CHAPTER III
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The Nation and the Family in Salman Rushdie’s Novels

"Do not ask your writers to create 'typical' or representative fictions. Such books are almost invariably dead books."


In this chapter, I propose to focus exclusively on Salman Rushdie and analyse some of his representative fictional works to show how new dimensions of the family-nation interface in the post-independence era have been represented in his work. Rushdie records in his fictional work, how, apart from playing the metaphorical role of an allegory to the nation, family is often caught up with the nation in various other complex roles. Sometimes it lends its own identity to its members in order to resist the hegemonic tendency of the nation. At some other times, particularly in South Asian nations, family even tries to impose its identity over the nation as a whole by consolidating dynasty rule in the nation. I have chosen three novels – Midnight’s Children (1981), Shame (1995) and The Moor’s Last Sigh (1996) – because these three novels foreground these different dimensions so prominently, that they basically become family stories. Rushdie’s presentation of family trees at the beginning of each of these novels, make this evident. In fact, genealogy proves to be crucially functional in all these novels, because through the evocation of a genealogy an elaborate family chain (which intersects with different moments in the history of the nation) is created.

73
individual never acts in isolation – his/her 'discursive' utterances and actions move, on the one hand towards the family, and towards the community and the nation on the other – towards a plethora of voices, a noisy crowd, a noisy nation. Thus the individual, as Rushdie succeeds in showing in all these three novels, acts as the crucial site where the interface between the family and the nation takes place.

By the end of Nineteen Seventies, the genre of Indian Fiction in English reached a state of impasse: the narrative of the modern Indian English novel needed serious rethinking. The challenge of the new decade was to reformulate and reassess the relation between the self and the nation. The eighties saw the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Indian Fiction in English as it saw a new strand emerging, though faintly, in the exploration of this relation. After Anita Desai had initiated the change in *Clear Light of Day* (published a year before *Midnight's Children*), by insisting that national history is made meaningful only through the scrutiny of individual lives, it needed one Rushdie to foreground the individual voice more prominently. Rushdie discharged this function so effectively that it became a subject of exclusive preoccupation for a host of novelists in the following years.

The publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 ushered in a new era in Indian English fiction. It proved itself to be such an important influence, as the term 'post-Rushdie' has come to refer to the decade or so afterward, in which a group of novels appeared, by established as well as young writers that were clearly influenced by *Midnight's Children*. The feature that defined the uniqueness is an unashamed self-centeredness with which Rushdie celebrates the
creative tensions between personal and national identity, as the private and the public realms are set off against one another. By reconfiguring thus the relationship between the self and the nation, Rushdie’s basic point of argument, in novel after novel, seems to be to establish that there are as many valid versions of national identity as there are citizens. As Rushdie himself says in “Imaginary Homelands”: “…what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that; ‘my’ India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions” (*IH* 10). This concept proved to be liberating for many Indian English writers who followed, allowing them to break the polarized stalemate between the self and the nation that had caught the Indian English novel in a kind of ideological and artistic prison for at least two previous decades. The eighties and nineties were distinguished by a literary explosion as writers found themselves free to speak in a multiplicity of voices and write in a multiplicity of modes. That Rushdie was trying to deviate from the tradition of Mulk Raj Anand or R. K. Narayan and do something new, was clear when he wrote in his essay on Günter Grass about the aim of an author: “Go for broke. Always try and do too much. Dispense with safety nets. Take a deep breath before you begin talking. Aim for the stars. Keep grinning. Be bloody-minded. Argue with the world” (*IH* 277).

In an interview to Gauri Viswanathan on March 13, 2003, Rushdie recollects the rationale behind his engagement in the project of writing his path-breaking novel *Midnight’s Children*:

… I did feel that what existed, certainly in English at that time, good as much of it was, didn’t speak to me about the world that I
knew and the world that I grew up in. One can read the novels of
R. K. Narayan and one can admire them greatly, as I do. But the
India they describe, which is largely rural or consists of very small
towns in India, was not mine. And also the manner of the novels
was very calm, mild classicist, linguistically orthodox, and I just
thought India is not like that. India is not calm and mild and
classicist and linguistically orthodox. India is turbulent and noisy
and vulgar and crowded and unorthodox, and you know it’s a
racket, and it’s a sensual assault, and it’s all these things. And I
thought, “How can I do that?” and I guess the biggest initial
question was to say the most obvious fact about India, that it’s a
crowd, it is a lot of people. How do you tell the story of a crowd?
How do you tell the story of a multitude? The form of the novel
emerged somewhat in response to that question that I asked myself.
How do you tell a crowd of stories? How do you tell a story in
which the central narrative certainly must exist and must be strong
but, in a way, has to push its way through a crowd of other stories,
bumps into stories in the streets, steps over them because they’re
sleeping on the sidewalk, whatever (Viswanathan 24).

Syed Mujeebuddin in his essay “Indian English Fiction and the Question
of Indianness” sums up Rushdie’s departure from his predecessors like Anita
Desai and Nayantara Sahgal succinctly: “if Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal
contextualize the past through a narrativising of silence, … Salman Rushdie’s
strategy consists of making as much noise as possible” (Biswas 26).
It is precisely here that Rushdie brought about the change – by forcing the nation to hear the ‘noise’ made by the peripheral characters of the history hitherto ignored, who now jostle for a space to make their stories heard, creating innumerable subjective versions of history. And interestingly, their stories refer to their family stories, because, family is the basic and immediate site where they operate. Thus Rushdie’s fiction intricately links the family and the nation, the historical figures of prominence and the unhistorical figures on the margin. If *Midnight’s Children* deals with Indian independence as a central trope of its fictional concerns and parodies Mrs. Gandhi’s efforts at perpetuating her rule and power, and *Shame* satirises the power struggle between Pakistan’s Zia and Bhutto, these central figures and events are juxtaposed against the peripheral and decentred protagonists who posit themselves as alternative symbolic centres of power. These protagonists are more positive and enabling, for they offer freedom and plurality unlike their ‘real’ counterparts who symbolize, for Rushdie, repression and intolerance. This is the phenomenal achievement of Rushdie – the retrieval of the individual from the periphery of the grandnarrative of the nation and placing him in the centre.

Importantly, this amalgamation of the public and the private engages the individuals and their families in different types of active and passive interfaces between them and the nation. As embodiment of history, these marginalized figures are made into receptacle of what has happened and is happening around them. At the same time, because they are also placed at the centre of all the happenings in the novel, they give history subjective, plural shapes and meaning. So, Rushdie’s characters influence the nation as much as the nation influences them as individual entities. Rushdie makes this point clear in *Midnight’s Children*:
I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirably modern) scientists might term ‘modes of connection’ composed of ‘dualistically combined configurations’ of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world. … By the combination of ‘active’ and ‘literal’ I mean, of course, all actions of mine which directly – literally – affected, or altered the course of, seminal historical events, for instance the manner in which I provided the language marchers with their battle-cry. The union of ‘passive’ and ‘metaphorical’ encompasses all sociopolitical trends and events which, merely by existing, affected me metaphorically – for example, by reading between the lines of the episode entitled ‘The Fisherman’s Pointing finger’, you will perceive the unavoidable connection between the infant state’s attempts at rushing towards full-sized adulthood and my own early, explosive efforts at growth … Next, ‘passive’ and ‘literal’, when hyphenated, cover all moments at which national events had a direct bearing upon the lives of myself and my family – under this heading you should file the freezing of my father’s assets, and also the explosion at Walkeshwar Reservoir, which unleashed the great cat invasion. And finally there is the ‘mode’ of the ‘active-metaphorical’, which groups together those occasions on which things done by or to me were mirrored in the macrocosm of public
affairs, and my private existence was shown to be symbolically at
one with history (MC 330-31 emphasis original).

While exploring the power of the individual in the grandnarrative of the
nation, Rushdie realizes that while great events take place around human beings,
the truly significant developments occur in their private lives; and in order to
understand the whole truth of history, one must take into account this plurality.
Just as the powerful tide of history cannot always be stemmed by an individual, so
too, the latter's will or vision cannot be entirely paralyzed by history and his
personal life is of interest because of its power to resist the hegemony of history.

The site from where the individual offers this resistance is his/her family,
for it is the immediate space where the individual is rooted and receives his/her
identity from. So, with the aim of dramatizing the encounter between the history
and the individual, Rushdie mixes the public, 'official' history of the nation (India
and Pakistan) with the private histories of families. Two distinct functions of the
family emerge from the encounter. On the one hand, in Rushdie’s fictional world,
family plays out the same history of the nation. It becomes invested with the
quality of an allegory, aptly encapsulating within it the story of the nation. This
reminds one of Frederic Jameson’s suggestion that the third world texts perform
the function of national allegories:

Third World Texts, even those which are seemingly private and
invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a
political dimension in the form of the national allegory: the story of
the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the
embattled situation of the public third-world and society (69
emphasis added).
Aijaz Ahmed, however, in his essay “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and ‘The National Allegory’”, strongly objects to Jameson’s sweeping statement that ‘all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical’ because Jameson seems to have overlooked much of eastern literature which never directly engages itself with issues of nation building. Still, one possible and often most inviting way of reading Rushdie’s texts is to trace the allegorical function that the micro-narrative of family plays in his fiction. Rushdie seems to strengthen this allegory by drawing on the resources of postmodern assumption of the multiplicity of history and to a great extent by fictionalizing history to narrate the nation (India and Pakistan). Jameson’s argument regarding the third world writer’s predilection for allegory fits Rushdie’s narrative of the nation: “… the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol” (73). In all the three novels we take up for discussion in this chapter, the family has unmistakably been used as an allegory – on a microlevel, it mirrors the events that mark the macrostory of the nation.

