INTRODUCTION
And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you will have to swallow the lot as well.

(Midnight's Children 4)

In a writer who has been made painfully aware of the extreme intolerance of some members of his own religious tradition, of the increasingly bruised political sensibilities and fragility of the syncretic quality of a composite culture, the easy irreverence with which Salman Rushdie continues to describe the full-grown crises of the subcontinental realities arouses a profound sense of awe and askance. Moreover, as a migrant writer who claims to have "floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time" to decry any attempt of 'locating' him within the certitudes of national authenticity, the way through which Rushdie allows his narrators search for their cultural 'roots' with particular love for particular things, places, and people of "a lost home in a lost city" has really been a matter of great amazement and interest to his readers.
As an autonomous recounter in whose tales merge the ironies of history, the colonial determination of our modernity, the conditions and corruptions of postcoloniality, the neo-colonialism with its absurd combinations of love and hate, popular upsurge and populist rant, democracy and totalitarianism and so on, Rushdie offers his readers one of the richest metaphors of our age. For, the migrant is perhaps the central defining figure of twentieth century, and Rushdie has been a figure of immense importance in the literature of migration.

The reader finds an immanent personal dimension to Rushdie's 'memory novels', which has been central to his self-representation, both in fiction and in life. In his real life Rushdie is a migrant and exile, in fiction he is a fantasist and a historian. The main lines of thematic and structural imagination in his fiction revolve round his migrant sensibility: while the troubled migrant in him seeks to encapsulate the whole socio-political reality of the Indian subcontinent, the fantasist in him tries to subvert and mythicize history in an obsessive search for reconstructing "imaginary homelands" in order to give a sense of wholeness to his otherwise partial and fractured identities. It may be argued that his novels invariably record the way or rather ways in which the migrant narrator imagines and reimagines 'India of the mind'—an India that constantly bombards with dreams and desires but deprives him of his immediate reality.

Rushdie's long-winding reflections on culture formation on the phenomenon of migration and transculturation; his conscious knowledge of being triply dislocated from his country, culture, and linguistic 'roots' and, yet playfully concocting a 'palimpsest on the past' to tell about his problematic relation with India; his plural and partial identity contending the fact that cultural hybridity involves a fundamental rewriting of knowledge within the interrogative space of being-in-between and, above all, his search for an aesthetic of imagination beyond the ephemeral realities, among other things, render his major fictions "the unmistakable whiff of chutney" from where "the smells of spices are for ever forthcoming".
The loss of, and search for, an integrated identity—the quest for a ‘home’ and a ‘wholeness’, the two needs so essential to human spirit, in fact, have been the central theme that runs through Rushdie’s major fictions, more emphatically in his quartet on Indian subcontinent—*Midnight’s Children*, *Shame*, *Satanic Verses*, and *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. All these novels aim at craving for an aesthetic world that grows from the tension between ‘history’ and ‘imagination’. They all draw their aesthetics from their narrator-author’s quest for rediscovering his ‘self’ in the deep, opulent, cultural matrix of the subcontinent. The excavation of identity from within the psyche of the subcontinent and the attempt for drawing “new and better maps of reality” gives Rushdie a wonderful gift of historical imagination.

Thus, in Rushdie’s ‘memory novels’ the reader winds up suffering from the same ontological confusions as the author himself or his characters. For, the very nature of triple dislocation seems to have taught him that reality has no excuse for existing except to supply inchoate raw materials to shape and order towards its own demands and designs. It is a construct or an artifact that does not exist until it is made and, that like any other artifact, it can be made well or badly. The perception of reality and illusion—the kind of dialectic of conflicts and oppositions—and the growing consciousness arising from it enables the author and his protagonists to look beyond the parameter of Time to embrace an utopian worldview that finds its ideational location in ‘loss of home’ as well as in ‘excess of home’. Rushdie’s treatment of history, first as a profound happening of events and as an explanation from the mythical past to the contemporary world where politics is the most dominant concern of all, offers the reader a profound insight into the process and practice of politics. Secondly, this explanation of history extends to achieve an ahistorical imagination through the author’s use of fantasy—the ‘dreaming self’. But to understand and share the narrator/author’s worldview, however, involves considerable risk. For, Rushdie is quite a metaphorical being; he lives more comfortably in images
and ideas than in places and events. Amongst the world's great writers Rushdie is quintessentially the artist of uncertainty.

Rushdie was at once acknowledged as one of the most innovative and accomplished novelists of Indian English fiction when his second novel *Midnight's Children* (1981) was awarded both the Booker McConnell Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. This sprawling Rabelaisian book as well as the other that followed, *Shame* (1983), written in tailor-made nativized English, mixing fiction and fantasy, posit the problem of culture and identity. They invent new idioms and metaphors to seek their narrator-protagonist's identity in terms of connections and places in and outside the chronological framework of Indo-British cultural history. *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which jolted the world and created a literary maelstrom not seen many times since the last world war, is in that sense, a migrant's eye-view written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis. Likewise, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), in a very particular sense, is a real triumph of the author/narrator over the fact of disconnection and exile from his cultural and linguistic 'roots'. Rushdie's fiction, as such, focuses on the 'quest for identity' and development not only of the narrator or the protagonist but also of the readers who have to seek identity in terms of connections and contradictions through a journey from acculturation to self-actualization.

But the manner in which the novels are written—in vignettes of memory, some of them are either lost or selectively suppressed—poses serious doubts on how they can encapsulate the paradoxes of the subcontinental realities. There has always been a similarity between the hazy air of unreality and make-believe that subverts the narrative authority and introduces real doubts about the identity as well as the authenticity of his narrators and their narrativization. His characters are always lying to themselves, always selectively emphasizing one aspect of experience at the expense of another. However despite the duplicities, lies, and the sense of uncertainty that result from Rushdie's own
characteristic evasions as a writer or narrator, such is the electricity of intelligence by which he makes them appear artistic wholes, and so skilfully does he weave his shimmering webs, that for the greater part of these fictions the readers get helplessly mesmerized by the sheer audacity of the art of narration.

As this study has been based on a broad-based hypothesis that the migrant writer's problem of alienation and the consequent search for an integrated identity through socio-cultural and linguistic roots, it makes a symptomatic study of the textual evidence in this light. It aims at critically analyzing his 'quest motif' that gives rise to tremendous fascination and tension in his art of narration and accounts for his immense technical virtuosity. The study is spread over nine chapters: the first chapter aims at highlighting the intricacies involved in postmodern identity construction within the Third Worldist canon, appreciating the ways Indian English fiction has been able to tackle the demands of postcolonial identity formation, and locating Rushdie in the backdrop of the colonial and post-colonial determination of the migrant's sensibility. In the next six chapters attempt has been made to make an analytical study of six major novels of Rushdie—starting from *Grimus* (1975) and coming up to *The Moor's Last Sigh*—to analyze the author's thematic imagination as well as his uninhibited experimentation with styles. His quintessential Indianness and the lines of descent from European modernism and postmodernism are discussed with citations from his novels. The last chapter concludes with an intension of arriving at his worldview that very much relates him to the socio-cultural psyche of the Indian subcontinent. The study, it may be said again, has only been an attempt to see and feel in a particular way that is only a partial and inconclusive study, never intending to provide any authentic solution to any critical issue whatsoever. The study, however, is a good contribution in the field of knowledge as it ignites a thinking mind and becomes a strong basis for further investigation and research.