Chapter 2
Metafictionality

The term “metafiction” was coined in 1970 by William H. Gass in an essay entitled “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction” to characterize the radical narrative innovations of American writers such as John Barth, Donald Barhelme, Raymond Federman, and Ronald Sukenick because these writers did not only violate or subvert the dominant conventions of novel writing, but also explicitly discussed the act of experimentation while they performed this very act. Metafiction is fiction about fiction. It self consciously reflects upon its own nature, its modes of production, and its intended effect on the reader.

Metafiction is a form of fiction that deals with the subject of writing of fiction. Metafictional dimensions are common in contemporary Magical Realism – the texts provide commentary on themselves, often complete with textual self-portraits. It consists of intertextuality, a term variously attributed to French critic Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin, used widely by critics in the last twenty years to refer to the presence of aspects of one or more texts within some other work. The idea of intertextuality suggests, in fact, that every piece of written work in some way is related to other texts that already have been written. Types of intertextuality include overt literary allusion, actual quotation from other works, and even plagiarism and parody.

Metafiction, in general, is a novel about a person who is writing or reading a novel. It is non-linear in nature. It violates time sequence
and time frame. It is plastic in structure in the sense that the arrangement is not rigid and hence can be rearranged. The novel provides narrative footnotes, comments on itself to facilitate the better understanding of the reader. The author himself is often a character in the novel. The story anticipates and begs the readers’ reaction. Authorial intervention is quite common. The narrator often turns critical and passes a critique of his own creation.

Metafiction is a type of fiction which self-consciously addresses the devices of fiction. It is the term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. It usually involves irony and is self-reflective. Self-reflexive is, for Maggie Ann Bowers, “A narrative or narrator referring to, or drawing attention to, itself or himself there by making the reader aware of the narrator’s role in the text” (133).

Metafiction can be compared to presentational theatre in a sense, presentational theatre does not let the audience forget that they are viewing a play, and metafiction does not let the readers forget that they are reading a work of fiction. Bowers defines Metafiction thus: “A form of fiction that includes the contemplation of aspects of literature and fiction such as a novel about writing a novel. These texts are often considered to be self reflexive” (131).

Scheherazade, the ingenious storyteller in The Thousand and One Arabian Nights is invoked when describing certain kinds of storytelling, especially in those stories of Magical Realism which use a
clever and often timeless narrator. She is the typical Post-modern replenishing narrator who employs the devices of metafiction with repetition as a narrative principle.

The role of the plebian commentator in the works of metafictional nature is highlighted by Brennen (105). The role of Padma, the interlocutrix in *Midnights’ Children* adds to the metafictionality. She constantly eggs on Saleem to rush up his narration as he is falling apart. She constantly makes her presence felt and expresses her genuine interest with comments like “so if you are going to spend all your time wrecking your eyes with scribbling, at least you must read it to me” (31-32). Padma longs for warmth but it is unfortunate that the narrator has been rendered impotent due to Sanjay Gandhi’s mass sterilization programme. He regrets since he “can’t leak into her” (MC 39). Padma, when the story progresses, appreciates the narrator and spurs him on saying “you’ve learned how to tell things really fast” (MC 109). She is very happy to recognize her in this story-- “‘Me!’ Padma is yelling, excited and a little embarrassed by the service memory. ‘Of course, who else? Me, me, me’” (MC 457).

The narrator of Midnight’s Children is conscious of his cracking. He is going to burst into pieces soon. He is always in a rush to finish his work, to mean something before he comes to nothing. He feels the constant pressure of time on him. “‘Tomorrow. Or the day after. The cracks will be waiting for August 15th. There is still a little time: I’ll finish tomorrow’” (MC 457).
The story is presented often as a movie-trailer; there is a preview of the happenings in the novel in the form of Ram Ram Seth’s prophecy:

‘There will be two heads--but you shall see only one--there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees’ (...) Newspaper praises him, two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him-- but, crowds will shove him! Sisters will weep; cobra will creep’ (...) Washing will hide him--Voices will guide him! Friends mutilate him--blood will betray him (...)

(...) Spittoons will brain him--doctors will drain him-- jungle will claim him -- wizards reclaim him! Soldiers will try him--tyrans will fry him...’ (...) ‘He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die... before he is dead.’ (MC 87-88)

The above passage presents the gist of the novel. Ram Ram Seth’s prophecy announces the happenings of the novel well in advance. The prophecy provides a frame, a skeleton plan to the novel.

Another sadhu visits the Methwold estate and says, “I have come to await the coming of the One. The Mubarak--He who is blessed. It will happen very soon” (MC 113). Saleem’s birth is announced in advance.