But this is not all. The family is in no way restricted to a merely passive role of being an allegory to the nation. In being a site where the subjective identity is constructed, by acting as the ‘roots’ of this identity formation, it also plays an active role. In this capacity, it resists the hegemony of the nation. One primary thing that attracts the attention of all readers of Rushdie amidst all these different dimensions in the family – nation interface, is the high degree of self-consciousness that characterizes his protagonists. This self-consciousness is ultimately Rushdie’s effective tool to make the boundary between history and fiction flexible, as it enables him to achieve an alternate recreation of the past, by
his constant attempt to foreground the individual’s story of the nation instead of
the nation’s story of the individual.

I

Handcuffed to History?

In The Sunday Standard, 14 June 1981, Rushdie himself says that his
purpose in writing Midnight’s Children was to focus on “the connection between
public affairs and private lives.” He elaborates: “You cannot separate the two.
They interpenetrate and that is how the writer needs to examine them, the one in
the content of the other.”

Panoramic in its scope, the narrative of Midnight’s Children moves
globally through three nations and chronologically through six decades of
the turbulent socio-political phase of the sub-continent. Among the innumerable
characters that jostle for space in the narrative, it is Saleem Sinai’s story that
stands out to be the most vocal – his centrality throughout is unmistakable. The
course of his quest for identity is used as a means of recording the entire history of
the subcontinent in its most significant phase. Rushdie puts into the novel virtually
all of twentieth century history of India, starting from the Jallianwala Bagh
Massacre and making its way through the Quit India movement, the Cabinet
Mission, the role of the Muslim League in the partition, reorganization of the
Indian States, language riots, the Indo-China War, theft of the prophet’s hair from
the Hazratbal mosque in Kashmir, the wars with Pakistan, the liberation of
Bangladesh and finally the Emergency. Yet, what makes the novel a trend setter is
its refusal to follow the documented history and its deliberate rewriting of history
by putting the life of some members of the protagonist’s family at the centre and
rendering the hitherto-missing ‘their version’ of the history. But at the same time, it is, in no way, just a limited personal narrative. It is actually a close intertwining of two most prominent spaces in Indian life – the national and the familial, connected by the protagonist Saleem, whose identity takes shape by the concurrent forces of these two spaces. In an early interview, Rushdie characterized *Midnight’s Children* as more a political novel than a historical novel, and most of all, as a novel about the nature of memory, “almost one person’s passage through history,” in which the individual’s version of the truth was presented as at once coherent and suspect. This personal view of history, Rushdie explained in an interview to Una Chaudhuri, allowed him to discuss and explore the nature of the relationship between the individual and history, between private lives and public affairs. Without denying the necessity of history, *Midnight’s Children* reconceptualised the dichotomy between personal and national identity in a way that made a new kind of social engagement possible, through a rather promiscuous intermixture of the two.

In the novel, Rushdie deals with a chosen period in India’s past; the main impulse behind this choice is clarified by him in one of his statements:

…it seemed to me that the period between ’47 and ’77 – the period from Independence to the Emergency – had a kind of shape to it; it represented a sort of closed period in the history of the country. That shape becomes part of the architecture of the book (Pattanayak 21).

The shape that Rushdie perceives in the thirty-year period of India’s past is the outcome of a distinctively specific point of view that informs his understanding and, therefore, his reconstruction of it. The very choice of the period is significant
the historical space it covers is enclosed by two momentous events. The first one marked the end of a long period of colonial rule and the beginning of free India; the second put an end to the short but controversial period of Mrs. Gandhi’s emergency rule, during which the hard-won freedom was severely threatened. It is Rushdie’s understanding of the import of these two events and the connection he perceives between them which determine the shape of this period for him. This distinguishes his interpretation of India’s history from other writers and historians. To this end, he employs Saleem as the historiographer – Rushdie’s involvement with history is realized largely through him.

In the role of a historian, Saleem, like the traditional historians, aspires to produce some kind of a totalization of the past, in which he can provide continuities and missing links. He wants to write a complete and coherent account: “Most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence: but I seem to have found somewhere the trick of filling in the gaps in my knowledge, so that everything is in my head, down to the last detail …” (MC 17). Both family histories and national histories, Saleem finds, are partial and distorted. He therefore eschews the temptation of resorting to such deliberate, selective representation of events in his account:

Family history, of course, has its proper dietary laws. One is supposed to swallow and digest only the permitted parts of it, the halal portions of the past, drained of their redness, their blood. Unfortunately, this makes the stories less juicy; so I am about to become the first and only member of my family to flout the laws of
halal. Letting no blood escape from the body of the tale, I arrive at the unspeakable part; and, undaunted, press on (MC 74).

Pitted against this desire to produce a coherent and total picture of the past, Saleem engages in the task of stitching up the holes in the ‘perforated sheets’ of history by weaving into it the two stories together and making one, complimentary of the other.¹ On the one hand, he tries to understand the history of the nation through the history of the family, the latter engaged in a metaphoric relation with the former; on the other, his constant search of the family roots gives him a standing against the onslaughts of history. What makes the structure of the novel complex is the simultaneous playing out of both these roles of family.

Divided into three parts, the first part of Midnight’s Children traces the family roots in Kashmir, the family’s move to Bombay via Amritsar, Agra and Delhi and ends with Saleem’s birth; the second deals with the family’s sojourn in Bombay, followed by a shift to Pakistan and ends with the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war; the third covers the carnage in East-Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh and ends with the Emergency and its aftermath. In the process, we are immersed into a fascinating tale full of unusual and humorous (and sometimes with an edge of pathos) incidents, where important political events are in conjunction with events in the lives of Saleem’s parents and grandparents, uncles, aunts and even classmates.

The narrative begins in Kashmir in the year 1915, much before the birth of Saleem. And it started significantly, with an unmistakable attempt to foreground a family history:
One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies (MC 4).

The actual connection between Dr. Aziz and history is set into motion when Tai, the old Shikara man in Kashmir, becomes instrumental in his meeting with Naseem. The perforated sheet, which turns out to be an important trope of fragmentation throughout the novel, interestingly, relates the family and the nation together. It is through this perforated sheet, that Dr. Aziz manages to get only partial glimpses of his future bride. But even this incident is linked to the developments of First World War:

Far away the great war moved from crisis to crisis, while in the cobwebbed house Doctor Aziz was also engaged in a total war against his sectioned patient’s inexhaustible complaints …

… On the day the world war ended, Naseem developed the longed for headache. Such historical coincidences have littered, and perhaps befooled, my family’s existence in the world (MC 26-28).

In fact, coincidences such as this are innumerable in the text. Apparently they seem humorous, but, on a serious note, they form a part of Rushdie’s strategy for linking individual with history. Rushdie tries to highlight through them, how links between the nation and the life of an individual are forged in unprecedented ways.
Thereafter the narration weaves the story of the Aziz family into the text of the Indian history so seamlessly, that it becomes impossible to separate the two – the nation influencing the family history and at the same time, the family becomes the microstory of the nation. Dr. Aadam Aziz moves from Kashmir to Amritsar and is drawn into the vortex of the freedom movement. In a humorous yet poignant description of the Jallianwala Bagh incident, we find how Aadam Aziz’s family and the infamous massacre are linked through a humorous use of mercurochrome:

... The chattering stops and is replaced by the noises of people and birds. There seems to be no traffic noise whatsoever. Brigadier Dyer’s fifty men put down their machine-guns and go away. They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowed. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. ‘Good shooting,’ Dyer tells his men, ‘We have done a jolly good thing.’

When my grandfather got home that night, my grandmother was trying hard to be a modern woman, to please him, and so she did not turn a hair at his appearance. ‘I see you’ve been spilling the Mercurochrome again clumsy,’ she said appeasingly.

‘It’s blood,’ he replied, and she fainted. When he brought her round with the help of a little sal volatile, she said, ‘Are you hurt?’

‘No,’ he said.
'But where have you been, my God?'

‘Nowhere on earth,’ he said, and began to shake in her arms (MC 41-42 emphases original).

This incident is noteworthy for more reasons than one. In the first place, it shows yet another of Rushdie’s brilliant strategies to link the national and the familial space by bringing into focus the husband-wife (family) response to the violence in the national space, the response unfolding within the confines of the four walls of the house. The bloodshed in the public space has an appalling effect on the private space – the extent of violence is beyond the wife’s imagination. Secondly, the grotesque mingling of blood and mercurochrome is a remarkable trope to highlight how the violence of the nation devastates the normalcy of the family life. So the incident, small as it is, shows how the family is not just a mirror of the nation, but it also measures the events taking place in the nation. This is how Rushdie intertwines the family and the nation comically and mock-heroically. At one point, it seems nothing but a story of Aadam and his wife Naseem, but at the same time this story seems inseparable from history. As Dieter Riemenschneider observes, “There is virtually no event which is not given an individual as well as an historical meaning” (58).

Aziz’s zest for freedom grows into an ‘optimism disease’, which is strangled with the gruesome death of Mian Abdullah at the hands of Muslim League fanatics. Abdullah’s secretary, Nadir Khan escapes when Abdullah is murdered, and seeks refuge at Aadam Aziz’s house. He later marries Aadam’s daughter Amina, who is forced to divorce him after two years when Aadam finds out that they have not yet consummated their marriage. But at the same time, the
connection between the individual and history (national, or even international at

times) is established through passing references to some bizarre concurrences in

history. The sardonic parallel drawn between the failure of the marriage of

Mumtaz Aziz, his daughter and Nadir Khan and the atomic explosion in Japan
during the Second World War, or the coincidence of the dropping of atom bomb

on Japan and Emerald’s unleashing a secret weapon of her own, the bandy-legged,
short Zulfikar, on Nadir Khan’s track is Rushdie’s grotesque, sometimes

contrived, way to show how the story of the individual can never be separated

completely from the story of the nation.

