya experienced in her home was too much for her. Bilquis and Raza never liked a girl as their first offspring. So when she grew up she realized that she was a wrong miracle, the family’s shame. One day angry Bilquis cuts her hair and it looked like a cornfield after a fire. According to Rushdie, her hair was the “proof of the mother’s loathing on her head” (*SH* 141). Naveed, her sister,
asks: “Who would marry you with that hair, even if you had a brain? ... Elder sister should marry first but who will come for her” (SH 136). These events in the family transform the beauty in to the beast. According to Purushotham, the “issues concerning the problems of women are foregrounded through the heroine, Sufiya Zinobia who aesthetically functions as a metaphor in the novel” (“Metaphor” 82). The repressive patriarchal norms imposed on her by her father, mother and husband lead to Sufiya’s transformation and final explosion.

The fragmentation of the self and multiple identities Rushdie wanted to portray resulted on the one hand, in the creation of alter egos, and on the other the delineation of grotesque and fantastic figures. The characters in the world of fantasy are different from the characters in the real world. Madhusudhana Rao observes:

The characters in a fantastic world differ from their realistic counterparts in many respects, both in their conception and in the very “process” of realization. Fantastic characters defy any logicality and dimensionality. They are basically illogical, without any reference for proportions, or temporal and spatial limitations. They explode the very myth of a unified and coherent self, in the process of its evolution through tensions and conflicts. (94)
Midnight's Children presents a medley of fantastic characters. There is the fairy like character Tubri Wallah, the Bengali snake charmer, who was travelling the country charming reptiles from captivity leading them out of snake farms by the pied piper fascination of his flute in retribution for the partition of his beloved Golden Bengal. Stories spread about the snake doctor Sehaapsteker that he was the result of an unnatural union between a woman and a cobra. There was the “Bengali boy who announced himself as the reincarnation of Rabindranath Tagore and began to extemporize verses of remarkable quality” (MC 197). There were children with two heads and horns. The beggar girl Sundari blinded her father with her radiance that in future he couldn’t distinguish between Indian and foreign tourists (MC 197). A boy from Kerala showed “the ability of stepping into mirrors and re-emerging through any reflective surface” (MC 198); “There was a blue eyed child of whose original sex I was never certain, since by immersing herself in water he (or she) could alter it as she (or he) pleased” (MC 198). Everything that surrounds Omar Khayyam belongs to the fantastic world, including his birth surrounded in mystery as to who his father was and who his mother was, since the three sisters all seem to have gone through pregnancy at the same time. Most of Rushdie’s characters in Shame present the qualities of both realism and fantasy.

The Moor’s Last Sigh also abounds in fantastic characters like Aurora. Aurora’s reaction to her grandmother’s dying moments on the
chapel floor is so cruel and horrific that it is impossible to consider her as a human being. She sits on the floor cross-legged and watches on, not even lifting a finger to help the suffering old lady. Lambajan Chandi Wala is described as “terrifyingly hairy-faced but literally and metaphorically as toothless as the day he was born, grinding paans between his betel – or blood-red gums” (MLS 126). Vasco is another fantastic character who is waiting for the needle lost in his abdomen years ago during an operation to reach his heart and kill him.

The grotesque stems from a combination of divergent physical or psychological elements disproportionately present in the characters and Rushdie’s fiction has a profusion of such characters. Though grotesque figures are not uncommon in literature, Rushdie’s postmodern fiction is different in that it celebrates the grotesque rather than presenting it as something odd or out of the ordinary. According to Jaidev,

Rushdie requires to free the characters from their normal human limitations to record the highest political realities and crucial historical events. In fact, realism cannot help him in his ambitious epic undertaking: he needs to be able to present all those moments when history gets enacted . . .

The character as a human, autonomous, dignified individual is lost . . . In Midnight’s Children, Salman Rushdie’s hero
says that in a country like India we have to be a little
grotesque in order to be noticed as individuals. (37-38)

*Midnight's Children* is a carnival of grotesque characters.
Independent India with its pseudo religious heads and politicians
became an ugly sight for the detached and disinterested onlooker.
Only grotesque characters can represent the fractured reality of India
and Pakistan. But Rushdie's protagonists, though grotesque in
physical features, are seldom evil. Saleem Sinai, Omar and Moraes
are not Machiavellian villains. They are unlucky victims of a political
set up where human values and ideologies are not respected. Their
grotesque appearance and ridiculous reactions to situations are the
postmodern novelist's purposeful way of presenting the contemporary
reality which is also grotesque and ridiculous. Saleem is grotesque
both physically and mentally.

