CHAPTER - 2

HISTORY, POLITICS AND THE INDIVIDUAL
History and politics have always been a predominant preoccupation of the Indian-English novelist. This compulsive obsession was perhaps inevitable since the genre developed concurrently with the climactic phase of colonial rule, the stirrings of nationalist sentiment and its full flowering in the final stages of the freedom movement. The Indian English Novel developed at a time when the consciousness of being a part of history was a national phenomenon. The intense emotional stirring of a people united in the effort to break free from the shackles of foreign rule made individuals unusually conscious of being a part of a momentous historical movement. This consciousness is exemplified in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgoankar with R.K.Narayan providing glimpses; it also finds expression in the later novels of Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Attia Hossain.

Therefore the theme of History, Politics and the Individual might not appear as particular to the novel of the 80s. However, the difference of treatment- a shift in the focus, a new array of techniques through which the theme is expressed-gives it an indisputable novelty. History and politics dominated the proceedings in the earlier novels but with the individual relegated to the periphery. The individual gets lost in the movement as can be seen in Raja Rao's Kanthapura or R.K.Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma, and Manohar Malgoankar's A Bend in the Ganges. The novels on partition, Train to Pakistan and Azadi present the individuals as helpless
victims of historical forces. The image of history projected in these novels is that of a Juggernaut rolling impassively over all that comes within its purview. In the novel of the 80s, the hitherto peripheral individual is thrust into the centre stage, no longer linked to history as a passive victim but projected as himself an agent of history. Rushdie, in whose novels this perspective is present in the most striking manner, is a self-consciously theoretical novelist who has propounded his own theory of history. He regards individuals as being linked to history in several ways as he explains in Midnight’s Children.¹

I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively—modes of connection composed of dualistically combined-configurations... 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 the battle cry. The union of ‘passive’ and ‘metaphorical’ encompasses all socio-political trends and events which, 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 Walkeskeshwar Reservoir, which unleashed the cat invasion. And finally there is the 'node' of the 'active-metaphorical", which groups together the occasions on which things done by me or to me were mirrored in the macrocosm of public affairs, and my private existence was shown to be symbolically at one with history. The mutilation of my middle finger was a case in point, because when I was detached from my fingertip and blood (neither Alpha nor Omega) rushed out in fountains, a similar thing happened to history, and all sorts of everywhichthing began pouring out all over us (MC-286)
History then is linked to the individual in three ways. K. Raghavendra Rao succinctly sums up the lengthy passage, as-"history bearing, history suffering and history creating." In 'On the Uses and Disadvantage of History for Life', Nietzsche discusses the three modes of historical consciousness- "the unhistorical, which comprises the power of 'forgetting', of limiting one's horizon, the historical, which is what we understand by conventional history- the paralysing 'burden of history', finally the super-historical- a sense that allows for a greater cultural view." The last mode of history creating as expounded by Rushdie is similar to Nietzsche's super-historical mode. Commenting on this last mode, David W. Price says, "Only he who is oppressed and wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has the need for critical history."

While the earlier novels focussed on individuals as history bearing and history suffering, the novel of the 80s projects the history-creating individual. The myth of history as Juggernaut is diffused. Being a product of the post-independent generation, the novel of the 80s primarily focuses on the post-independent scenario and projects the individual in a hitherto unexplored role as history creating. The glimpses of pre-independence and partition years expose the limitations of the earlier perspective. This Chapter has been divided into three sections dealing with the pre-independence, partition and post-independent eras respectively, in order to focus on the new perceptions of the link between history and the individual.
Historical forces have a tremendous effect on almost all things in the world today. To quote Walter Allen:

In the literature of an age, its conflicts, tendencies, obsessions are uncovered and made manifest to a degree which is continually astonishing; good writers are, so to speak, mediumistic to the deeper stirrings of life of their time while they are still unknown to, or at any rate unsuspected by, the public, politicians and current received opinion... contemporary novels are the mirror of the age, but a very special kind of mirror that reflects not merely the external features of the age but also its inner face, its nervous system, coursing of its blood and the unconscious promptings and conflicts which sway it.5

The novels of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee are mirrors of this kind, establishing a dynamic inter-action between the individual and the multifarious forces of history. Ralph J. Crane emphasises this aspect with particular reference to Rushdie:

What Rushdie has done in Midnight’s Children, is to recognize and demonstrate that the Indian situation
is the perfect metaphor for characteristically twentieth-century questions about history, language, social and political fragmentation and creativity. Whereas Narayan's view in Waiting for the Mahatma or Singh's view in Train to Pakistan, for example is microcosmic, Rushdie's view in Midnight's Children is certainly macrocosmic. India, because of its size and complexity, and the fecundity of its myth and cult is the ideal metaphor for the plight of the individual and history.6

Constantly ruminating, grappling with the current complex issues, and trying to come to terms with the present, the novel of the 80s still finds it imperative to constantly go back to the past. Amiav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and Upamanyu Chatterjee intersperse their narratives with incidents from the pre-Independence struggle and the partition holocaust. The new techniques in these novels do not present incidents and events of history in chronological order. Current events bring to focus events of the past. So artistically is the new and old synthesised that events of the past come alive, making it a living experience. In another significant way, the novel of the 80s present a radically different perception of history. History is no more the biographies of kings and queens but finds an important place for the common man as an active participant in the making of history. Salman Rushdie is deeply concerned with the politics of the sub-continent.
In an interview given to Gordon Wise, Salman Rushdie calls himself "a fairly political animal." In the course of the interview, he claims that his novels "Midnight's Children and Shame are novels 'on historical themes.'"7

His presentation of politics and history is innovative. The fusing of these two aspects with the life of the individual has been done with dexterity and imaginative power. Thus he fulfills what he had said earlier about the purpose of writing *Midnight's Children* "to relate private lives to public events and to explore the limits of individuality in a country as populous and culturally variegated as India."8 *Shame* attempts a similar exploration against the politico-historical scenario of Pakistan. These novels try to highlight complex networks of transcultural relationship between the individual and historical forces. "It seems to me", Rushdie remarks, "that everything in both books has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history."9 Rushdie's belief that one cannot separate history and the individual as "they interpenetrate and that is how the writer needs to examine them, the one in the context of the other"10 is best exemplified in Saleem Sinai's flamboyant claim that he is "handcuffed to history" (*MC*-3). The narrator protagonist feels that "his destiny is indissolubly chained to those of my (his) country" (*MC*-3).

Niel Ten Kortenaar comments, "Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is commonly read as a national allegory giving imaginative form to India and its history."11
This aspect can be seen when Rushdie puts into Midnight's Children virtually all of twentieth century history—the Jallianwala Bagh incident, Quit India movement, the Cabinet Mission, the Muslim League and its role in the partitioning of the country, riots and bloodshed subsequent to Independence, the Five-Year Plans, re-organisation of Indian states, language riots, the war with China, the theft of the sacred relic from the Hazratbal mosque in Kashmir, the wars with Pakistan, the liberation of Bangladesh and finally the emergency. There are also other events which show the typical Indian co-existence of discordant elements—religious fanaticism juxtaposed with secular ideals.

Incidents from pre-Independence clearly focus on the mammoth human struggle for freedom. The will to be free and unbounded is the central point in all the novels. The patriotic fervour, the tireless endeavour, the unflagging human spirit and the inner strength are highlighted and are the point of focus. The novels capture the variety and range of the individual’s involvement in the nationalist movement. Some of them in the fight for freedom chose the militant path and some others the path of non-violence. What was common was the fire of freedom raging relentlessly in everyone’s heart. In the course of depicting this struggle, the novels present individuals as being engulfed by the forces of history. Hence the individual is presented as history bearing.
The writers of the 80s also show that the suffering did not end with the coming of freedom. The partition drama is depicted as a nightmarish experience with the individual in his role of history suffering, the victim of the inexorable forces of history. The new novel with its innovativeness enables the post-Independence generation to imaginatively re-live that horrendous experience. The novels show that the post-Independence scenario is equally challenging. Today the word politics has acquired a variety of unpleasant meanings. The novelists show the titanic struggle of the individual in the post-Independence era against Herculean odds. His efforts to create a new positive history emphasise the idea of the individual as history creating.