With the dramatic entry of Saleem Sinai, the family connection with the

history of the nation takes a more direct and flamboyant turn. He is ‘handcuffed to

history’ by virtue of being born at the same momentous hour of the nation’s

independence. Baby Saleem receives a letter of congratulation from Prime

Minister Nehru himself. Confidently identifying Saleem’s life with the life of

India, the letter links the unlimited potential of the newborn, both with that of the

nascent state with all its future glory lying before it, and with the India of timeless

antiquity, tales of whose past glories inspired and unified the nationalist

movement: “You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also

eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it

will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own” (MC 167). Right from this moment,

begins his intricate, varied relations with the nation. At one level he is only a

helpless, passive recipient of history’s onslaught having no agency in the active

and the literal modes. He does not seem to have a life of his own: “From ayah to

Widow,” he tells us, “I’ve been the sort of person to whom things have been done”
(MC 330 emphasis added). But he is also an active agent who can give history
shape and meaning. He is made to report and comment on people and happenings;
sometimes he has to participate in events of crucial importance. Whenever the
novelist wants it, he makes him perform impossible tasks. On one occasion, he is
even made invisible, (Rushdie’s magic realism is at its best here, using the
invisibility as a trope to highlight Saleem’s loss of his self to the nation) so that he
can be transported from Bangladesh to India. Like conventional victim-figures, he
has also to suffer dismantling: he loses his go, his hair, and finger. In short,
though we see him walk in flesh and blood, he is no ‘character’ at all. He is an
embodiment of history, and no more than a voice. He says about himself:

Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that
went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-
to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world
affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after
I’ve gone which would not have happened if I had not come … to
understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world (MC 470).

Saleem is a world in him – history encapsulated into a human frame. Every
passing moment makes him full and heavy. The cracks and fissures in his body
are constantly widening because of its pressure. “History pours out of my fissured
body,” he tells us quite often. Yet, Saleem doggedly persists in positioning
himself, the bestower of meaning and form, at the centre of his story – as indeed
he is, in the role of author-narrator. Saleem’s grotesquerie is Rushdie’s ploy to gift
him with extraordinary subjective power of omniscience: for making him see,
know, and report more than an ordinary mortal can, a substantial part of which is
national history. Thus Saleem is in a position to analyse history-family relation objectively. With variations on his miraculous powers, he can report and comment even on those happenings which take place in his absence. His dip into his pre-natal past brings into the novel the story of his grandfather's fantastic love affair, the equally unbelievable story of his mother's first husband, and several actual historical incidents, connected with India's colonial past. As a child, he is given a mature, adult voice for reporting critically on people, situations, and events, both private and national. He has a Ganesh-like elephantine nose, which is capable of miraculous sensitivity, and gives him unbelievable powers of discrimination. As an extraordinary voyeur, he sees through the deception which Lila Sabarmati practices on her husband; on occasions, he gets transformed into an enlarged peephole, and sees more than what is on the surface. With a prophetic voice and a sensitive receiving mechanism, he communicates with the other miraculous children of his country. His powers of telepathy turn him into a kind of container: “The inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head” (MC 232). After his nose is drained off of its miraculous goo, it acquires new powers of knowing; he sees through the games of love and hate, sniffs truth and falsehood, smells what is in the air, and follows trails. He is, in short, a window to the world around him. This is where he is more powerful than recorded history. Ultimately, he is turned from a victim to a protagonist. And as a protagonist, Saleem is also aware of unreliability of the recorded history. As for example, Saleem, in spite of his best efforts, is utterly confused so far as the 'facts' behind the Indo-Pak war of 1965 are concerned:
Important to concentrate on good hard facts. But what facts? One week before my eighteenth birthday, on August 8th, did Pakistani troops in civilian clothing cross the cease-fire line in Kashmir and infiltrate the Indian sector, or did they not? In Delhi, Prime Minister Shastri announced ‘massive infiltration … to subvert the state’; but here is Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, with his riposte: ‘We categorically deny any involvement in the rising against tyranny by the indigenous people of Kashmir’ (MC 470).

Meanwhile, the peculiar interface between the familial and the national continues. During the Indo-China War, the Sinai family is in Pakistan. But Ahmed Sinai refuses to move from Bombay. This small bit of information is quite significant as it highlights the resistance of the family to the dictates of the nation.

In a bizarre but metaphoric connection, we find on the afternoon of 9th September, 1962, Amina Sinai is trying to cut her verrucas out of her feet with a sharp ended nail file exactly at a time when Krishna Menon, the then defence minister, is reacting at Delhi, equally sharply, threatening to cut off the Chinese in the Himalayan front by the use of force. Again later, the nation’s mood of hatred and vengefulness is amply expressed through a similar situation brewing within the Sinai family – the wrath and revenge of Aunt Alia. As India and Pakistan engage in a relation of revenge, Aunt Alia turns her hatred of the man who abandoned her into an all-consuming revenge directed towards Saleem’s : ‘while we thrashed like flies in the webs of my aunt’s revenge, the mill of history continued to grind’ (MC 463).
And finally, the connection between the nation and Saleem’s family proves to be disastrous. The Indo-Pak War destroys his family and residence completely. By wiping out the family and residence, history suddenly lands Saleem into a tremendous identity crisis. As he loses his consciousness with the silver spittoon hitting on the back of his head, he also loses his identity, having neither a family to cling to, nor a nation to identify with. Realising gradually that he is constantly being pushed away by the nation to the margins, as a native alien and a helpless victim of history, Saleem begins his search for his identity: “I became afraid that everything was wrong – that my much trumpeted existence might turn out to be utterly useless, void and without the shred of a purpose” (*MC* 280).

The metaphoric/allegorical function of the family continues even till the end of the novel. Having recourse to the method of metaphoric connections between private and public history, the birth of Saleem’s son is equated with the birth of Mrs Gandhi’s emergency; his sickness symbolizes the sickness of the entire nation:

I suspected, from the first, something darkly metaphorical in this illness – believing that, in those midnight months when the age of my connection to history overlapped with his, our private emergency was not unconnected with the larger, macrocosmic disease, under whose influence the sun had become as pallid and diseased as our son (*MC* 590).
In consonance with the principle of nasal ethics, Saleem smells the evils of emergency and the unhealthy practices it promoted, which are linked with the country’s diseased past:

When the constitution was altered to give the Prime Minister well-nigh-absolute powers, I smelled the ghosts of ancient empires in the air...in that city which was littered with the phantoms of Slave Kings and Mughals, of Aurangzeb the merciless and the last, pink conquerors; I inhaled once again the sharp aroma of despotism. It smelled like burning oily rags (MC 592).

In its allegorical function, the family also exhibits a shrewd power politics often tending to be violent, as one witnesses in the history of the nation. Herein lies another interesting aspect of Rushdie’s treatment of the familial space in the novel. Rushdie shows how the apparently passive familial space may be used by its members actively to consolidate subjective ego, and how thereby, the space is also split between the ‘pedagogic’ and the ‘performative’ tensions. In the novel, for example, women are seen to be the source of power with which they control the site of family. In spite of their seeming lack of control in the public sphere, they loom large in the familial space, particularly in Saleem’s family. They feed all their repressed sorrow, guilt, jealousy, and bitterness into him like mother’s milk, as did his Aunt Alia, who “fed us the birianis of dissension and the nargisi koftas of discord,” and whose kormas “spiced with foreboding as well as cardamoms” wrought a terrible vengeance upon his mother. Or even before, we find Naseem, with all her age-old superstitions and traditions, protecting her subjective space against all onslaughts of Patriarchy:
The twin hearts of her kingdom were her kitchen and her pantry. I never entered the former, but remembered staring through the pantry’s locked screen-doors at the enigmatic world within, a world of hanging wire baskets I knew to be full of gur and others sweets, of locked chests with neat square labels, of nuts and turnips and sacks of grain, of goose-eggs and wooden brooms. Pantry and kitchen were her inalienable territory; and she defended them ferociously. When she was carrying her last child, my aunt Emerald, her husband offered to relieve her of the chore of supervising the cook. She did not reply; but the next day, when Aziz approached the kitchen, she emerged from it with a metal pot in her hands and barred the doorway. She was fat and also pregnant, so there was not much room left in the doorway. Aadam Aziz frowned. ‘What is this, wife?’ To which my grandmother answered, ‘This, whatsitsname, is a very heavy pot; and if just once I catch you in here, whatsitsname, I’ll push your head into it, add some dahi, and make, whatsitsname, a korma’ (*MC* 48-49).

Thus, women’s status within a patriarchal structure symbolises the states of the postcolonial subject in the uneven struggle for self-determination. As the women do in the family, so does Saleem in the nation.

Equally interesting is the not-so-elaborate hint of how the Gandhi family is involved in the power politics of India. In the first place, the emergency is a clear marker of how a family desires to consolidate a dictatorial rule over the nation (*‘India is Indira and Indira is India’ MC 587*), and thus becomes synonymous with
the nation in the act of power-mongering. Another hint of the cruel politics that went on within this family is when Rushdie indicates that the 'widow' is emotionally blackmailed by her son who accuses her of killing her husband through neglect. Family, thus, is far from being an innocent space of love, comfort and shelter. This has led critics find interesting parallels between *Midnight’s Children* and the Mahabharata. Vijay Mishra in his essay “The Great Indian Epic and Peter Brook” compares the allegory of *The Ramayana* with the *Mahabharata*:

... one finds that *The Ramayana*, read allegorically, affirms Hindu genealogy, order and sanctity of the family and constructs the Indian ideals of man and woman; in contrast *The Mahabharata* is about power and politics, about national disintegration and schisms: the Indian here confronts the forces of history. Thus, not surprisingly, Indians see the former epic as “life-atoning” whereas they never recite *The Mahabharata* in full for fear that it would lead to disharmony and chaos (196).