The grotesque body is a recurring image in Rushdie. The
grotesque could also be associated with Bakhtin's concept of the
Carnivalesque. Carnivalesque energy represents liberation from
official orders hierarchical fixities and prevailing truths through a
celebration of change, incompleteness and renewal. John Clement
Ball remarks:

In the work of Rabelais, through which Bakhtin's theory of
carnival is largely developed, the primary symbol that makes
concrete the transformative potential of the carnival spirit is
the grotesque body: the ingesting, defecating, urinating, fornicating body of open apertures, where the psychological self flows into and out of the world. ("Pessoptimism" 99)

In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie uses a major section of the novel for the portrayal of Saleem's grotesque body. The leaking body of Saleem indirectly stands for intermingling impurity and mongrelization which Salman Rushdie always glorifies as devices liberating one from the rigidity and fixity of contemporary life.

In *Midnight's Children* Saleem introduces himself as "a swallower of lives" (*MC* 9). In the novel the nose and the genitals are the most important apertures. Aadam Aziz's nose is "the place where the outside world meets the world inside you" (*MC* 17) with "dynasties waiting inside it" (*MC* 14). Thus the nose fuses fertility and regeneration. It is through the nose that Saleem gets access to the world outside. When the nose is drained Saleem looses connection with the outside world. Baby Saleem started a heroic programme of self enlargement by "draining" successive women's "breasts" (*MC* 124). Saleem's cousin Zafar has the habit of leaking urine. His fiancée finds out this leaking and she responds to it by obstructing her own menstrual flow so that she can put off becoming an adult and avoid marrying him.

At the outset, Baby Saleem is presented as a healthy child, but gradually his health deteriorates. John Clement Ball is of the view
that "the healthy baby Saleem reflects a generally healthy young Indian state, while the bodily deterioration of the older Saleem is both a metaphor and a literal effect of ill health in the realms of the state and the body politic" ("Pessoptimism" 106). Saleem describes how "waste matter was evacuated copiously from the appropriate orifices; from my nose there flowed a shining cascade of goo. Armies of handkerchiefs, regiments of nappies found their way into the large washing - chest in my mother's bathroom" (MC 124).

O' Flaherty in her discussion of ancient Vedic and Post Vedic beliefs about bodily fluids notes: "while women's loss of blood (menstruation) and milk (nursing) were symbols of creation and fertility, the male's loss of blood and semen (his equivalent of female milk) were associated with death" (qtd in "Pessoptimism" 108). When Saleem is "drained" by the widow, he begins to disintegrate and India enters into a period of darkness. Thus the presentation of the leaking grotesque body of Saleem symbolizes the postmodern mingling of the serious and profane and at the same time it voices the traditional draining of vitality of men by the dominant women. Along with this traditional concept it focuses on the postmodern subversion of womanhood.

The predominance of grotesque, unnatural, deformed and even subhuman characters sets off Rushdie's novels from most of the modern or postmodern fiction. The grotesque characters and
situations lend the novels an aura of the mythical and highlight how postmodern life is unnatural as it is a refutation of all the traditional values of life. *Midnight's Children* is a maze of grotesque characters. Their very deformities enlarge these characters so as to give them a dimension not to be found in the characters of an ordinary realistic novel.

Other characters in the novel are also drawn along the grotesque and the unnatural. The hole in the middle developed as a loss of religious faith is the identifying mark of Adam Aziz. His extraordinary large nose is a sign of a patriarch and the head of the family. Amina had become one of those rare people who take the burdens of the world on their own backs. Everyone who came into contact with her felt the most powerful of urges to confess their own private sins. She thus becomes an amorphous sponge. Shiva is a brute force that no one could resist and he uses this force to enjoy a long line of women and several military honours. His terrible dictate is, “Everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees!” (*MC* 220). Methwold is a six foot Titan with “a head of thick black brilliantined hair, parted in the centre” (*MC* 95) which made him irresistible to women and “it was one of those hairlines along which history and sexuality moved” (*MC* 95).