The baby switch is central to the story. Mary Periera, who is in love with Joseph D’ Costa, the revolutionary, is persuaded to do this to wreck his vengeance on the aristocracy. The baby switch is described as follows:
And when she was alone—two babies in her hands—two lives in her power—she did it for Joseph, her own private revolutionary act, thinking He will certainly love me for this, as she changed name-tags on the two huge infants, giving the poor baby a life of privilege and condemning the rich-born child to accordions and poverty. (MC 117)

Saleem accepts the responsibility for many happenings in the novel. He accepts that he caused the language riots, “triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay” (MC 192). He gives Khusro a copy of the most precious of superman comics which influences him to grow into Lord Khusro Khusrovand Baghvan and in a superman kind of act; the baghvan tries to walk into the sea and drowns himself to death. He owns up the responsibility for killing Homi Catrack and in turn, his uncle Zulfikar too (MC 271). He claims responsibility for the imposition of Martial Law in Pakistan, as he was the one who changed the pepper pots indicating the position of the Military forces. “Tonight, therefore, yes! I was there! A few yards from him! – General Ayub and I, myself and old Ayub Khan! – I am assuming control of the State” (MC 289). He is the one who sniffs out Mujib-ur- Rahman from his hiding. He acknowledges, “Yes, Padma: when Mujib was arrested, it was I who sniffed him out” (MC 355). Thus he, the narrator Saleem, places himself in the centre of all actions that take place.

Digressions are found often. The narrator plays the role of the critic also. He digresses of course with the permission of the readers
and Padma; “But I digress. What, Padma’s frown demands” (MC 224). But Padma does not relish digression much. She is for unilinear narration where digressions are not entertained.

There is constant reference to Thousand and One Arabian Nights; hence thousand one children were born. They represent a thousand and one possibilities that India has after Independence.

The silver spittoon acts as a unifying thread through out the novel Midnight’s Children. But it is buried into the slum when the bulldozers move in. Pickling is used as a metaphor for immortalizing history in the form of a fiction. The narrator draws constant reference to the act of pickling. Thus Braganza’s pickle factory becomes central to the narration. Here is where Saleem seeks refuge at last and narrates the story.

The whole novel is summed up in two pages (MC 404-05). This helps the reader to take stock of the entire happenings of the novel and to recapitulate all the events that have gone so far. This also is in the tradition of metafiction that aims at making the reader feel at ease.

Unlike Midnight’s Children, Shame has an omnipotent, all knowing narrator. This novel is narrated by ‘the third person’, who does not figure in as a character like Saleem. This vantage point gives him more freedom to comment and describe in an objective fashion.

In Shame, the fairy tale beginning is in the ancient oral tradition of story telling: “In the remote border town of Q, […] there once lived three lovely, and loving, sisters […] And one day their father died” (11).
This beginning helps Rushdie cloth his tale of ‘actuality’ in fiction and fantasy.

Time is not chronological. It does not move in a linear manner. It is rather clairvoyant—that foresees events and rushes back to embrace the past when necessary. Rushdie observes, “Time cannot be homogenized as easily as milk” (S 13). Time cannot be held by its reigns. Recalcitrant in many ways, it often rushes ahead of the schedule; the future butts into the past unmindful of the present.

Though Rushdie mentions that the story takes place in the fourteenth century, it is very much contemporary. Thus there is ‘untiming’ of time.

The narrator’s involvement with the story is well evident from his concern for the three ladies—Chunni, Munnee and Bunny. He strongly feels, “My ladies must be defended against intruders” (S 17). The metafictional narrator blends himself with the happenings. He is not in the periphery but very much in the thick of action.

In Shame the narrator echoes the concern of the readers. When questions like “how did they pay for it all?” (S 18) and “But who was pregnant?” (S 19) arise after the demise of old Mr. Shakil, the father of the three mothers, the narrator asks on behalf of the readers.

The narrator is at pains to restrict the flow of time. He does not want events to supersede one another:

but no, ends must not be permitted to precede beginnings and middles, even if recent scientific experiments have shown us that within certain types of closed system,
under intense pressure, time can be persuaded to run backwards, so that effects precede their causes. This is precisely the sort of unhelpful advance of which storytellers must take no notice whatsoever; that way madness lies! (S 22)

The narrator sounds rather apologetic about the time being ‘uncontrollable’. He observes, “It seems that the future cannot be restrained, and insists on seeping back into the past” (S 24).

The narrator often steps out of the frame of the plot to express his own concerns:

I tell myself this will be a novel of leave taking, my last words on the East from which, many years ago, I began to come loose. I do not always believe myself when I say this. It is a part of the world to which, whether I like it or not, I am still joined, if only by elastic bands. (S 28)

The author and the narrator seem to be the same in such instances.

To make the novel Shame unrealistically realistic, the narrator resorts to the following explanation:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centering to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (S 29)
But, of course, he is writing about Pakistan.