Continuing this analogy, Shyam S. Agarwalla, in his essay “Jameson’s Third Worldist National Allegory and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*” comments that *Midnight’s Children* is the Mahabharata of Postcolonial India (81).

The next phase of the family-nation interface is worked out in Saleem’s struggle to get back his identity. In order to do that, he has to engage himself in a search of a neatly structured family. This he desperately needs to create around him, not only to prevent the nation swallowing him entirely and turn him to a non-entity, but also because Saleem’s fragmentation of self is a result of the
fragmentation in his own family. The whole household is very often torn by the conflict between grandpaternal skepticism and grandmaternal credulity. Saleem's father is "unnerved, adrift, unmanned" and his mother becomes the victim of the "spirit of detached fatigue" and, eventually "fell apart". His sister Jamila is filled with "the pain of exile" and "the lovelessness of life". Hence, he has the sensation of being "pulled up by his roots" to be flung unceremoniously across the years, and is fated to plunge memoryless into an adulthood whose every aspect grows daily more grotesque. He meanders through his existential predicament "like a puppet with broken strings". Saleem's identity crisis, of course, begins in a way, in the moment of his birth. He is the biological child of Methwold, the departing English coloniser, and Wanita, a low-class Hindu and raised by Amina and Ahmed, bourgeois Indian Muslims. Also, as M. K. Naik observes:

(Saleem's) birth on the stroke of midnight on the day which marks the great divide between colonial and independent India is itself symptomatic of his identity crisis ... being a midnight's child he is born with a basically divided character (46).

Other prosaic factors, too, have contributed to Saleem's fractured identity. Immediately after Saleem's birth at Dr. Narlikar's nursing home, Mary Pereira exchanges babies born into two homes belonging to two opposite ends of the social and economic spectrum. Thus, Saleem, who was actually a son of a poor family, finds a home in the affluent Sinai family. This switching of babies, a device obviously borrowed from popular Hindi movies, is a blatant device to reiterate the protagonist's confusion of identity. Equally blatant is the saddling of the child with a multiplicity of parent figures. Saleem is bound to be confused and
his identity fragmented amidst his innumerable parents, real and supposed, proposed and presumed – real mother Vanitha, his putative mother Amina, the nurse Mary Pereira, his aunt Pia, or his plentiful father figures – William Methwold, Wee Willie Winkie, the street singer, Dr. Schaapstaker, his uncle Zulfikar, Hanif Aziz, Picture Singh and of course Ahmed Sinai. He had “more mothers than most mothers have children” and all his life, he says, “consciously or unconsciously I have sought out fathers”. Jean M. Kane observes, “The genealogy that Saleem has exhaustively related is his own through adoption and experience, but not through heredity” (Kane, 95-96). Consequently, it became a dire necessity for Saleem to form a familial space around him that would give him sustenance.

So Saleem engages in the task of creating family where there is none. This urge to create family/community is typically postnational, as Teresa Heffernan observes in his essay “Apocalyptic Narratives: The Nation in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children”:

… the narrative of the modern nation envisions the eradication of margins and the closing of gaps in the formation of a community that emerges at the end of history; cutting across class, race, language, and gender boundaries, a national boundary circumscribes differences. Saleem, as the chronicler of the nation, insists on the idea of community as a “mixing of voices” in a contained space (472).

The first attempt of Sinai to form a community is the Midnight Children’s Conference, where he attempts to bring together the clamouring voices of the secular, independent India, to form ‘a loose federation of equals with all points of
view given full expression’ (MC 305). But losing to Shiva’s authoritativeness, Saleem’s search for identity remains frustrated and fractured to this point, in close conjunction to the frustrated aim of having a united and developed India even after a decade of independence. Finally, his association with Midnight’s Children’s Conference is permanently lost, as he undergoes a sinus operation, which leaves the transmitter that helped him to connect with the other members, permanently disabled!

The second stage of Saleem’s search for identity was to defend his central position in the family. This stage unfolds when the family seems to have resolved its problem of divided loyalties and shifts permanently to Pakistan, ‘the land of the Pure’. But this new quest for a family, too, is threatened by his changed relation with his sister, Jamila, which turns out to be incestuous. Along with this, his jealous realisation that Jamila has dislodged him from the centre, proves to be ruinous. He loses the central attention of his family. So, while Jamila, the singer, the darling of the masses, goes on singing of holiness and love of country, Saleem engages himself in search of base, private pleasures. This denigration continues and his identity is ultimately reduced to a sniffer dog, serving as an agent of the Pakistani government.

But Saleem takes a u-turn from this nadir, for the nation cannot hold him in his throes for long or take away his identity permanently. Refused to be hegemonised by the pedagogic role of the nation, Saleem starts ‘performing’ towards a reconstruction of life. In spite of the nearly pervading note of despondency in Midnight’s Children, this last phase of Saleem’s quest to get back his identity is unmistakably redemptive. He is lost in the Sundarbans and is reborn
like a phoenix. Mario Couto aptly sums up his situation: “[Saleem rises] like a later day Odysseus tearing himself from the arms of Calypso who both soothes his pain and robs him of the challenge of achievement” (63). As he reaches back India through the magic basket of Parvati, he embarks on a process of reconstruction. The process is difficult and not without challenges. After a short stay in the magicians’ ghetto, Saleem’s instinctive desire to go back to the roots takes him to his uncle Mustafa’s house. Disillusioned there as well, he comes back to the ghetto. Here, finally he tries to create a family along with Parvati. This instinctive desire to create family is yet once again threatened gruesomely by the nation, as the ‘widow’ and her son (who are in charge of the nation) engage in the dictatorial act of forceful vasectomy in the name of family planning. By relating this heinous project in an extremely sardonic tone, Rushdie foregrounds how nation can employ crudest strategies to curb the freedom of an individual.

But still the novel ends on a note of sardonic hope. Inspite of all the tyranny of emergency, Saleem pins all his hopes on his son Aadam Sinai, the child of emergency. Saleem is confident that a stronger new generation would emerge victorious against the onslaught of the nation. It is also at this time that he is united with his surrogate mother Mary Pereira. So, by being connected to his surrogate son (Aadam is actually the son of Shiva and Parvati) on the one hand and his surrogate mother on the other he could at least partially consolidate a familial bond that saves him from getting lost in the nation’s hegemonic (hi)story.

Thus, even when Saleem runs the risk of being ‘trampled underfoot’, and ‘sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes,’ (MC 647), he prophesies that midnight’s children will be ‘both masters and victims of their times’ (MC 647).
The pessimism generated with the failure of *Midnight Children’s* conference is finally offset by the fact that the three most potent of the Midnight’s Children – Parvati, Shiva and Saleem have produced between them a son symbolically named Aadam. At the beginning of the novel, Aadam, Saleem’s grandfather had suffered a fall from grace in the idyllic garden state of Kashmir. The novel comes a full round when Aadam the second embodies the hope for future redemption and regeneration, of a new and better start for the children of independent India. ‘We, the children of Independence’, notes Saleem in the penultimate episode:

> rushed wildly and too fast into our future; he [Aadam], Emergency-born, will be, is already, more cautious, biding his time; but when he acts, he will be impossible to resist. Already, he is stronger, harder, more resolute than I (*MC* 594).

The function of the first generation of Midnight’s Children may have been destroyed, but out of its destruction, the hope for a better future springs. Andrew Teverson, in his recent, well-researched book *Salman Rushdie* (2010) describes this positive note as a mythologisation of post-Independence India and compares it to a mythologisation of post-war Europe provided by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, where a realisation of the barrenness of hope for the present generation gives way to the possibility of future regeneration. Replying to the question on the pessimistic end of the novel, Rushdie himself categorically said:

> I want to make one last point about the description of India that *Midnight’s Children* attempts. It is a point about pessimism. The book has been criticised in India for its allegedly despairing tone.
And the despair of the writer-from-outside may indeed look a little easy, a little pat. But I do not see the book as despairing or nihilistic. ... The story of Saleem does indeed lead him to despair. But the story is told in a manner designed to echo, as closely as my abilities allowed, the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration (IH 16).

In another interview, Rushdie categorically states, "... I think I have shown that although the possibility that Saleem represents is finished, a new and longer generation is just ahead" (Ravi 92). Commenting on the end of the novel, Ron Blabber says:

For Saleem, the promise and hope associated with the 'mythic' midnight children will always fall victim to the history of times. But the despair is not total; buried within the process is hope that the cycle will be broken (63).

This is the precise achievement of Midnight's Children as a postnational narrative. The constant jarring note that Saleem creates in the project of the Nation to hegemonise, makes him a pioneer figure in the history of Indian fiction. His individual attempt may have failed, but the attempt itself has definitely opened up new possibilities of identity formation. Saleem ultimately becomes an active agent, and, being placed at the centre of all happenings in the novel, he gives history a subjective meaning and shape. The feelings of suppression, subordination and coercion evoked by the trope of 'handcuff' at the beginning, get considerably diluted at the end as the nation loses its power over Saleem, the individual.
The Peripheral Man

Like *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* (1995) too problematises history, along with elaborate comments on specific historical events of Pakistan. Significantly, *Shame* deals more with the history of Pakistan than with the problematization of the historical discourse. And since political history of the subcontinent is inseparable from the history of different families vying with each other for power, the family-nation interface becomes multilayered in this novel as well. Though predominantly allegorical, the family is caught up with the nation in various other interesting relations as well. But there is a significant departure, too, from the earlier novel. In *Shame*, Rushdie has failed to invest the familial space with redeeming features, pervading the novel with unrelieved pessimism. In *Shame*, the familial space is not procreative, as in *Midnight's Children*, but abortive.