Rushdie often employs the technique of mimicry for characterization. Jaidev remarks: “Rushdie is like Desani in his
exuberant mimicry which displaces realism and turns characters into caricatures and grotesques” (31). An element of caricature mingles with the grotesque in characters like Lifafa Das and Ram Ram Seth. Narlikar, the gynaecologist was a birth control fanatic. He asks Sinai: “is it not a finer thing, I ask you, to eschew procreation – to avoid adding one more miserable human life to the vast multitudes which are presently beggaring our country – and, instead, to bend our energies to the task of giving them more land to stand on?” (MC 175).

Rushdie’s novels often present matriarchs as caricatures. They are presented as dominating women who are characterized by certain mannerisms in their behaviour. Saleem’s grandmother nicknamed Reverend mother “lived with in an invisible fortress of her own making, an iron clad citadel of traditions and certainties” (MC 40). There was no photograph of “Reverend mother” anywhere on earth because she believed that she was not one “to be trapped in anyone’s little black box” (MC 40). The matriarchs are always contrasted with the male characters in the novel. Epifania in The Moors Last Sigh is one such matriarch who loved and followed the English ways of life. Her mannerism was to suffix ‘fy’ to all words that she spoke like “Killofy” (MLS 8) and “Speakofy” (MLS 18). When Fran cisco was drowned at sea, “Epifania swallowed the news of his death without a tremor. She ate his death as she had eaten his life; and grew” (MLS 24). Through Epifania – Fran cisco relationship, Rushdie highlights the reality behind the so-called sanctity of husband-wife relationship.
This gives him an opportunity to subvert man-woman relationship in the present day India.

The traditional dislike of the patriarchal Indian society towards the girl child is expressed through Epifania. The same attitude is shared by the fundamentalist society in Pakistan and it is presented through the Raza family’s dislike for Sufiya. These matriarchs and their mannerisms are deliberately portrayed by Rushdie mainly to create a postmodern playfulness in the presentation of characters.

Grotesque situations are also numerous in Midnight’s Children, from the fall of the British Empire to Mrs Gandhi’s Emergency rule in India. The killing of Mian Abdullah during the time of the partition riots is one of the grotesque and ridiculous situations in the novel. He was killed by six hired assassins holding crescent knives. Piedogs of Agra came running to surround the scene and sing his dirge. Rushdie describes the scene: “His body was hard and the long curved blades had trouble killing him; one broke on a rib, but the others quickly became stained with red” (MC 48). The description of Narlikar’s death in mob violence is equally grotesque. Narlikar, fleeing from the mob of language marchers, climbed on his brain child, the cement tetrapod planted on the Chowpathy beach for advertisement. The marchers rocked the tetrapod and the force of their numbers overcame its weight. It tilted and fell down and “man and four-legged concrete fell without a sound. The splash of the waters broke the spell . . . nobody
had any trouble locating the body because it sent light glowing upwards through the waters like a fire" (MC 177). Death becomes both grotesque and comic when Rushdie describes it. The bizarre shooting of Homi Catrack by the cuckold commander Sabarmati is yet another grotesque incident. The detailed description is gruesome: "Commander Vinoo Sabarmati shot him once in the genitals, once in the heart and once through the right eye . . . Mr Catrack sat down on the toilet after he was shot and seemed to be smiling" (MC 261).

In *Shame* Omar is grotesque in appearance. From his earliest days Omar was afflicted “by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside - down” (SH 21). He was haunted by the fear that he was living at the edge of the world so close that he might fall off at any moment. The narrator himself seems fed up of the hero and shows his impatience: “Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?” (SH 25). Though Omar was a Muslim, the religious rites that are to be observed at the time of birth were not performed on him: at the time of his birth, his eldest mother did not permit to whisper the name of God into his ear, the middle mother prevented the shaving of his head and the youngest did not allow the foreskin to be removed. Thus he entered the world “without benefit of mutilation, barberly or divine approval” (SH 21).