Rushdie and the narrator are often one and the same. His autobiographical concerns often surface. He compares himself to Omar Khayyam, the poet after whom the protagonist of the novel Omar Khayyam Shakil is named:

Omar Khayyam’s position as a poet is curious. He was never very popular in his native Persia; and he exists in the West in a translation that is really a complete reworking of his verses, in many cases very different from the spirit (to say nothing of the content) of the original. I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion-- and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald–Khayyam-- that something can also be gained. (S 29)

Rushdie is more autobiographical when he writes about his sister:

If this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, I would not be writing about Bilquis and the wind; I would be talking about my youngest sister. Who is twenty-two, and studying engineering in Karachi; who can’t sit on her hair any more, and who (unlike me) is a Pakistani citizen. (S 68)

The reference to other books and works add to the metafictionality of the work. There is not much reference to reading and books in *Midnight’s Children* but in *Shame* there is some and in
the subsequent novels there are a lot of books and literary works mentioned. Rushdie's works exude scholarship.

The metafictional narrator is an ‘involved’ narrator in the sense that he reacts to concepts and happenings critically. His comments on ‘doctor’ is interesting:

What’s a doctor, after all?--A legitimized voyeur, a stranger whom we permit to poke fingers and even hands into places where we would not permit most people to insert so much as a finger-tip, who gazes on what we take most trouble to hide; a sitter-at-bedsides, an outsider admitted to our most intimate moments (birthdeathetc.), anonymous, a minor character, yet also, paradoxically, central, especially at the crisis. (S 49)

Metafiction often provides a summary and commentary of the work in progress:

This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquis, about what happened between her father and Chairman Iskander Harappa, formerly Prime Minister, now defunct, and about her surprising marriage to a certain Omar Khayyam Shakil, physician, fat man, and for a time the intimate crony of that same Isky Harappa, whose neck had the miraculous power of remaining unbruised, even by a hangman’s rope. Or perhaps it would be more accurate, if
also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel. (S 59)

The narrator is often found thinking aloud--voicing his difficulties in being a narrator:

I am wondering how best to describe Bilquis[...] But I find that I must, after all, return to my starting point, because to me she is, and will always be, the Bilquis who was afraid of the wind (S 67-68).

Rushdie is often conscious of the fate of his works after Midnight’s Children brought in a lot of trouble. In Shame, he says:

By now, if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer’s heart. (S 70)

These lines clearly indicate that Rushdie wants no trouble.

Metafiction has an all knowing narrator who has a hand in everything that happens in the novel. His role is there somewhere, somehow, for instance, when Rani Humayun’s pregnancy, in spite of Bariamma’s tight vigil, is commented on with humour: “Taking a leaf out of Bariamma’s book, I have turned a blind eye and snored loudly while Raza Hyder visited the dormitory of the forty women and made this miracle possible.” (S 77).
When Barriamma calls Bilquis a ‘Mohajir’, the narrator comments:

I, too, know something of this immigrant business. I am an emigrant from one country (India) and a newcomer in two (England, where I live, and Pakistan, to which my family moved against my will). And I have a theory that the resentments we mohajirs engender have something to do with our conquest of the force of gravity. We have performed the act of which all men anciently dream, the thing for which they envy the birds; that is to say, we have flown. (S 85)

Here it is found that Rushdie is speaking through the narrator about migration and displacement. Whenever and wherever a chance occurs, Rushdie speaks in his ideas.

The novel Shame is full of aphorisms; “What is a Saint? A Saint is a person who suffers in our stead” (S 141). The metafictional narrator is never short of ‘witticisms.’ “If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining” (S 173). He loudly speaks of the happenings of the society. Pakistan - most of the Islamic countries- repress their women folk. But it cannot be for long:

I hope that it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It is commonly and, I believe, accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men...
their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier. (S 173)

Pakistan’s political history vouches this observation. Benazir Bhutto emerged as a great political force to be reckoned with after Zia Ul Huq.

The narrator, along with the readers, shares his depression:

You can imagine how depressed I am by the behaviour of Omar Khayyam Shakil. [...] What kind of hero is this? Last seen slipping into unconsciousness, stinking of vomit and swearing revenge. [...] How is one to account for such a character? Is consistency too much to ask? I accuse this so called hero of giving me the most Godawful headache.

(S 142)

He comments on the shameless behaviour of Omar Khayyam thus:

I accuse the villain of attempting a shameless piece of social climbing [...] So unscrupulous is he, so shameless, that he will court an idiot in order to woo her father. Even a father who gave the order which sent eighteen bullets into the body of Babar Shakil. (S 144)

Babar is Omar’s brother and he unscrupulously aligns with Raza Hyder to climb up the social leader.

The narrator in *Shame* comments on marriages thus. “I dislike arranged marriages. There are some mistakes for which one should not be able to blame one’s poor parents” (S 145). In oriental countries most of the marriages are fixed only by the parents. Here the dictum
is ‘love after marriage,’ never ‘before’ as it is in the west where ‘experimentation’ is possible.

Iskandar Harappa’s foreign bank account and the money poured into it is made public by his cousin Mir Harappa. This news gets reprinted in *News Week* (S 147). Bringing in the name of a famous weekly adds up authenticity and verisimilitude to the matter. Metafictionality cares much for authentic vouching by authorized sources.

The movement of the story is indicated by the narrator. He calls the story “our story” (S 173) indicating the confidence that he has built up in his readers. The reader is not let off at any time; he/she is made to become a part of the story. Active participation of the readers is solicited in metafiction.