As in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's concern in *Shame* is with contemporary history. He is highly selective in his representation of events in Pakistan, the selection of events governed by his understanding of what Pakistan meant to him. This is suggestively implied in the very title of the novel, *Shame*, which functions as the controlling metaphor in the narrative. Sushila Singh in her essay "*Shame*: Salman Rushdie's Judgement on Pakistan" points out that *Shame* is a companion piece to *Midnight's Children*:

The first was a stupendous evocation of the evolution of India since independence; *Shame* is about what happened to the other half of the country after 1947. Unfolding the truth about Pakistan, the
novel is a queer combination of free flight fairy-tale and a savage political indictment. *Shame* is an exposé of the bleak nightmare of Pakistan (14).

The novel traces a fictionalized path through the rise to political power of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Iskander Harappa), Bhutto’s appointment of Zia-Ul-Haq (Raza Hyder) as his army chief of staff in 1976, Zia’s deposition of Bhutto after the army was called in to quell street rioting in July 1977, the execution of Bhutto on the charge of ordering a political assassination and the ‘Islamisation’ programme that Zia introduced once he had taken power in Pakistan. The satire is double forked – one is directed towards Zia, for his serious erosion of civil rights of women and for his politicized misuse of Islam, the other directed at Bhutto, for allowing military to regain power.

The novel explores a series of significant connections between the family and history, particularly prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. That struggle within the family and the nation are inseparably related has been hinted by Rushdie, in the first place, by making Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa “cousins-in-law” before they become each other’s mortal adversaries. In fact, in *Shame*, the family is all the more actively related to the nation’s history as what happens in the corridors of national power is actually an elongation of the family drama in Bariamma’s family. After Bariamma (Raza’s maternal grandmother) and Duniyazad Begam (a distant relative) taunt Bilquis for giving birth to a still child, Duniyazad and Bilquis engage in a violent fight – ‘she arose and fell upon Duniyazad Begum, who had been awaiting her eagerly, and the two of them, hands entangled in hair, knees driving into yielding fleshy zones tumbled softly to
the floor (Shame 85). This is only but a prelude to a more serious drama the nation is going to witness, where the politicians will violate all norms and decorum to grab power.

The link between the political developments of the nation and the family is manifest throughout in numerous events. As a coup within the military regime establishes a new dictatorship, a similar coup is also staged in Raza Hyder’s family. Talvar Ulhaq deposes Haroon Harappa from the affections of his lover Naveed Hyder and becomes her bridegroom. On the day of the wedding, there is national as well as family turmoil, pointing not only to Jameson’s theory of the allegorical role of the family, but also indicating the unavoidable link between the nation and the family, as the incidents taking place in both these places are not independent of other. They are connected in some way or other – sometimes in remote, and at other times, in direct, causal relation. The next day a violent civil war broke out in the nation; within the family, Sufiya, being denied the rights of an elder daughter, resorts to demonical violence. Later on, Raza Hyder inflicts on the nation military dictatorship and repressive measures are introduced in the name of religion. In the family, Sufiya Zanobia is now chained and kept drugged in a dungeon (The symbolism is obvious – chained Sufiya stands for the repressed nation). However, this cannot go on for long and Sufiya breaks free and escapes into the countryside, symbolizing the liberation of the people. Sufiya becomes uncontrollably violent. The story finally comes to a full circle when Sufiya, now a beast, moves towards Nishapur and causes Raza’s terrible nemesis. The end finally comes when she blows up Nishapur to smithereens, eliminating both shame and shamelessness. Thus Sufiya Zanobia’s role in the novel takes her
through the entire gamut of relationship between the individual/family and the nation – starting as passive-metaphorical figure, moving on to the active-metaphorical and finally culminating in an active literal role.

Secondly, the family as centre is integral to the traditional culture of the subcontinent in another dangerous way too. Rushdie has said that he sees the leadership of Pakistan, and other dictatorships, as revolving around family cliques. Therefore the analogy fits at the literal and figurative levels. It is significant at both levels that the extended family is quickly reduced to three nuclear families – those of Isky, Raza and Mir vying to subject Pakistan under respective dynasty rules, pointing to the incessant desire of different ‘families’ to perpetuate their names in history. So, history of the subcontinent has also been the history of families as well. Rushdie observes that even after the democratic rule has been initiated in this continent with a lot of fanfare, the desire of the family to be on the driver’s seat of history, has remained the same. In fact, it has now resorted to all sorts of guile, treachery, shrewdness and falsehood, making the role of family in the history of a nation, as ugly as anything. One classic example in this regard is the ironic description of Isky (who stands unmistakably for Bhutto) and his daughter Arjumand (standing for Benazir). Before taking to politics, Isky was a playboy, a rake, a debauch, who dissipated his energies by indulging into excesses. However, when he realizes that for joining politics, he needs to cast himself in a new role, he embarks upon a massive transformational programme; he gives up “stud poker, chemin de fer, private roulette evenings, horse-race fixing, French food, opium and sleeping pills … his habit of seeking out beneath … tables the excited ankles and compliant knees of society beauties, and stopped
visiting the whores” *(Shame 124)*. To put it in a sentence: “He stifled forever the high-pitched giggle of his unreliable playboy self and substituted a rich, full-throated, statesmanlike guffaw” *(Shame 125)*. The entire description of Isky’s transmutation from a playboy into a saint is permeated with fine irony. The final, sarcastic blow is delivered in this mock-encomium: “Did any man ever sacrifice more for his people? He gave up cock-fights, bear-fights, snake-and-mongoose duels; plus disco dancing, and his monthly evenings at the home of the chief film censor, where he had watched special complications of the juiciest bits excised from incoming foreign films” *(Shame 25)*. Consistently, Rushdie also suggests that in spite of the transformation that Isky undertakes to launch himself into politics, he is essentially the same person. He has only put on a face to dupe people. It is primarily for this reason that from the time he assumes power to the time he is arrested and hanged, he has been presented through his daughter Arjumand, who covers up his past to make him into a mythical figure of gigantic proportions. After his death, she devotes herself solely to the task of deifying him, so that he could be restored to history in his new incarnation. She is so passionately involved in this enterprise that she “empties herself of everything to make room for the memories. They fill her up, her bowels, her lungs, her nostrils …” *(Shame 178)*. Through them, she allows her “remembering mind to transmute the preserved fragments of the past into the gold of myth” *(Shame 181)*. All this hypocrisy is directed to the only aim of perpetuating the reign of the family over the nation, even if it is a shameless exhibition of desire for power. It may go against the cause or honour of the nation, but helps the individual to consolidate a dynasty rule, thereby taking the history of the nation under the grip of a family for generations. For example, the final surrender of the army to the Indian forces after
the creation of Bangladesh perpetrated the final shame on the nation, but at the same time, it suited the political ambitions of one individual Isky Harappa, enabling him to take over the reigns of the partitioned nation.

Again, it is because of this desire that the family is subject to another politics within itself. Since Arjumand’s version of Isky veers towards myth, Rushdie not merely deflates it by providing a short version of what actually happened, but also pits it against the account of her mother, who knows the real Isky and his tyrannical ways. She tells her daughter, “... Your father, whom I always loved, was world champion of shamelessness; he was international rogue and bastard number one. You see, daughter. I remember ... Isky ... before he became a saint” (Shame 108).

It is not that Isky was shameless before he joined politics; he remains so even after that, though he maintains a façade of saintliness. The real character of Isky is preserved by his wife in the eighteen shawls she knits during the time she lives in utter loneliness. They provide the most telling account of his shameful deeds: his philandering after women, his authoritarian manner, his torture of his opponents, the death blows he has given to democratic structures, his use of police force to oppress people, the genocide of the Pathans, and his election manoeuvrings. The shawls are a miniature portrait of the historical Bhutto, which is meant to be a foil to his mythical representation by his daughter. The imagery of the shawls is interesting not only because it points to the severity of Rushdie’s disapproval of Isky as a person and leader, but more so because this disapproval comes through Rani, Isky’s wife. This points to the power politics within the family itself: while trying to perpetuate family rule over the nation, Isky uses the
familial site itself to consolidate patriarchal domination. So far from being a healthy, conducive place, the family becomes a close, suffocating, and diseased site, infected with unhealthy relations of jealousy, dishonour and perversion.

This takes us to another important aspect of the family-nation interface in the novel: the shameful position of the women both in the family and in the nation. Rushdie has encapsulated this problem in the character of Sufiya, who fails to come up to the dreams of her parents: she was not born a male. Her father, Raza takes this as a defeat of his aspiration. So she has to live with neglect and later with humiliation and oppression, which ultimately erupts into horrifying violence. She, therefore, embodies ‘shame’ in the novel. But her shame is inextricably linked with the shame of the nation. Both the nation and Sufiya are victims of an imposed sense of shame, burdened by a shame not of their own actions but thrust upon them by the larger forces – political, social and religious in the outer world and familial hierarchy within the family – which rule their lives. A nation which represses its women under a patriarchal and puritanical code, a nation which perpetrates authoritarian rule under the guise of democracy, is shameless. The shame which should rightfully be felt by the perpetrator is transferred, in a tragic irony, on to his victims. What results is a grotesque and inhuman history.

Sufiya is the most intriguing character in the novel. Her psychosomatic disorders along with occasional outbursts of terrible violence are symbolic of the ills that plague the nation and the inevitable outbursts that follow. She is projected as embodiment of ‘shame’ – parents’ sense of shame at their inability to fulfill the expectations of their society by bearing a male child, as also all the shame of the people in the country due to social, political and religious reasons. She felt the
shame of being born a girl from the very beginning for ‘the baby blushed at birth’ and “she was too easily shamed” (Shame 90). Her own mother says: “He (Raza) wanted a hero of a son. I have him an idiot female instead […]. I must accept it: she is my shame” (Shame 101). She is the product of misconstrued notions of shame which flourish in a society that is inhumanly rigid in its norms.