The historico-political consciousness of Rushdie is blatantly on display. In Amitav Ghosh and Upamanyu Chatterjee, this consciousness is given a more muted expression. They deal with the inextricable link between history and the individual in less concentrated but equally meaningful manner.

Hence this chapter is divided into three sections namely pre-Independence-showing the individual as history bearing, partition-showing the individual as history suffering and the post-Independence-showing the individual as history creating.
The demarcation may not be universally acceptable because of the inevitable overlapping of the categories. However it has been found convenient as a means of organising this study to maintain a necessary focus on the new dynamic connection being established between history and the individual.

**PRE-INDEPENDENCE-THE INDIVIDUAL AS HISTORY BEARING**

Through an encapsulation of the experiences of the three generations of the Sinai family, the narrative of *Midnight’s Children* moves through the pre-independence, Partition and the post-independence eras of contemporary Indian history. Saleem Sinai the narrator protagonist fuses public events with his personal life and that of his family. From Kashmir to Amritsar and from there to Agra and from Agra to Delhi, Saleem narrates the journey of his maternal grandparents Dr. Aadam Aziz and his wife Naseem. With the progress of the story of the journey, we see the progress of the Indian struggle for Independence from Jallianwala Bagh to the partition of India. Dr. Aadam Aziz passes through various situations, which are connected with every turn in the march of Indian history. Commenting on the role of Dr. Aadam Aziz Neeraja Mattoo says:

Through Aziz’s story we are introduced to one of the important themes in this study of India; the
juxtaposition of the old and the new, the myth ridden fabulous past and its attendant narrowness and prejudice on the one hand and modernism which brings its own problems on the other.\textsuperscript{12}

The actual connection between Dr. Aziz and history is set into motion when in Kashmir, old Tai, the shikara man, brings a summons to him to treat the blind landowner’s daughter Naseem. The perforated sheet, through which Dr. Aziz gets partial glimpses of his future bride, is a symbolic anticipation of the fragmented history of India, which is to unfold. Dr. Aziz's relationship with his “sectioned” patient Naseem keeps pace with the developments of the 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 co-incidences have littered and perhaps befouled my family’s existence in the world. (MC-23).

Dr. Aziz has his first brush with Indian history when he comes to Amritsar with his newly wed wife Naseem. He is quick to reject the Rowlatt
Act banning political agitation. On April 7th, 1919, the strike called by Gandhi turns violent. Dr. Aziz plunges into the movement by treating the wounded. His sympathies are aroused. He realises that there is some horrendous event waiting in the wings. A sardonic humour characteristic of Rushdie, his adeptness at fusing the grand and the trivial is evident when the premonition of the historical Jallianwala Bagh event is linked to the itching of Dr. Aziz's nose. On April 13th, 1919, Brigadier Dyer ordered the massacre of one thousand five hundred and sixteen unarmed people gathered at the Jallianwala Bagh. This incident seems to embody the helplessness of the common man caught in the whirlwind of history. Saleem Sinai, who is narrating this incident, does so by being scrupulously truthful and providing a factual report, as opposed to a partisan, nationalistic, religious or cultural viewpoint. He resorts to understatement rather than melodramatic rhetoric when he describes the shooting in Jallianwala Bagh by Brigadier General Dyer's men:

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 crowd. 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. (MC-35)
Tariq Rehman aptly sums up General Dyer's actions when he says, "General Dyer's words bring out his inhumanity in particular and the whole phenomenon of colonial rule in general." Rushdie's style of narration seems unemotional but it unleashes deeper emotions which could not have been evoked by melodrama.