The end of Iskandar Harappa is presented in a chorus like commentary; “*His greatness overpowered Time itself. A NEW MAN FOR A NEW CENTURY... yes, he ushered it in, ahead of Time. But it did the dirty on him. Time’s revenge: it hung him out to dry*” (S 186). Those who are ahead of time in their thoughts and attitudes become anachronistic elements and nature gets rid off them in most of the cases as unwanted.

Inscribing literary texts is a part of metafiction. *Julius Caesar* is viewed through a colonial eye to avoid any revolutionary ideas. It is ridiculous that Caesar is viewed as an English colonizer and he is slayed by a native Pakistani to induce the national zeal. *Machiavelli’s The Prince* is also referred to (S 246). Iskandar Harappa’s ghost is
found referring often to this piece of work on diplomacy and administration for the benefit of Raza Hyder.

The narrator indicates the cause for the end of tyranny or a dictator. Here is a piece of universal truth:

How does a dictator fall? There is an old saw which states, with absurd optimism, that it is in the nature of tyrannies to end. One might as well say that it is also in their nature to begin, to continue, to dig themselves in, and, often, to be preserved by greater powers than their own.

(S 257)

After speaking out, as an after thought, he impleads; “Well, well, I mustn’t forget I’m only telling a fairy-story” (S 257), and ensures that he is not speaking of ‘real things’.

Whenever a chance occurs the narrator airs out his opinion. Fed up with the religious fervour of Raza Hyder, he steps in, of course with the approval of the reader; “May I interpose a few words here on the subject of the Islamic revival? it won’t take too long” (S 250) When religion is forced on people they tend to reject it. “What happens if one is force-fed such outsize, indigestible meals?--One gets sick. One rejects their nourishment. Reader: one pukes” (S 250-51).So as a suggestion the narrator recommends the three myths, “liberty; equality; fraternity” (S 251) for the betterment of any nation.

The Moor, Moraes Zogoiby, is the narrator of the novel The Moor’s Last Sigh. He is fleeing for his life from Benangali after Vasco
Miranda, his tormentor, bursts on his own accord and dies. Standing amidst the trees, gasping for breath he asks:

A Moor’s tale, complete with sound and fury. You want? Well, even if you don’t. And to begin with, pass the pepper.

--What’s that you say?--

The trees themselves are surprised into speech. (And have you never, in solitude and despair, talked to the walls, to your idiot pooch, to empty air?) (MLS 4)

There is a preview of the novel that the metafiction offers often. The Moor briefs the novel’s story:

Mine is the story of the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed: me, Moraes Zogoiby, called ‘Moor’, for most of my life the only male heir to the spice-trade-‘n’-big-business crores of the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty of Cochin, and of my banishment from what I had every right to think of as my natural life by my mother Aurora, nee da Gama, most illustrious of our modern artists, a great beauty who was also the most sharp-tongued woman of her generation, handing out the hot stuff to anybody who came within range. (MLS 5)

Death is not an end. It is a form of new beginning. Rushdie asserts this idea time and again in his fiction. Epifania is upset after the death of Francisco since he has willed most of his money for the country’s Independence struggle and has left her nothing except her
clothes, jewellery and a modest allowance. This enrages Epifania and this rage is passed on to the Moor as well. He says, “This, too, is part of my inheritance: the grave settles no quarrels” (MLS 27).

This novel The Moor’s Last Sigh is about love and its betrayal; “If love is not all, then it is nothing: this principle, and its opposite (I mean, infidelity), collide down all the years of my breathless tale” (MLS 28). The reader is never left at a loss to know what the work is all about.

The narrator often voices out his views. Indians love English, English literature and English people but English rule is not loved, only detested; “I see that hate-the-sin-and-love-the-sinner sweetness, that historical generosity of spirit, which is one of the true wonders of India” (MLS 33) observes Rushdie.

Aurora, the Moor’s mother shows signs of an artist even as a small child. She exhibits her talent in ever so many ways; she uses all her pocket money to buy crayons, papers, calligraphic pens and China ink. The imprisonment enforced on her by Epifania helps her bring out the artist in her fully out. The narrator feels that he has brought out this point before the chronological development of the plot. He apologetically says, “but I am getting ahead of my tale” (MLS 45). But he is not able to restrain himself. It is typical of metafiction that things are spelt out in advance.

Gandhi figures in the novel. The Independence movement creeps into The Moor’s Last Sigh also. Gandhi is found in Narayan’s
Malgudi, on the sands of the river Sarayu. Camoens reaches Malgudi to be a part of the audience. He records his experience thus:

In that huge gathering sitting on the sands of Sarayu, I was a tiny speck. [...] Then Gandhi came and made everyone clap hands in rhythm over their heads and chant his favourite *dhun*: Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram.

(MLS 55)

Known historical personages intermix with the fictitious in Magical Realism.