The contrast between Sufiya and the world around her is connected by Rushdie with all-enveloping shame in society. She blushes quite often for people who act shamelessly. The secret of her blushes is that they are caused by shame where it ought to have been felt, but was not. This implies a terrible state in Pakistan – shame is felt for wrong things, while the really shameful things are done without any compunction. A few examples of the shameless treatment of woman in the nation are worth noting:

i) At the beginning of the novel when we find Omar’s mothers have to lead a cloistered existence because their father raises them in strict conformity with “an iron morality that was mostly Muslim” (Shame 13). Consequently they remain uneducated, in a state of interminable captivity, imprisoned in the zenana. The women are subject to ‘double colonization’ – that of patriarchy and religion.

ii) Isky tells his daughter Arjumand in very clear words that she should forget that she is a woman: “It’s a man’s world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in” (Shame 126 emphasis added).

iii) When Sufiya’s sister refuses to marry Haroun because she is in love with Talvar, Hyder and his relatives think that it is a matter of shame and no less
than a scandal. Hyder agrees to her marriage with Talvar not because he has any respect for her wishes, but because he believes that his daughter had behaved no better than a whore, and “a whore with a home is better than a whore in the gutter” (Shame 167).

iv) Although Talvar is in love with Naveed, he considers her no more than a child-bearing machine. The result is that after producing a very large family of twenty seven children, she gets sick and tired and commits suicide.

Aijaz Ahmed in In Theory (1992) argues that the political hopelessness of the novel is reflected in the hopelessness of its female characters. What we find in Shame, Ahmed argues:

... is a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualized (Arjumand, the ‘Virgin Ironpants’), demented and moronic (the twenty-odd years of Zinobia’s childhood), dulled into nullity (Farah), driven to despair (Rani, Bilquis) or suicide (Good News Hyder), or embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity (the Shakil sisters). Throughout, every woman, without exception, is represented through a system of imageries which is sexually overdetermined; the frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity, appears in every case to be the central fact of a woman’s existence (144).

If women are the symbolic underclass of Shame, and are meant to give readers an indication of the effects of power on the oppressed, Ahmed concludes, then Shame must be regarded as a fiction of despair, for there is no room, in such a presentation, for the promise of change and transformation. The female figure that
Ahmad is naturally most interested in is Sufiya Zinobia, ‘the beast’. For Ahmed, the figure of Sufiya provides clinching evidence of the hopelessness and nihilism of Rushdie’s aesthetic. She is presented from the start, he notes, ‘as the very embodiment of the principle of redemption’ – and yet she is made permanently and irrevocably mentally retarded (145). Any possibility of redemption is, therefore, hamstrung from the outset: ‘The novel … becomes incapable of communicating to us, in whatever grotesque forms, the process whereby a woman’s intellectual and emotional abilities may be sapped, or regained (Ahmed 145).

Rani and Bilquis are other examples of this repression. Bilquis and Rani have conventional dreams of getting out of a confined environment and becoming queens by virtue of marrying a prince. To subvert the fairy tale archetype, they expect to be transformed from moth to butterfly, from frog to princess as soon as the designated prince kisses them. Bilquis is chosen by Raza whereas Rani’s marriage is arranged in a conventional manner; but both have the same partly romanticized, partly passive attitude to marriage. Both enjoy love-making and seem to be fully satisfied and fully able to satisfy their husbands. But married life changes a woman’s course even in the most harmonious of unions, and for these two it changes drastically because of their husbands’ political ambitions. Isky peremptorily silences Rani when she, lulled with her first lovemaking, speaks of his companion, the doctor that ‘everybody in town is calling such a bad influence on you’ (Shame 80). This is an omen of what is to come in their future together. Isky will go his way and Rani must draw from whatever inner strengths family and genes have given her. Similarly, Bilquis’ future with Raza is foretold in her
beginning. Rescued during pre-partition riots, wooed with gifts from plundered
booty, she starts her wedded life as a nomadic soldier’s wife and ends it that way,
though Raza at some point becomes primarily a soldier of Islam. Rani, with all her
worldly wisdom and foresight, remains tyrannised by her husband’s domination,
and the burden of family honour and propriety. Crushed beneath the code of
conduct of a society, which expected only niceties from its womenfolk, Bilquis
too, finally breaks down, as she suffers from suppression, cheating and cruel
atrocities. For the women, therefore, the “chains, nevertheless, are no fictions.
They exist. And they are getting heavier” (Shame 173).

Against such a backdrop of political and social repression unleashed by the
authoritarian family, society and state, Rushdie examines the struggle of the
protagonist Omar Khyyam Shakil for his identity. Omar is a peripheral hero,
deliberately chosen by the author to explore the problems of a marginalised
character in the nation’s history. In “Midnight’s Children and Shame”, Rushdie
talks of his choice of a different hero:

... I thought this time I would like to talk about a character who
was marginal, a very peripheral figure [like] people who are mostly
shaped by things that happen around them, not by the things they
do themselves, people who are kind of spectators in their own fates
(MC and Shame 3).

Omar’s crisis commences right from the time of his birth. An illegitimate child
with three mothers, and a father who is most likely an ‘Angrez Sahib’, he is
afflicted “from his earliest days, by a sense of inversion, of a world turned upside-
down. And by something worse: “the fear that he was living at the edge of the
world, so close that he might fall off at any moment" (*Shame* 21). He confesses to Isky that he is 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” (*Shame* 24). At one point, the narrator sums him up rather sharply: “Dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?” (*Shame* 25) The repeated emphasis on the peripheral status of Omar makes him a puzzling character. If he is so marginal to the action, then what is he meant for? A major clue about this is provided by him almost at the end of the novel, when he says about himself:

> I am 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 (*Shame* 283).

Importantly, Omar’s experience of being in the periphery and being repressed, starts even within his family. The claustrophobic atmosphere in the family is a result of the unhealthy relation existing among his mothers as well as between him and these mothers. They are dictatorial, repressive and Omar starts hating them from an early age. So Omar’s realization is horrific – he only enjoys the “pseudo-liberty of a zoo animal, and his mothers were his loving, carrying keepers” (*Shame* 35). This feeling is largely responsible for Omar’s early degeneration into a peripheral personality. Complete ignorance about his father’s identity troubles him too. All these result in him a disorder arising out of imbalance, confusion of identity, a disturbing feeling of being peripheral, leading
to increasing restlessness. For the next twelve years, he is suffocated in his reclusive mansion. All these years, Omar views the outer world through a telescope. Along with this, he is afflicted by a sense of inversion, of a world upside down and a fear that he is living at the edge of the world. This vertigo is a symbolic manifestation of a sense of disorientation which eternally troubles him. As part of his endeavour to create an identity of his own he starts returning to father figure like Eduardo Rodrigues, his schoolmaster. Thereafter his search of identity takes a wrong turn, manifesting itself in a negative form. When he re-enters the narrative at the age of thirty-five, he is a reputed doctor, a degenerate without shame, so much that Rani Humayun sums him up in the following remark:

Fellow doesn’t know the meaning of the word [shame]; as if some essential part of his education has been overlooked or perhaps he has deliberately chosen to expunge the word from his vocabulary lest it’s explosive (Shame 81).

The second stage of Omar’s quest begins with his association with Isky Harappa. On the professional front, he gains a high reputation as a doctor, but on the personal front, he continues to lead a life of abject shamelessness. The relation provides him a brief support to sustain him, symbolized by the silver-headed sword stick he receives from Isky which helps him from falling. But, since this association is based on a shameless desire to enjoy life in the most unhealthy way, it cannot develop in a meaningful, robust relation that can provide Omar the much needed familial space. Ultimately, he is rejected unceremoniously by Isky to go back to his peripheral status once more.
Thus, Omar, as a peripheral creature, crosses frontier after frontier but can never come to the centre. In this, of course, Rushdie puts in his own anxiety as a diasporic writer:

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 ... I am comparing gravity with belonging.

Both phenomena observably exist: my feet stay on the ground, and I have never been angrier than I was on the day my father told me he had sold my childhood home in Bombay (Shame 85-86).

The third and final stage of the quest begins with a transformation.

“Ditched by one great figure of the period, Omar Khayyam seeks to hitch himself to another star” (Shame 144). But it is this relationship which ultimately gives this peripheral hero an identity. The invitation to treat the mentally retarded daughter of Raza Hyder, Sufiya Zinobia, ultimately proves to be redemptive for Omar. Both born outside the misconceived norms of the society, they are marginalized and hence perhaps share an affinity between them. The marriage with Sufiya ultimately provides Omar the scope of becoming confidant of another man (Sufiya’s father) moulding the fate of the nation, but more importantly, it provides him an opportunity to redefine himself as a human being through his tender care
of Sufiya. The physical transformations that come over him now are actually symbolic of his inner transformation. For the first time in his life, he gains self-respect as he views himself with new eyes: “I may be no movie star, he told his mirror, but I have ceased to be a cartoon” (Shame 212). Palpable, positive changes come over him as he goes for simple living and hard work (fourteen hours a day at the Mount Hira Hospital), with an ample ‘evidence of reformation’, and prompting Shahbanou to remark ‘you’re not such a wretch as you say’ (Shame 212). He also shows great courage and compassion in refusing to pay heed to Raza and insisting on her treatment through hypnosis, though he cannot stop her from escaping.

But still, Shame fails to reach a hopeful conclusion. While in Midnight’s Children the reader feels overwhelmed with possibilities, in Shame the reader feels trapped in a dead end. According to Rushdie, this is an effect of his different feelings concerning the two nations with which he was dealing:

Midnight’s Children was a book that was deliberately constructed to be very open; Shame describes a very closed society. And that has to do, I suppose broadly, with the differences in my perception of India and Pakistan. If the one society asks for an open sort of approach, the other demands a closed one – and so Shame is a closed system (SRI 63).

