The efforts of several generations of writers—stretching from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the 1860s to Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan to the experimental duo of G.V. Desani and Arun Joshi in the 1960s—have attained a triumphant climax in the outburst of vibrant new talents in the 1980s and ’90s. With the publication of Midnight’s Children the Indian English Novel has finally established its credentials, paving the way for a set of novels with similar preoccupations. Rushdie’s experiment opened the floodgates for Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee who in many ways imitated him. They form a trinity which heralded the eighties novel.

Despite the breakthrough the critical attention which the novel of the ’80s has attracted is incomplete and at times unsatisfactory. Salman Rushdie with his unbridled talent has dominated this critical scenario over shadowing the substantial contribution of his contemporaries Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee. This thesis rose from the need to study these authors not as writers possessing individual talents but functioning as a group and representing a radically new phase in the development of the Indian English Novel. This approach might be helpful in providing a totality of perception of the nature and significance of the novel of the ’80s.
The novel of the '80s has evolved from a new ethos, a transformed sensibility and startlingly original perspective. This thesis has chosen to study selected novels of three authors, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee. The novels chosen for study are Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* and Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story*. The texts chosen do not merely belong chronologically to the '80s by virtue of their dates of publication, they represent the principal features of the new genre. This study comprising five chapters deals with the significant changes from two aspects— the thematic and technical.

In Chapter One, The origin, growth and the development of the Indian English Novel have been discussed. It has been shown how the eighties novel is radically different from its predecessors. This chapter ends with the emergence of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee on the literary scene.

Chapter Two, ‘History, Politics and the Individual’ commences the thematic study with a discussion of the dynamic interaction between History, Politics and the Individual. The novel of the eighties gives a new perspective by its refreshing approach to the subject. The three novelists Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee, in spite of their
pre-occupations with contemporary issues, still find it imperative to recapitulate the history of the past in their novels. This recapitulation serves to propound the new theory advocated by the novel of the eighties. These novelists, particularly Salman Rushdie, regard individuals as being linked to history in three ways- History-bearing, History-suffering and History-creating. This chapter has been divided into three sections to depict the three facets. Incidents pertaining to the 'Pre-independence' era from all the five novels have been brought under the section pre-independence to show the individual as History bearing. In a similar exercise the section entitled 'Partition' shows the individual as History suffering. The third section 'Post-independence' diffuses the myth of history as Juggernaut. The individual is projected in a hitherto unexplored role as attempting to create history.

Chapter Three 'The Search for identity' deals with the theme of the search for identity of the protagonists in the five novels against the background of the new cosmopolitanism and the increasing complexity of life in the sub-continent.

The protagonists of Midnight's Children, Shame, The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines and English, August: An Indian Story have been shown to pass through three distinct phases in the course of their search for identity. Each phase traces a definite movement with the third phase proving the most decisive in the search.
Chapter Four 'Techniques' analyses the innovative techniques used by the novelists. It studies how the realistic mode can no longer serve the purpose of the novel. The increasing complexities of modern life have forced the novelists to give the narrative a new structure. The new novel interfaces the oral narrative structure with various post-modernist techniques. Episodicity, story within story, fantasy, myth, magic realism, cinematic techniques and the new vibrant usage of the English language all combine to give the novel of the eighties an unusual novelty.

In chapter five 'Conclusion', the discussion of the eighties is rounded off with a summary of observations made in the course of the thesis. Since the novelists under discussion are contemporaries and their writings too recent to have benefitted from extended critical discussion, any comment that has been made is at best tentative, not conclusive. These new novelists have taken the novel forward by continuing the tradition and going beyond it. The present study has aimed to place the Indian English Novel of the eighties in a critical perspective and indicate the significance of this writing in formulating an emerging consciousness.

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