Omar grew up as a wolf child under the care of an equally grotesque mother. He describes himself as the incarnation of all vices
like fleeing from roots, obesity, drunkenness, hypnosis, getting girls in the family way and not sleeping with his wife. Shakil is a man who has lost his way completely. He runs "wildly about like a time-traveller who has lost his magic capsule and fears he will never emerge from the disintegrating history of his race" (SH 31).

Moraes in *The Moor's Last Sigh* is very much conscious of his grotesque appearance. He describes himself: "By the age of twenty-three my beard had turned white; and other things, too, had ceased to function as well as they once did" (MLS 162) and he had "the tree-stump hand . . ." (MLS 162). He presents his unusual size and super speed ageing in a comic tone: "I GREW IN ALL directions, willy-nilly. My father was a big man but by the age of ten my shoulders had grown wider than his coats" (MLS 188).

Along with physical deformity Rushdie presents mental deformity as contributing to the grotesqueness of characters. Saleem's red head sister, Jamila Singer, was blessed with the gift of speaking the language of birds and cats. The soft words of lovers roused in her almost an animal rage. Though Sony loved her, she had been making him suffer for his love, carrying tales to his mother, pushing him into mud puddles and assaulting him physically. One day she took the worst revenge on him when she and three of her friends jumped upon him while he was waiting for the bus and tore his clothes leaving him naked on the street. Saleem did not know why she behaved thus. He
says: “She does things, that’s all” (MC 184). Like Sufiya in Shame, Jameela too showed a streak of abnormality and an element of bestiality as a child. Sufiya, the heroine of Shame is the “wrong miracle” (SH 237). As a result she became “the embodiment of violence, the pure malevolent strength of the Beast” (SH 242). She is totally insane. Undeveloped in mind but fully developed in physique, she hypnotizes people with one stare and wrenches the head off the victim and eats its entrails like a ghoul.

Unnatural sexual habits and relationships also add to grotesqueness in most of the novels. Impotency is a major motif that Rushdie uses to highlight unnaturalness. Saleem is impotent, Nadir Khan is impotent. Ahmed Sinai experiences a freezing of his sexual organs. Sufiya couldn’t satisfy the sexual needs of Omar. Physical impotency in characters is presented as the symbolic representation of their mental impotency. Homosexuality, oedipal relationships, incest and lesbianism are recurring motifs. This concern with unnatural sexual relationships begins with Flapping Eagle-Bird Dog relationship in Grimus and continues through Midnight’s Children, Shame, The Moor’s Last Sigh, Ground Beneath her Feet and Fury. This subversion of human relationship could be considered as Rushdie’s way of dismantling the glory attributed to the metanarrative of the Indian family.
Extra marital relationship is another grotesque feature found in Rushdie’s fiction. Saleem himself is the illegitimate son of Methwold. Saleem’s mother continued to have her affair with Nadir Khan even after her marriage with Ahmed Sinai. Saleem’s longing for his sister Jameela suggests the element of incest. Commander Sabarmati kills Homi for his extramarital relationship with Lila Sabarmati. In *Shame*, Omar is a bastard. He makes Shabanou his shadow bride and puts Farah in the family way before his marriage with Sufiya. Pinkie becomes Iskander Harrapa’s mistress, Raza knew that Naveed was not his daughter. He kills Sindbad Mengal for being his wife’s lover.

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* presents situations that are overtly or covertly oedipal. The fact that the Moor is the only child that Aurora suckled at her breast has Freudian implications. Oedipal suggestions are scattered throughout the novel. Aurora harbours a hidden longing for her handsome hefty son Moraes. In two of her moor paintings, the oedipal element is revealed. In the first picture Aurora paints herself as the young Eleanor Marx and the Moor as her father Karl. The Moor comments:

*Moor and Tussy* was a rather shocking idea – my mother girlish, adoring, and I in patriarchal, lapel-gripping pose, frock-coated and bewhiskered, like a prophecy of the all-too-near future. ‘If you were twice as old as you look, and I was half as old as I am, I could be your daughter,’ my forty-plus
mother explained, and at the time I was too young to hear any thing except the lightness she used to disguise the stranger things in her voice. (*MLS* 224).