The origin of the story is given out. “Great family trees from little corns: it is appropriate, is it not, that my personal story, the story of the creation of Moraes Zogoiby, should have its origins in a delayed pepper shipment?” (MLS 68). Aurora, who goes to the factory to inspect the progress, falls in love head-over-heal with Abraham unmindful of the social status.

The reader is very much involved in the narration. The story is presented in the form of a discussion. The Moor asks, “You want to know what was in the box? Listen: forget about jeweled turbans; but emeralds, yes [...] its illegitimacy you want? Never mind about genetics; just follow the cash” (MLS 85). Questions are anticipated and answered. The narrator of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* further has a confession to make. He says, “In what follows you will find stranger tales by for than the one I have just attempted to debunk [...] of the truth of these further stories there can be no doubt what so ever. So finally it is not for me to judge, but for you” (MLS 85).
Commenting on the quality of the story, the narrator observes:

“And as for the yarn of the Moor: if I were forced to choose between logic and childhood memory, between head and heart, then sure; in spite of all the foregoing, I’d go along with the tale” (MLS 85-86). The narrator clearly indicates that he is not bothered much about logic. He is particular only about the lively presentation of the story.

Rushdie in The Moor’s Last Sigh asks many unsettling questions. “Did you ever see your father’s cock, your mother’s cunt? Yes or no, doesn’t matter, the point is these are mythical locations, surrounded by taboo, put off thy shoes for it is holy ground” (MLS 88). Metafiction always has room for such discussions.

Sometimes the narrator pretends to be very modest and tries to narrate things without verging on vulgarity but the effect achieved is far more vulgar than what words could have.

He came to her as a man goes to his doom, trembling but resolute, and it is around here that my words run out, so you will not learn from me the bloody details of what happened when she, and then he, and then they, and after that she, and at which he, and in response to that she, and with that, and in addition, and for a while, and then for a long time, and quietly, and noisily, and at the end of their endurance, and at last, and after that, until … phew! Boy! Over and done with! (MLS 89)

The narration does not give out the action straight in words but it is suggested. The deflowering of Aurora could not have been described
better. The reader is at liberty to fill in the gaps as far as his imagination would carry him.

The Western readers may feel shocked to know that a fifteen year old girl gets ‘kind of’ married. But the narrator has a convincing reply: “Fifteen years old! Okay, okay. In our part of the world that’s not so young” (MLS 92). Child marriages were quite common in this part of the world. It could not be said for sure that the system has been totally eradicated.

Prophecies foretell the story to come. Epifania, at the point of her death pours sweet poison into Aurora’s ear; “a house divided against itself cannot stand[…] may your house be for ever portioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard” (MLS 99). This is what happens in the story. This is very much similar to the prophecy of Ram Ram Seth in Midnight’s Children.

Moor enjoys his status of being a bastard. Aurora and Abraham Zogoiby never got married in the formal sense. There were no wedding bells for them.

I salute their unmarried defiance; and note that Fate so arranged matters that neither of them--irreligious as they were – needed to break confessional links with the past, after all. I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was both, and nothing: a jewholic-anonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was--what’s the word these days? -- atomised. Yessir: a real Bombay mix.
Bastard: I like the sound of the word. Baas, a smell, a stinky-poo. Turd, no translation required. Ergo, Bastard, a smelly shit; like, for example, me. (MLS 104)

The Moor delights in analyzing the word with involvement and interest. Self appraisal is metafictional in nature.

In The Moor’s Last Sigh, a comparison between Shakespeare’s Portia and Aurora is drawn.

She was rich (like Portia in this), but chose her own husband (unlike in this); she was certainly intelligent (like), and, at seventeen, near the height of her very Indian beauty (most unlike). Her husband was--as Portia’s could never have been--a Jew. But, as the maid of Belmont denied Shylock his bloody pound, so my mother found a way, with justice, of denying Flory the child. (MLS 115)

The comparison highlights Aurora’s courage to establish a Jewish connection. She took a decision to never get pregnant as long as Flory was alive.

The Moor ages in double speed. “Four and half months from conception to birth” (MLS 144) is all that he requires to be born. He expects the reader to understand this. He placates him thus: “O my omnipotent reader, that I have been passing too quickly, too. A double-speed existence permits only half a life. Short as the watch that ends the night, Before the morning sun” (MLS 145).
The ‘left-handedness’ is elaborated. It is of course a rare feature and the world does not make allowance for it.

Where, pray, is one to find a left-handed trouser-fly, chequebook, corkscrew, or flatiron (yes, an iron; imagine how awkward for a lefty that the flex always emerges from the right)? A left-handed cricketer, being a valued member of any middle order, will have no trouble finding a bat to suit him; but in all the hockey-mad land of India there’s no such creature as a wrong-way hockey-stick. Of potato peelers and cameras I will not deign to speak... and if life is hard for ‘natural’ left-handers, how much harder it was for me- for it turned out that I was a right-handed entity, a dexter whose right hand just happened to be a wreck.