The emphasis in Shame is therefore on enclosure, entrapment and alienation. Pakistan is ‘a miracle that went wrong’ (Shame 87): a tragic betrayal of the fairy tale hopes that had attended Independence in the Indian sub-continent in 1947.
The different treatment that Rushdie provides Pakistan results in its portrait as a desolate, despondent and oppressive landscape. Bounded by a noose-like frontier that strangles its inhabitants, Pakistan in *Shame* can only present a dystopia, an absolute area of darkness that is incapable of delivering its inhabitants from its throes. This all-pervading claustrophobic atmosphere has been highlighted in Rushdie’s use of the house image in the novel. Unlike the teeming, crowded quality of the plurality of Indian life that Saleem in *Midnight’s Children* symbolises – the multitudes that jostle inside him and eventually break him up – *Shame* is riddled with images of empty, labyrinthine houses in remote places and frontiers surrounded by nothingness. Thus the house in ‘Nishapur,’ Omar Khayyam’s “mother-country” is a “reclusive mansion,” a world that is “neither material nor spiritual” a “sweltering, entropical zone” where “nothing new seemed capable of growth,” a “hideously indeterminate frontier universe,” an “infertile and time-eroded labyrinth” and a “thing-infested jungle” (*Shame* 30-31), while Rani Harappa’s house is located in the “backyard of the universe” (*Shame* 94). Mohenjo, (Mohenjo-Daro means “the mound of the dead”), the Harappa country estate, is also a closed universe that stretches “from horizon to horizon,” and is “afflicted by a chronic water shortage, (and) populated by laughing scornful monsters” (*Shame* 94). The house itself is described as a small labyrinth – “Verandahs run along all four walls; a long covered mosquito-netted walkway joins the kitchen bungalow,” – and is opulent – “And oil paintings and chandeliers and high ceilings and a flat tar-macadamed roof […]” (*Shame* 95). Or, it is a house like that of Bariamma which is a ‘forest of new relatives,’ ‘a blood jungle’ where Bilquis has to share a ‘cavernous bedroom’ with forty other female relatives. It is, therefore a space witnessing constant war among its members.
In such a familial space, it is only natural that the protagonists will end up in disintegration and death. This is primarily because Omar and Sufiya fail to create a redemptive familial bond between them. Though Omar attempts a late transformation, he cannot sustain it due to inability in his female counterpart Sufiya to contribute to the creative project of family. So, while in *Midnight’s Children*, Saleem’s quest for truth leads him on a spiral journey of expanding consciousness, which enables him to survive all disasters and to keep his hope alive in the next generation, Omar and Sufiya must end up in the hellish claustrophobic mansion at Nishapur with all hopes aborted and dreams shattered. Though Saleem, at the end of *Midnight’s Children*, finds himself lost in the thronging multitudes of Bombay, he has a redemptive realization that even when his story ends, Aadam’s begins. He is confident that this story will go on and on ‘until the thousand and first generation.’ In absence of that hope, that next generation, that virtue of procreation that saves the midnight’s children, *Shame* brings no hope for Pakistan, as the novel fails to form a robust family.

III

Burning up Our Own House

In *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995), Rushdie continues with a similar interface between the nation and family: while the function of the family in the narration of the nation’s history is predominantly allegorical, Rushdie also foregrounds the meeting points of the nation and the family throughout the novel to show how crucially one influences the other. There are clearly two issues that Rushdie
explores in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Firstly, the novel has been intended as a continuation of *Midnight’s Children* to show a further degeneration of India in all fields as we have entered the last quarter of the twentieth century. Secondly, the novel, like all Rushdie’s previous ones, is an attempt to rewrite national space as a space of complex heterogeneity in which cultural differences constantly disturb the imagined constructions of cultural and national identity. To that end, Rushdie does not only limit himself to contemporary history, but goes back in time and moves across spaces to connect the political events of the twentieth-century India with some remote events in the world-history – the Spanish reconquest of Granada in 1492, the expulsion of Jews and Moors from Catholic Spain in the fifteenth century, the founding of the spice trade between Europe and India, and Portuguese colonial expansion in the fifteenth century.

In the famous speech given at the moment of India’s freedom from colonial powers, Nehru gave a voice to the collective desire to create a secular, democratic, tolerant, pluralist and socially just nation – ‘the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell’ (McArthur 234). His announcement at that historic moment was a springhead of dreams –

> We are citizens of a great country on the verge of a bold advance, and we have to live up to that high standard. All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action (237).
In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie critically explores whether the first generation of the independent Indians lived up to these hopes. His findings were ambivalent – though he is not very enthusiastic about the condition of the ‘midnight’s children’, he finds the lineaments of future hope in Saleem’s son, the representative of future generations. But over the years, Rushdie lost even this bleak ray of hope. After six years of the publication of *Midnight’s Children*, he wrote in *Imaginary Homeland*:

> It’s a sad truth that nobody finds the novel’s ending pessimistic anymore, because what has happened in India since 1981 is so much darker than I had imagined. If anything, the book’s last pages, with their suggestion of a new, more pragmatic generation rising up to take over from the midnight children, now seem absurdly romantic (IH 33).

Written fourteen years after *Midnight Children*, *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is actually the fictional embodiment of India’s post-Independence political life, besmeared with communal violence and rampant political corruption. The political resolution that the subsequent generations will take India to a better future nosedived into frustration as greed, cynicism, aggression, malaise and ennui have become the determining characteristics of this generation. The novel is a record of this frustration. It traces Moor’s family history back to the early years of the twentieth century. Moraes Zogoiby’s (The Moor, as he was nicknamed by his mother) experience of India reaches into the 1980s and early 1990s to glance at ‘the disintegration of the post-emergency, anti-Indira coalition government’ (MLS 261) the return of Mrs. Gandhi to power in 1980, the death of Sanjoy Gandhi and the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. Set mostly in Bombay, the novel tells ‘the story of
the fall from grace of a high-born cross-breed’, Moraes Zogoiby, who is heir to ‘the spice-trade-’n’-big-business crores of the da Gama-Zogoiby dynasty of Cochin’ (MLS 5). As Moor tells the story of four generations of his family from the last four decades of the nineteenth century till the present, it becomes clear that the text is tracing the fortunes of the narrator’s family in complex, allegorical relation to the fate of the Indian nation. As in the case of Saleem Sinai, the genetically ‘impure’ protagonist of Midnight Children, the mixed identity of the Moor is made to parallel the heterogeneous composition of Indian population and cultural life. But while the narrative begins just after the independence to encompass the growing authoritarian politics, corruption, caste antagonisms, illiteracy of this post-independence India, it also takes into account the various other challenges like the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in the recent years.

In the first official discourse of Indian nationalism, Nehru proposed a process of national formation whereby the different communities and religions, each of which had made distinctive and significant historical contributions to the sub-continent, were incorporated into a collective unity. According to this secular concept of nationalism, Hinduism was just one of the sources of India’s greatness. For Nehru, secular nationalism became the most authentic testimony to the capacity of Indians to maintain a cohesive heterogeneity. The secular model of ‘unity among diversity’ provided Nehru with the organizing political framework through which he sought to unite the cultural heterogeneity of the newly independent India. In his book The Discovery of India (1946), Nehru speaks of India as an all-inclusive ideal with the ability to bring together different ‘classes, castes, religions, races’ (28).
But from the 1980s, with the diminishing popularity of the Congress and the rise to prominence of Hindu-based political organizations, the ‘secular’ narrative of the nation’s history started to be interrogated more openly. By trying to discover the India’s ‘true’ Vedic past, the BJP wanted to legitimise its own claim to Indian national identity and undermine the minorities. Ultimately this endeavour took a distorted manifestation in the razing of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by Hindu extremists.

It is against this, too, that Rushdie writes *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, which unmistakably registers his growing disenchantment with secularism, as is manifest in India. What *The Moor’s Last Sigh* offers is an interrogation of the liberal multiculturalist terms with which secular nationalism constructs a unifying narrative. The text suggests, as Sharmani Patricia Gabriel observes, “the secular nation’s constant harking back to the past for a common history is unable to confront the reality of the social relations presented by the contentious plural politics of the contemporary nation” (79).³

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* records a host of critical moments where the secular narrative of India had received fatal blows over the years: the Gujrati-Marathi language riots that broke out in 1957 and ended with the partition of the state of Bombay, the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi set off by the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 by Sikhs seeking vengeance for the Indian Army’s attack on the Golden Temple, Amritsar, the equally shocking assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by Tamil extremists, and the Hindu Muslim riots in Ayodhya and Bombay following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. And of course there was the stunning effect of the emergency. The narrator remarks, “I had begun to come unstuck. We
all had. After the Emergency people started seeing through different eyes. Before the Emergency we were Indians. After it we were Christian Jews” (MLS 235).

Thus *The Moor’s Last Sigh* offers a critique of secular nationalism as practised in India. Rushdie obviously presents the contending realities of the contemporary Indian nation, which has all along tried to write out the ‘other’ in the narrative of the national identity. *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, from the beginning, recognizes this reality and works on the basic premise that India is an amalgam of disparate and eclectic elements, the plural traditions of different peoples and groups whose complex, contingent and shifting interactions make up the actual shape and identity of the nation. The text breaks with the most important assumption underlying most models of nationalism – the privileging of the nation as a cohesive and homogeneous space of collective identification. Rather, it focuses on the national ‘other’ (or ‘others’) – the inevitable polyphonic voices which create a constant jarring note on the project of homogeneity the nation tries to write. And it is this polyphonic note that Bhabha encapsulates in his concept of “cultural difference”. ‘Cultural difference’, Bhabha argues, focuses on the ambivalence of culture as a space of agency and intervention that unsettles hegemonic readings of culture by envisaging national histories of people:

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation. And it is the very authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of enunciation. The enunciative process introduces a split
in the performative present of cultural identification; a split
between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition,
a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary
negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural
demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice
of domination, or resistance (LoC 34-35 emphases original).