The second painting *To Die Upon a Kiss* (*MLS* 224) portrayed Aurora as murdered Desdemona and Moraes as Othello.

Rushdie's portrayal of women demands special attention as he employs subversive strategy for the presentation of female characters. Women characters in Rushdie are placed on an equal footing with the male, and many women characters are thematically more significant than the males. As Margo Jefferson points out,

Rushdie describes women with all the ingenuity that love, fear, and obsession can bestow. Some are monstrous, some ordinary, some gifted and willful. All have lives forced into the striking but narrow grooves made when tyranny presses itself on to individual temperaments. Propriety and convention suddenly crack open and give way to anarchic impulses. Every archetype stereotype of the East and West makes its way into Rushdie's pages, to be embraced, lingered over nostalgically, or rejected. (356)

The quixotic, bizarre and grotesque women characters in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* are typical of this breaking and "cracking" of propriety and convention.
The traditional Indian concept of the Devi-Kali dichotomy may be observed in Rushdie’s portrayal of women. Devi and Kali are the two contradictory manifestations of the same deity that symbolize the constructive and destructive powers inherent in women. Good and bad, evil and sublime, the devil and the angel exist simultaneously in all females. Rushdie in many of his novels presents female characters that embody the traditional virtues of Indian women along with monstrous characters devoid of all human virtues.

Many of Rushdie’s female characters are liberated independent and capable of making their own decisions, though they are unlike the “feminist” characters in modern fiction. The feminist angle is visible in Rushdie’s portrayal of female characters when they are presented as victims of patriarchy. As Catherine Cundy points out, “Rushdie invokes the iconic feminist victim – ‘the mad woman in the attic’ – when he depicts the slumbering, sedated and bestial Sufiya Zinobia imprisoned in the family home by her men folk” (Salman 52). Men reveal frustration and resent the autonomy of women and “Rape often bursts through as the ultimate signification of this resentment” (Cundy, Salman 53) as in Flapping Eagle’s rape of the goddess Axona in Grimus and Omar’s assault on the hypnotized Farah Zoroasterare in Shame.

In Grimus, it is Bird-Dog the female who supports her weak brother Flapping Eagle. She is the first Axona to break the laws of the
Axona's and she roams around after drinking the elixir of life and it is she who arranges Flapping Eagle's meeting with Grimus, which in fact paves the way for a new pattern of government in Calf Island. Bird Dog is definitely one of the very strong female characters of Salman Rushdie. The subversion of patriarchal norms beginning with Bird-Dog becomes more prominent in *Shame* where the Pakistani patriarchy becomes the target of Rushdie's attack. In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie is more varied and complex in the treatment of female characters. As Goonetilleke observes, "Rushdie's portrayal of women . . . offers a greater range and positiveness, yet incorporates a curious negativity as well" (42). Naseem for example at first is a child-like devoted wife and it is evident in her reactions to the Jallian Walla. "mercurochrome". But finally she is transformed into a tough matriarch trying to impose her will on others. The widow is destructive and inhuman. Parvati is protective, tender – and powerful: a kind of mother goddess, the source of new hope and yet not beautiful. Like Parvati, Padma is also not beautiful but she is also protective, loving and powerful. The Narlikar women are tough. The Ayah Mary Pereira becomes the life long supporter of Saleem Sinai because she believes that she is responsible for Saleem's fate, as she had done the baby swapping.

The duality in female nature is emphasized in Saleem's words that women have made and also unmade him. This statement and the entire depiction of the women characters in the novel project women
as creators and destroyers. The difficulty of female characterization is indirectly hinted at in the words of Saleem:

How are we to understand my too-many women? As the multiple faces of Bharat-matha? Or as even more... as the dynamic aspect of maya, as cosmic energy, which is represented as the female organ?... Too-many-women: are they all aspects of Devi, the goddess - who is Shakti, who slew the buffalo-demon, who defeated the ogre Mahisha, who is Kali Durga Chandi Chamunda Uma Sati and Parvati... and who, when active, is coloured red? (MC 406)

Rushdie is highly critical of the conventional attitude to women as inferior beings. In Shame, he spotlights the sign at The Sind Club in Karachi, which prevents the entry of women and dogs. Rushdie believes that the patriarchal social patterns of India and Pakistan are responsible for the dehumanization of its women folk. Rushdie's portrayal of women as victims of patriarchy could be best understood in Shame. As a result of the patriarchal tyranny, women who are born into a family of men are almost always ignored and abused. These women take revenge on their sons, who in turn take revenge on someone else's daughters and the vicious circle continues till the beast explodes destroying everything in its path.