(MLS 153)

Rushdie pleads the cause of the left handers with understanding, and also in tongue-in–cheek.

Having learnt lessons from The Satanic Verses, Rushdie is cautious to an extent.

More will be said later of the feared Muslim gang-boss, ‘Scar’ whose real name I will not make so bold as to set down here, contenting myself with that terrifying cliché of a sobriquet by which he was known throughout the city’s underworld, and finally--as we shall see--beyond it. (MLS 182)
The scar is construed to be none other than Dawood Ibrahim and it is no surprise that Rushdie is on his alert. It might even be feigned fear.

The ‘Braganza pickle’ of Midnight’s Children comes into The Moor’s Last Sigh also. Aadam Braganza, “a precocious eighteen year old with ears the size of Baby Dumbo’s or of Star TV satellite dishes” (MLS 341) ends up as the heir of the great Abraham. This Aadam is the illegitimate child of the Shiva and Parvati of Midnight’s Children. He has taken the name of Braganza in the old ladies’ honour and after they passed away has taken over the factory. He has come to Siodi Corp, Abraham Zogoiby’s business empire, in search of expansion capital and has eventually become Abraham’s heir. The interlinking of novels adds to the metafictionality.

Aurora’s engagement with “the mythic-romantic mode in which history, family, politics and fantasy jostled each other” (MLS 203) best exemplifies Magical Realism. Her paintings are a combination of all these. Her paintings serve as excellent examples for Magical Realism.

Aurora warns her son of the dangers involved in being with Uma. There is always some clairvoyance, foreseeing in metafiction.

That little fisherwoman has her hook in you and like a stupid fish you think she only wants to play. Soon you will be out of water and she will fry you in ghee with ginger-garlic, mirch-masala, cumin seed, and maybe some potato chips on the side. (MLS 246)

This turns out to be true and the Moor, being deep in love, fails to take heed. Thus he brings ruin into his own self.
Aurora brings in a story within the story. Her favorite parlour game is “three characters, seven sins” (MLS 253). A story has to be developed on these lines. One has to continue the story where the other has left it. Aurora skillfully narrates the story of her own involvement with her son who is entangled with Uma and Uma ends her story skillfully suggesting the elimination, the death of Aurora. Thus a triangular context is introduced and the unwanted ‘third’ is eliminated.

The Moor resorts to a soliloquy when his mind is terribly burdened because his mother has shunned him. He pours out his predicament. This is a fine example for character analysis that the narrator, the Moor does about himself.

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. Now I am plunging downwards from your hill, but I’m no angel, me. My tumble is not Lucifer’s but Adam’s. I fall into my manhood. I am happy so to fall. (MLS 295-96)
The Moor’s mother has disowned him because Uma made him abuse his mother. Uma recorded it on a tape-recorder and played it for her. He feels for his mother and her absence. “O mother, mother. I know why you banished me now. O my great dead mother, my duped progenitirix, my fool” (MLS 316). This brings out his love for her.

Rushdie builds up a kind of excuse for the abusive language that the Moor uses: “coming from a house where easy obscenities had always peppered and spiced our conversational dishes, I did not flinch from fuck and cunt and screw” (MLS 320). Rushdie also uses ‘four-lettered words’ unflinchingly and freely.

As Rushdie is conscious all the time of being a migrant, he makes the narrator dwell on it. “Men and women who leave their natural places are less than human. Either something is lacking in their souls or else something surplus has gotten inside--some manner of devil seed” (MLS 327). It has been seen that this issue is taken up in all the novels that have been analysed in this work.

Metafiction makes constant reference to contemporary literary pieces, stories, events and movies. The song ‘Choli Ke Piche Kya hai?’ is brought in and analysed. Rushdie pours out his contempt for such ‘meaningful’ songs.

_What is under my choli?_’ he sang, jerking his torso suggestively. _‘What is under my blouse?’_ One day, Dhirendra, driven mad by the interminability of his companion’s fixation and also by the appalling quality of
his voice, had yelled back, “Tits! She’s got tits under her
fucking choli, what do you think?” (MLS 357)

Sammy, who is full of love for Nadia Wadia hums the song as often as possible and this gets on the nerves of Dhirendra.

The English bulldog named Jawaharlal which was Aires’ pet died long back. As Aires was very fond of it he stuffed and preserved it. After Aires, the Moor carries it with him wherever he goes. In Spain, when he checks out of the airport he is asked;

‘What is the dog? Why is the dog?’

‘It is the former Prime Minister of India, metamorphosed into canine form.’ (MLS 385)

The narrator indicates that though Jawahar is dead, ‘Jawaharism’ continues to be in India.

After the Moor slays Mainduck, he compares himself with Ram and Achilles. Such comparisons are typical of metafiction.

You see the difference. Where Ram had the use of a heavenly doomsday--machine, I had to make do with a telecommunicative frog. [...] As far Achilles: I had neither his innard--munching savagery [...] nor his poetic turn of phrase. (MLS 368)

Imprisoned in the tower along with Aoiue by Vasco, the Moor is given the assignment of writing his story. His life depends much on it as he has to continue writing everyday lest he will lose his life.