On the day Dr. Aziz witnesses the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, many new realisations dawn on him. The impact of the senseless massacre is not limited to the emotional. His association with Mian Abdullah transforms this into a desire for positive action. Mian Abdullaullah or 'the Humming bird' rose from the famous magicians' ghetto in Delhi to become "the hope of India's hundred million Muslims". Mian Abdullah was the founder of the free Islamic convocation, an organization to counteract the Muslim League's designs for a separate country for the Muslims. Under his tutelage, Dr. Aziz's identification with the secular ideals of India is complete. He tells the Rani of Coonch Naheen, "I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim, then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian, though not much of a Muslim but I'm all for Abdullah". His secular outlook is evident when he dismisses the maulvi, his children's tutor. He tells his wife Naseem that the maulvi was "teaching them to hate... Hindus, Buddhists, Jain and Sikh". He refuses to let his children grow up hating others. With his association with Mian Abdullah, Aziz's zest for freedom grows into an "optimism disease" which
is sweeping through the hearts of all liberal Indians. With the gruesome death of Mian Abdullah at the hands of fanatic Muslim Leaguers, the idea of a united India is scuttled. The "optimism disease" comes to a premature and disillusioned end. Dr. Aziz is left in tears of grief. Nevertheless Aziz's brush and association with incidents of history had made him more determined, humane and secular in outlook; he "buried himself in his work, taking upon himself the nursing of the sick in the shanty towns by the railway tracks- rescuing them from quacks who injected them with pepper water, and thought that fried spiders could cure blindness" (MC-56). He thus plunged into social work at the service of millions of poverty-stricken, exploited people. The connection between the individual and history is reiterated through passing references to other members of Dr. Aziz's family. The parallelism between the disintegration of the marriage of Mumtaz Aziz his daughter and Nadir Khan and the atomic explosion in Japan during the Second World War is blatant in its artifice. After three years of marriage, a bomb is dropped on Mumtaz and Nadir Khan's relationship. Simultaneously, on a fateful day a weapon such as the world had never seen was being dropped on the 'yellow people' in Japan. In Agra, her sister Emerald unleashed a secret weapon of her own, the bandy-legged, short, flat headed Zulfikir, placing him on Nadir Khan's track. The latter disappears, bringing the unconsummated marriage to an explosive end.
Rushdie's linking of history, politics and the individual often seems forced and contrived. However, the sheer verve of the writing and the exuberance of his imagination entices the reader into "a willing suspension of disbelief".

Amitav Ghosh in his two novels, *The Shadow Lines* and *The Circle of Reason* provides interesting glimpses of various facets of the Nationalist movement. Militant nationalism, socialism, non-violence were all paths leading to the common goal of independence. However diverse the paths chosen, the individual as can be seen ultimately gets submerged in the movement and is relegated to the state of being a mere bearer of history.

*The Shadow Lines*, written in 1988, also deals with political issues. As Novy Kapadia aptly comments, "It is basically a memory novel which skillfully weaves together, personal lives and public events in three countries-India, England and Bangladesh." Amitav Ghosh through his narrative technique that includes a subtle sense of humour and an awareness of contemporary politics that is similar to Salman Rushdie, brings out the connection between private turmoil and crisis with their public counterparts. Certain incidents from the united pre-independent India are narrated in an explicitly emotional manner. These emphasise the idea that the zest for freedom was predominant among all Indians.
A story of one incident during the pre-independence days in Dhaka brings out effectively the powerful influence of politics on an individual's life. The call for independence was gaining momentum. People of all ages and from all walks of life had plunged into the freedom struggle. In the pursuit of independence people had chosen their own paths. One of the characters, Tha'mma, reacting to a current event, recalls an incident from the freedom struggle. In Bengal those days there were secret societies like Anushilan and Juginter, organisations of militant nationalists with their clandestine networks and homemade bombs with the purpose of liquidating the British officers and policemen who were symbols of oppression and stood in the way of freedom. Hence acts of daring heroism of such secret societies and equally cowardly mercenary acts of betrayal by villagers were wellknown in Dhaka, as in the rest of the country. Fascinated and also inspired by stories of heroism, young women like Tha'mma nurtured ambitions of plunging into the struggle through such secret societies. Their desire to participate fully in the freedom struggle was restricted by two factors- their gender and the secrecy with which these societies functioned. Tha'mma had always visualised a militant nationalist as a man with fiery looks, with enormous strength and with a huge moustache. Police raids were frequent in colleges those days. During one such raid, Tha'mma was shocked when one of her frail-looking classmates was arrested. The boy had been a member of a secret society from the time he was fourteen years old. She watched in horrified silence as he was hauled away to prison, a
mute spectator of historical circumstances. She idolised him for his tremendous mental strength. The novelist through this incident shows that the struggle had engulfed every one. It focuses on those people who had chosen the militant path in the pursuit of freedom. The boy in *The Shadow Lines* and Joseph D’costa in *Midnight’s Children* significantly have the same ideology. Both of them are fragile looking but possess tremendous mental strength and determination. Both of them are involved in the same kind of militant activities, which is their brand of patriotism.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason* focuses on the embroglio in the Socialist movement during 1936. Truly committed socialists like Mathur, one of the characters in the novel, were toiling in rural India to create awareness, while pretenders like Mishra, were biding their time to ascend the throne of a new independent India. And when the crunch came in 1947, most of the socialists walked over to the Congress, to lay their hands on the coffers of independent India, destroying the basic fabric of the socialist movement, which ultimately made the Praja Socialist Party extinct. True socialists like Mathur lived and died in obscurity, while theory-speaking pretenders like Mishra were catapulted to the pinnacles of success. The novel is highly critical of such unscrupulous politicians who are the bane of this country.
From a study of the incidents in the novels it is clear that in addition to the burden of history, unethical and unscrupulous politicians by their actions reduce individuals to being mere bearers of history.