Shame presents a number of women who are victims of the patriarchal system and the consequent marginalization experienced
by women. Bilquis was hated by her husband's family as she could not conceive and give birth to a male child, and it is treated as if she had brought shame to the family. The Shame is not individual but collective as Duniyed Beegum maintains: "The disgrace of your barrenness, Madam, is not yours alone. Don't you know that shame is collective? The shame of any one of us sits on us all and bends our backs" (SH 84). Naveed Hyder is also presented as the victim of patriarchy and its notion about manhood. When she feels incapable of coping with the endless stream of humanity flowing from her, she curses herself and neglects her children. As a result mother–children relationship loses all its warmth and sanctity. Naveed loses all her charm and she forgets even her children's names. She does not care for her personal appearance. Finally she commits suicide to put an end to the endless stream of children flowing out of her.

Rani Harappa, like her daughter, was strong willed, which she reveals only after Isky's death. Her letter to her daughter Arjumand is a testimony to the power and strength of character she had carefully hidden from every one. Rani knitted her thoughts about her husband into eighteen shawls of memory and she put the shawls into a trunk and sent it as a gift to her daughter with the spicy title, "The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great". She signed the letter in her maiden name - Rani Humayun, an attempt made by her to retrieve her original self. She writes to her daughter:
Yes, I know, you have made a saint of him, my daughter, you swallowed everything he dished out, his abstinence, his celibacy of an Oriental Pope, but he could not do without for long, that man of pleasure masquerading as a servant of Duty, that aristocrat who insisted on his seigneurial rights, no man better at hiding his sins, but I knew him, he hid nothing from me, I saw the white girls in the village swell and pop, I knew about the small but regular donations he sent them, Harappa children must not starve, and after he fell they came to me. (SH 192)

She understands him both as a man and a politician. She even analyses the reasons for his final fall:

and of course he’d have won anyway, daughter, no question, a respectable victory, but he wanted more, only annihilation was good enough for his opponents, he wanted them squashed like cockroaches under his boot, yes, obliteration, and in the end it came to him instead, don’t think he wasn’t surprised, he had forgotten he was only a man . . . . (SH 193-194)

Sufiya, the Shakil sisters, Rani Harappa and Arjumand are the products of the oppressive side of the patriarchal system. The political repression in Pakistan is in a way permitted by the social code that is in itself repressive, and the people who feel that mostly are women.
When women are kept down in such they form networks of support and solidarity among themselves.

Arjumand Harappa, the virgin Iron pants, believed that she should rise above her gender in this man's world. When her breasts began to swell she decided to bind them tightly with linen bandages so that she blushed with pain. Arjumand became qualified in law, became active in the green revolution, threw zamindars out of their palaces and led raids on the homes of film stars. In court she prosecuted the enemies of the state with a ferocity that earned her the name Virgin Iron Pants. Women like Rani and Sufiya react to things around them even when their reactions take on extreme levels. Sufiya acts as the hand of justice. Rushdie considers Sufiya as a saint because she suffers for other people's sins and "a saint is a person who suffers in our stead" (SH 141).

When Pinkie Aurangazeb started the turkey business, Bilquis did not like the charming lady rearing turkeys next to the minister's house. She considered the arrival of the turkeys as a personal insult. When she complained to her husband he replied: "She is the widow of our great Marshal, wife. Allowances must be made" (SH 134-135). The gobbling turkeys represented one more victory for Pinkie over other men's wives. Sufiya, the mentally retarded daughter who embodied her mother's shame decided to teach Pinkie a lesson and she kills the two hundred and fifteen turkeys of Pinkie. She becomes violent with
Talwar because he was responsible for Naveed cancelling her marriage with Haroun. Talvar told Naveed at the time of parting: "I won't see you again . . . until you break your engagement and allow what must be to be" (SH 164-165). So Naveed decided not to marry the "stupid potato" (SH 165). This was a humiliation to Raza and Bilquis who would never give their daughter in marriage to a polo player. Sufiya who had decided to punish Talvar for his decision attacks him violently at the wedding party. When men become ineffective women show the moral courage to face the situation. Syed Amanuddin remarks:

Sufiya Zinobia is perhaps the most powerful character Rushdie has created. Although she brings to mind the subcontinent's many stories of vampires and its folktales of ghouls and "chudale", she must be seen in the context of the novel as an embodiment of evil perpetrated by the leadership of the nation, especially by her own father. (44)

Sufiya breaks out of the room in the attic the moment Isky is murdered. Rushdie describes her: "what now roamed free in the unsuspecting air, was not Sufiya Zinobia Shakil at all, but something more like a principle, the embodiment of violence, the pure malevolent strength of the Beast" (SH 242). She is described as the beast "on all fours, naked, coated in mud and blood and shit, with twigs sticking to her back and beetles in her hair" (SH 286). Sufiya becomes the agent
of Raza's fall. Raza, in order to escape from the fury of Sufiya had to
disguise as a woman but even then he couldn't escape from the wrath
of the Shakil sisters. Raza is killed by the Shakil sisters whose son
Babar, has been killed by Raza. Inspite of all his diplomacy and
efficiency as a statesman Raza's tragedy is finally caused by women.
Thus women who were supposed to be peripheral creatures gradually
come to the centre and finally monopolize the stage of Shame. Like the
widow in Midnight's Children, Sufiya becomes an image of Kali which
is a recurring symbol in Rushdie's portrayal of women. Uma in The
Moor's Last Sigh whose name recalls the incarnation of the mother
goddess in Hinduism is also pictured as the manifestation of Kali, the
goddess of destruction.

Rushdie is very much conscious of the positive aspects of the
Indian culture, especially motherhood. Even though motherhood is
subverted there are mothers and surrogate mothers who exemplify the
virtues of Indian motherhood. Aurora though very unloving to her
daughters proved to be a very loving mother to her son the Moor. She
always made it a point to comfort her son. She knew that her son was
worried about his unnatural ageing and so she comforted him by
telling him not to think of himself "as the victim of an incurable
premature-ageing disorder, but a magic child, a time traveller. Only
four and a half months in the womb" (MLS 219).
Another prominent mother figure is Padma. Even though Parvati dies after giving birth to Adam, Padma looks after Parvati's son like her own son. She proves to be very faithful to Saleem Sinai also. Though he is impotent she loves him and tells him: "And love, to us women, is the greatest thing of all" (MC 193). She prays to Varuna: "Give my Mr Saleem thy power. Give heat like that of Fire of Indra. Like the male antelopoe, O herb, thou hast all the force that Is, thou hast powers of Indra, and the lusty force of beasts" (MC 193). Chunni, Munni and Bunny though called as three witches, loved and cared for their bastard sons Omar and Babar Shakil.

But it is ironical that in Rushdie it is not always the biological mother who lavishes all love and care on the child. The mother-son relationship in Rushdie often follows a pattern – the biological mother's relation with the child shares some oedipal implications as in the case of Omar and the three witches and Aurora and the Moor, but the Ayahs who become mother surrogate are remarkable characters with all feminine charm like Mary, Shahbanou and Aurora's Ayah.

Women as refuge to men is another recurring feature of Rushdie's works. Parvati's wicker basket enables her to make men disappear until she wills them to return. Saleem escapes from Pakistan hidden inside Parvati's basket. For some time he is concealed in a washing chest, which belongs to his mother. It is
Parvati who restores Saleem’s identity. By recognizing him, she gives back the name he has forgotten. In *The Satanic Verses* the brothel protects Baal. In *Midnight’s Children* Rev. mother decides to manage the Gem business during the days of crisis. Amina started the petrol pump to rescue the family when her husband became sick. In *Shame*, Raza is protected by his wife till the end. Finally he tries to escape wearing his wife’s burqua. Virgin Iron Pants dressed like a man to support her father in the country’s administration. Though an idiot Sufiya tries to be a saviour to her husband. It is Rani’s veil that hides Raza from the anger of his daughter.