If Zogoibys are to be wiped off the face of the earth – if the wrong-doings of the father, yes, and the mother, too, are
to be visited upon the son--then let the last Zogoiby
recount their sinful saga. Everyday, after that, he
brought me pencil and paper. He had made a
Scheherazade of me. As long as my tale held his interest
he would let me live. (MLS 421)

Metafiction makes constant reference to The Thousand and One
Arabian Nights which is typical of it.

The narrator ends the novel The Moor's Last Sigh with an
optimistic note. Having narrated the story and feeling spent, he says;

See: here is my flask. I'll drink some wine; and then, like a
latter-day Van Winkle, I'll lay me down upon this graven
stone, lay my head beneath these letters R I P, and close
my eyes, according to our family’s old practice of falling
asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed
and joyful, into a better time. (MLS 433- 34)

The Moor prefers to go into hibernation to wake up when the world
gets more conducive.

In The Ground beneath Her Feet, the narrator, Mr.Umeed
Merchant, a photographer known as Rai is one of the three major
characters in the novel. Thus there is ‘involved’ narration that adds to
the authenticity. The narrator has an inside view of the happenings.
He is the unofficial, underground lover of Vina, the protagonist. His
life, though it has its own track, is inseparably twined to Vina’s and
Ormus’ lives to a major part. Born in Bombay, he globe-trots and
settles in the U.S., the dreamland of modern pop culture.
In the very beginning of the novel *The Ground beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie gives room for the reader to assume how the story progresses. “She died. She ended in the middle of the story of her life, she was an unfinished song abandoned at the bridge, deprived of the right to follow her life’s verses to their final, fulfilling rhyme” (GHF 3).

The main concerns of the novel are clearly spelt out.

Five mysteries hold the keys to the unseen: the act of love, and the birth of a baby, and the contemplation of great art, and being in the presence of death or disaster, and hearing the human voice lifted in song. These are the occasions when the bolts of the universe fly open and we are given a glimpse of what is hidden; an elf of the ineffable. Glory bursts upon us in such hours: the dark glory of earthquakes, the slippery wonder of new life, the radiance of Vina’s singing. (GHF 19)

Rushdie makes elaborate descriptions about these in the novel.

As a photographer, Rai’s duty is “the hellish gift of conjuring response, feeling, perhaps even comprehension, from uncaring eyes, by placing before them the silent faces of the real” (GHF 22). This is what a novelist also does. The narrator always needs to be restricted and restrained. There is always a tendency to skip and go ahead fast but it is always better to progress systematically. Rai understands this and says, “But I mustn’t get too far ahead of my tale” (GHF 37).

Good old characters from Rushdie’s previous works occur in this novel also; the Methwold of *Midnight’s Children* appears as an
aged gentleman discussing Indo-European myth with Sir Darius. He leaves India to his country England to die there aged and peacefully. Homi Catrack also appears in the novel. Pia Aziz, the beauty actress in *Midnight’s Children*, Aurora Zogoiby, the famous artist of *The Moor’s Last Sigh* also appear as a part of the elite society consisting of ‘Merchants’ and ‘Kalamanjas’.

Regarding the language acquisition and use, Rushdie comments, “We were language’s magpies by nature stealing whatever sounded bright and shiny” (GHF 60). Though this is a comment about the nature of Rai and his mother who are interested in language, this describes the nature of artists especially novelists who juggle with words better.

Wordplay is at its best in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*. Hybrid words of all sorts abound in the novel—“magnificentourage,” “magnificentestine” and “arrogantourage” are a few examples.

Rai is a cocksure narrator. He retreats when there is a need too. But when the necessity arises, he is sure to comeback; “I will. When I come to it, I will” (GHF 67).

Writer writes unmindful of whether people accept it or not. He has to speak out his mind. “That’s my view. You don’t have to buy it [...] you’re entitled to your opinion” (GHF 79). The reader is constantly present. Whenever a chance occurs, the narrator, besides narration, talks to the readers straight with the second person pronoun ‘you’ prominently placed.
References to other famous works of literature are metafictional in nature. There is reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Tangle Wood Tales*, *The Adventures of Hatim Tai*, *Sindbad the Sailor*, *Marcopolo*, *The Travel report of Ibn Battuta* and *Mahabaratha* (GHF 80).

The narrator is very much conscious of the readers’ understanding and co-operation. He says, “I must briefly halt my runaway bus of a narrative, so that I may help the reader to a better understanding of how matters had arrived at so sorry a pass” (GHF 93).

The character Rai, besides being the narrator, speaks out his obsession as the character devotedly in love with Vina; “the teenage prayer, of the anthemic “Beneath Her Feet”: What she touches, I will worship it. The clothes she wears, her classroom seat. Her evening meal, her driving wheel. The ground beneath her feet” (GHF 155).