Going by Bhabha, we see how cultural difference, by interrogating the unities of
nationalism, aims to represent national cultural and identity from the perspective
of the minority or marginalized.

*The Moor’s Last Sigh* works towards the formulation of a national
aesthetic that resists prescriptive definitions. Interestingly, from the beginning, the
novel foregrounds the difference that constitutes the national space through the
allegorical use of the familial site. In the opening section entitled ‘A House
Divided’, the feuding between the Menezes and Lobo Clans, the division of the da
Gama family business into two, and the partitioning of the family home on Cabral
Island are replete with clues that highlight the antagonistic politics of difference
that characterize the national space. In keeping with this, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*
foregrounds Moor’s hybrid and dynamic universe wherefrom he resists the fixed
conceptions of culture, and the tyranny of the majority: “Majority, that mighty
elephant, and her sidekick, Major-Minority, will not crush my tale beneath her
feet. Are not my personages Indian, every one?” (*MLS* 87)

So, Moor’s tale is composed of the minority communities Portuguese-
Catholic and Spanish-Jewish communities. This mongrelization, which Rushdie
defines as a cultural politics that “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling,
the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combination of human
beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs (IH 394), has been allegorized by
‘masala aesthetic’. Moraes Zogoiby personifies the ‘masala’ as ‘melange,
hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that’ (IH 394). The Masala binds the family
and the nation together in its aspect of mongrelization: Moraes is a product of the
‘pepper love’ between his parents and their ‘passionate conjoining’ in a ‘foetid
atmosphere heavy with the odours of cardamom and cumin” (MLS 90); Moor is
raised as neither Catholic nor Jew but a “Jewish – anonymous, a cathjew nut, a
stew-pot, a mongrel cur ... a real Bombay mix” (MLS 104).

Moor’s father, Abraham Zogoiby is one of the few remaining members of
the ancient Cochin Jewish community of India. His lineage on his father’s side
can be traced to the first batch of Jews who arrived in India after their expulsion
from Spain in 1492. The ancestry is even more complicated by the possibility that
one of the Moor’s Jewish ancestors who had left Spain and settled in India was the
mistress of Bobadil, the last Moorish ruler of Granada, who was driven into exile
along with the Jews, following the conquest of Spain by the Catholic rulers
Ferdinand and Isabella in the fifteenth century. Abraham later on realizes that his
mother’s claim of their ‘purity of race’ is nothing but a fiction. Moreover, Moor’s
mother, Aurora da Gama comes from a Catholic spice-trading family based in
Cochin. She proudly claims descent from Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese
navigator. Thus, Moor’s family history is a classic example of cultural
intermingling, as Moor, referring to his own polyglot family history, poses the
following question:
Christians, Portuguese and Jews; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns … can this really be India? Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara, is this the place? (MLS 87)

This mingling is also foregrounded through Aurora’s artistic composition

‘Mooristan’, a place

where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and wash off away. Place where an air-man can drown in water, or else grow gills, where a water-creature can get drunk, but also choke off, on air. One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumbo’ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpsestine (MLS 226).

The novel is once again a family saga, the story this time of the doomed Zogoiby family. As with Shame, the text is once again prefaced with a family tree. It is a story of sexual infatuation and betrayal; of conquest, family trade and political intrigue; of religion and religious conflict. Aadam, who in Midnight’s Children, represented Saleem’s hope for the future of Independent India, has ironically grown up to be a shallow foot, who has sacrificed political idealism for financial greed. He represents a new generation that has arrived full of brash confidence and a desire to take over the world, but cares little for political justice or social welfare. He is only concerned with money and self-promotion. Adam’s female equivalent is Uma Sarasvati who is equally plural entity, using that to destructive effect. She systematically deceives Moraes and his family, and finally destroys the vital connection between Moraes and his mother by tape-recording
him cursing Arora during bouts of engineered love-play. Moraes realizes, though too late, that

\[\text{In the matter of Uma Sarasvati it had been the pluralist Uma with her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth, who had turned out to be the bad egg (MLS 272).}\]

Yet this is not just a family story, but a replica of the story of treachery and brutality that marked the entire nation. Thus the overall theme of degeneration and betrayal is explored through a subtle intertwining of the family story and the nation’s – Aurora Zogoiby’s paintings, very much like Rani Harappa’s shawls, interlinking the micro-narrative of the family in this novel with the macronarrative of the nation. The fortunes of this trading family are closely involved with public events. Rushdie, in his typical manner of narration, describes how through the open windows of the da Gama family, not only flies but Gandhi and Nehru made their entry as well:

And if the flies buzzed in through the opened netting-windows, and the naughty gusts through the parted panes of leaded glass, then the opening of the shutters let in everything else: the dust and the tumult of boats in Cochin harbor, the horns of freighters and tugboat chugs, the fishermen’s dirty jokes and the throb of their jellyfish stings, ... the tales of Communist troublemaking and Congresswallah politics, the names Gandhi and Nehru, the rumours of famine in the east and hunger strikes in the north, ... (MLS 9).
The Zogoiby family is ‘handcuffed to history’ in a similar way to that of Saleem; one of Moor’s sisters dies in the Bhopal disaster, and when Sanjoy Gandhi is killed in a plane crash, Moor tells us, “I, too, was plunged towards catastrophe” (MLS 274-76). The link continues till the end. Both the family and the nation are seedbeds of heinous treachery and conspiracy and the plot is peopled with hired goons and contract killers. Aurora is killed in a fall from the high terrace of her Bombay house. Towards the end, we understand that it is her husband, Abraham Zogoiby, ‘the most evil man that ever lived’ who is responsible for this.

Corruption pervades the entire world, as we find Moor himself is employed by his father’s business rival Mainduck in a campaign of violent reprisal. Again, the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya and the burglary at Zogoiby bequest are juxtaposed in a bizarre manner. Finally, there is an apocalyptic explosion that destroys whole buildings and families and public figures. In an extremely pessimistic note Rushdie (through Moraes) observes:

The explosions were our own evil – no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible to defend (MLS 372-73).

Moor takes off for Spain to avoid arrest. Thus the family and the nation are intertwined inseparably from the beginning till the destruction.

In all the three novels discussed above, Rushdie has used similar kinds of motifs and imagery. Divisions and politics within family, monstrous physical
defects in protagonists, double identities have recurred in all these novels to allegorise erosion of the civil values and rapidly increasing deterioration of the subcontinental politics. In Rushdie’s novels, therefore the family-nation interface has emerged to be a very complex one, the constituents knotted with one another in a relation of power politics. Unfortunately, however, in all its relations, the family (either in its allegorical role or in its role of resistance to the nation) fails to emancipate the individual in a really free world left to him alone.

Notes

1. Contending John Fowles’ assertion that novelists are gifted with “whole sight,” Rushdie writes in “Imaginary Homelands”: “Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions” (IH 12). This limitation is at the very centre of the novel, and suggested through the metaphor of the perforated sheet, because of which Saleem’s grandfather could look at his future wife only in bits and parts; his mother too could love her husband only in fragments.

Similarly, in another metaphoric incident, Saleem cuts up bits and parts of newspaper headlines to prepare a note of warning for Commander Sabarmati: “In the secrecy of a bathroom, I glued my complete note – my first attempt at rearranging history – on to a sheet of paper …” (MC 361).

2. By making Raza and Iskander cousins-in-law Rushdie displays another brilliant tool to analyse the family-nation interface. On the one hand, by-
being ‘in-laws’, they belong to one extended family and their mutual struggle to usurp power points to the shameless family feuds over the issue of national power. This is a common phenomenon in the history of the subcontinent. But this might, on the other hand, point to the similarity between these two power mongers as well – they are not only related by their marriage, but they also belong to the same community of shameless politicians – the bond between them being the lust for power.

3. Rushdie’s diminishing optimism about the ‘secular nation’ is already discernible in *Imaginary Homelands*, where Rushdie observes that the idea of nationalism in India itself “had grown more and more chauvinistic, had become narrower and narrower” (*IH* 32).

4. As Ania Loomba writes in her book *Colonialism/Post-colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) “in ‘metropolitan’ nations as well as ‘third world’ ones, the difficulty of creating national cultures that might preserve, indeed nourish internal differences has emerged as a major issue in our time” (203).

5. Even the narrator’s name, Moor, as Shamani Gabriel points out in her essay “‘Imaginary Homelands’ and Diaspora: History Nation and Contestation in Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*”, itself problematised the idea of a distinct cultural identity. The Moors were originally Muslims of mixed Berber and Arab descent, who lived in north-west Africa and Southern Spain from the eighth to the fifteenth century.

6. Aurora’s paintings also play a significant role in the novel. There is an unmistakable preference for the plural over the singular, the dialectical over the monologic in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. This preference has been effectively expressed through Aurora’s paintings. Figures from ancient and modern
history consort with hybrids from her imagination, 'half-woman half-tiger, half-man half-snake ... sea monsters and mountain ghouls'.

Aurora had composed her giant work in such a way that the images of her own family had to fight their way through this hyper-abundance of imagery, she was suggesting that the privacy of Cabral Island was an illusion and this mountain, this hive, this endlessly metamorphic line of humanity was the truth ... (MLS 59-60).

So her dominant form of art is 'the mythic-romantic mode in which history, family, politics and fantasy jostled each other like the great crowds at V. T. or Churchgate Stations' (MLS 203-4).

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