In *The Moor’s Last Sigh* Aoi Ue, the Japanese painter, becomes Morae’s sole companion in Vasco’s Castle. He admits that she was of immense support to him. She comforted him by instilling hope and self confidence in him through her words: “We are greater than this prison . . . We must not shrink to fit its little walls” (*MLS* 424). As a result he could spend the time without thinking of the dark calamity waiting for them. The Moor expresses his indebtedness to her: “I can only pay tribute to the generous strength with which she held me close through those interminable nights” (*MLS* 422). Presenting women as refuge to men in critical situation is also Rushdie’s way of subverting existing norms and beliefs.

Though Rushdie’s protagonists undergo identity crisis and fragmentation, a return to the original roots is suggested by the
nóvelist as an escape from identity crisis. In personal life also Rushdie expressed his longing for his Indian roots: “One of the great losses in my life was having to stay away. It’s the only passage of seven years in my life in which I have not been in India. It feels like losing a limb” (Reder 193). Josna E. Rege points out Rushdie’s nostalgia for an unpartitioned India: “An interviewer once reported that Salman Rushdie kept on his writing desk a little sculpture of an unpartitioned India. Even as he wrote the realities of a divided subcontinent, he couldn’t help but persist in holding on to India’s geopolitical wholeness as both an idea and an ideal” (199). Rushdie’s protagonists reach ultimate self-realization after experiencing the turmoils and conflicts of the fragmented postmodern society.

In *Grimus*, Flapping Eagle after a hazardous journey reaches Calf Island where he sees his alter ego Grimus. Then Flapping Eagle realizes that he is Grimus himself. This realization is similar to the “*Aham Brahmasmi*” concept in which the individual soul realizes himself as part of the cosmic soul. The individual as a result of self-sacrifice attains self-purification by which he becomes God or Brahman. Saleem Sinai after his eventful life in India and Pakistan realizes that the “sound and fury” of life is nothing:

> for the moment, any way, there is was only the buddha; who recognizes no singing voice as his relative; who remembers neither fathers nor mothers; for whom midnight holds no
importance; who, some time after a cleansing accident, awoke in a military hospital bed, and accepted the Army as his lot; who submits to the life in which he finds himself, and does his duty; who follows orders; who lives both-in-the world and not-in-the-world; who bows his head; who can track man or beast through streets or down rivers; who neither knows nor cares how, under whose auspices, as a favour to whom, at whose vengeful instigation he was put into uniform; who is, in short, no more and no less than the accredited tracker. (MC 356)

Saleem after his wanderings, comes to Bombay where he decides to work in the Braganza pickle factory owned by Mary. He decides to spend the rest of his life with Padma and his son. Coming back to one's roots is suggested as an escape from identity crisis in both *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses*. The circular structure of *Midnight's Children* itself indicates this homecoming. According to David Myers the religious propositions suggested in *The Satanic Verses* also suggests a return to the original home:

the only cure for the anguish of cosmopolitan uprootedness and intellectual agnosticism is to reconcile oneself with some form of the community which one has denied in one's youth. The prodigal son must renounce the vanity of his ambition for fame in exile and return to his father's fold in
order to seek a redefined community in his native land. He must cease to ape the imperial conqueror in a self-denigrating culture — cringe and instead look to an unorthodox renewal of the traditions of his own native land as a positive framework for individual self-definition. (148)

Most of Rushdie’s characters experience a kind of self-realization in the end, and in some cases as with Saleem and Saladin, it is suggested through the final homecoming. But even then his postmodern fiction obliterates the possibility of character analysis in the traditional sense, as character and narrative are fused together for artistic purpose. In his historical novels, Rushdie re-imagines historical and political events and characters enabling a reappraisal of his country and its people. The distorted and grotesque characters depicted symbolize the grotesqueness that has crept into human relationships in modern times. But it is impossible to separate Rushdie’s characters from the narrative technique, as his characters play a vital role in determining the narrative strategy. Narrative devices like subversion, parody and word play supplement the grotesqueness of his characters. Thus Rushdie’s characters and fictional techniques complement each other and this mingling results in a fiction which is traditional and postmodern at the same time.