There is constant reference to *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights* in all Rushdie’s works. Rai feels “like Dunyazade, Scheherazade’s sister, sitting at the foot of the queen’s sleepless bed while she told tall stories to save her life” (GHF 197).

There is plenty of parody in metafiction. “Here, from this propagatory enclave – seedbed wrested from seabed—her Ozymandian colossi will rise, and the mighty will look upon Bombay and despair” (GHF 224). This is clearly a parody of Shelley’s “Ozymandias”. Ameer Merchant, the construction enthusiast, wants to build sky scrappers but her vision ended up in a fiasco due to her husband’s addiction for gambling and the consequential loss of money.
The narrator comments on the events that occur. He is not just a passive narrator, and so what happens affect him first and in that sense he is also a reader of his own fiction. Commenting on the suicide of Nissy Poe’s mother, he says, “Murder is a crime of violence against the murdered person. Suicide is a crime of violence against those who remain alive” (GHF 226).

The narrator gives elaborate details about what he talks about. As a photographer, Rai gives details regarding the origin of photography. “The first permanent photograph was taken in 1826, in Paris, by Joseph Nicephore Niepce” (GHF 229). There is a reference to the great French photographer M.Henri Hulot, who encourages and ushers Rai into a career.

Rushdie uses Rai as his spokesperson. He talks about leaving India for better pastures; “And so farewell, my country. Don’t worry; I won’t come knocking at your door. [...] My home is burned, my parents dead, and those I loved have mostly gone away. Those whom I still love I must leave behind for good” (GHF 272). He talks very warmly of the India that he has experienced – high mountain meadows, Bollywood songs, filthy streets, roadside tea and its malaria mosquitoes.

While giving names, the narrator prefers the names of well known writers. Mull Standish’s sons are named Mr. Nathaniel Hawthorne Crossley and Mr. Waldo Emerson Crossley. Hawthorne and Emerson are popular American writers of the nineteenth century.
Ormus finds books of famous writers in his cabin aboard Radio Freddie; Nathan Zuckerman’s Carnovsky, science fiction by Kilgore Trout, a playscript--Von Trenck--by Charlie Citrine, who would go on to write the hit movie Caldofreddo. The poetry of John Shade. The one and only Don Quixote by the immortal Pierre Mednard, F. Alexander’s A Clockwork Orange and The Watergate Affair (GHF 307-308).

The narrator comments on the nature of the story so that the readers would know for sure what to look for:

No, this is a story of a deep but unstable love, one of breakages and reunions; a love of endless overcoming, defined by the obstacles it must surmount, beyond which greater travails lie. A hurdler’s love. The forking, fissured paths of uncertainty, the twisting mazes of suspicion and betrayal, the plunging low road of death itself: along these ways it goes. This is a human love. (GHF 353)

As the novel is a eulogy for love, the comment on love is apt and warranted.

Rai feels self conscious about narrating his own story. But as he is also an important character, besides being a narrator, he has to narrate his stories also. He justifies his act thus:

I have much to say about myself, I have my own stories to tell. Mostly they’ll wait. (While the gods are occupying centre stage, we mortals must hang about in the wings. But after the stars have finished all their tragic dying, the extras come on stage--it’s the end of the big banquet
scene--and we get to eat up all the fucking food.) But the pictures are her now. I can’t put them back in their box. (GHF 375)

As it is customary of metafiction, the narrator exhumes the past, and recapitulates the events that have gone before. He presents it in the form of rebuke brought out by Remy Auxerre, champion of racial and cultural admixture, to demean the prestige of Ormus and Vina: “After long researches he published a thousand page hetchet job bringing all Ormus’s family’s skeletons out of their closets[…] and Vina’s too” (GHF 469)--the exam fraud of Sir Darius, the braining of Ardaviraf, Cyrus the serial killer; Vina’s murderer--suicider-mother, her willingness to travel on school bus from which black kids were banned, the death of Marion Egiptus in poverty, Vina’s youthful miseries in Chickaboom, her father Shetty being a bankrupt bum, all these help the readers recall all these characters and stay better tuned to the story.

Metafiction includes literary references and The Ground beneath Her Feet has references to Graham Greene and to Captain Ahab of Moby Dick. Greene is supposed to have heard of the abusive cry of this mistress’s husband who would position himself on the side walk outside the apartment block whenever she was with Greene. When asked about the story, Greene “allegedly replied merely that as his apartment was on an upper floor he would not have heard the cries” (GHF 473). Thus he neither denies nor confirms the tale. Rai’s position, when Vina is with Ormus, is similar to that of Greene’s
mistress’ husband. Ormus wanted to be close to his lost world as captain Ahab wanted to be with his Whale. “If the lost otherworld be likened to a Whale, then Ormus Cama had become its Ahab.” (GHF 480).

Metafictional aspects like the role of the narrator and character, constant reference to time, foreshadowing of the plot, foreseeing the future events, binary oppositions, recapitulation of events to help readers keep track of the story, intertextuality, presence of the same characters in other works as well and the use of language get analysed in the above chapter. All these metafictional aspects go into Magical Realism.