The individual as history bearing can be best exemplified through what happens to Dr. Aadam Aziz during the Jallianwallah Bagh carnage. The innocuous Jallianwallah Bagh meeting into which he unwittingly wanders with his attache case turns out into a literal baptism by fire into the freedom movement. A chance sneeze however saves his life. But in the process as he falls on his attache case, the clamp of the bag leaves a permanent bruise on his chest. This wound makes him a literal bearer of history. Dr. Aadam Aziz’z wound is symbolic of what happened to millions of Indians during the pre-independence days.

THE PARTITION- THE INDIVIDUAL AS HISTORY SUFFERING

As the national movement gained momentum, sub-versive forces were hacking away at the very ideals on which it had grown. As wiser and saner counsels failed, the spectre of partition loomed large on the horizon. People of various religions carried away by partisan and misplaced ideologies found it impossible to sink their differences and made the partition an unavoidable reality. The most traumatic event in the history of modern India was the partition, unsurpassed in the magnitude of its effect.
on individuals in the sub-continent. The link between History and the Individual as its sufferer cannot be depicted more vividly than through the tragic drama of partition. The Partition was not just a historical event but one which touched the lives of millions of common people throughout the country. The sudden outburst of the simmering animosity between the communities which had co-existed for centuries, tore asunder the basic fabric of the nation, destroying the much-vaunted ideal of religious tolerance. The tragic effect of partition manifested itself on two fronts—the mindless and bloody violence which set the country ablaze leaving one million people in northern India killed in brutal and primitive manner, and the stupendous mass migration, the largest two-way land migration in history, uprooting hundreds of thousands of long entrenched people and transforming them into refugees overnight. The latter was not merely a geographical dis-location comparable to the migration of the Israelites, it represented a complete disintegration of the lives of millions of people who had to rebuild their lives after a total obliteration of their identities, the helpless sufferers of history. The partition has had a far-reaching impact on the psyche of the Indian sub-continent, as in the case of the Jews of Nazi Germany; it was a trauma psychologically affecting an entire people. The human dimension has made writers of the sub-continent turn repeatedly to this tragic experience. The theme of partition dominated the middle phase in the development of the Indian English Novel. Even the new generation of writers who have not directly experienced the horrors of
partition found it imperative to touch on such a momentous national catastrophe.

The tremors of partition are felt even today for the politics of post-
Independent India and Pakistan is still enmeshed in the history of partition. However this distancing has enabled the new writers to project it from a refreshing new perspective. Although the partition has found a significant place in the Indian English novels, Rushdie feels that considering the magnitude of the tragedy, the depiction is inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity. He dismisses the books written on it as "anaemic and dull." Given the sincerity and poignancy of many of the fictional depictions of partition, Rushdie's words may appear an unjustified and harsh indictment. However, it could be taken as a significant indication that different perspectives of this human tragedy are possible.

The earliest novel published on the partition, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1965) is located in a village along the newly established Indo-Pakistan border where the violence afoot elsewhere has not yet reached except by report and rumour. The villagers- Muslims and Sikhs continue to live in harmony, the rhythm of their days set by the arrival and departure of the trains. It is this railway station which is crucially the theatre of all activity in the novel.
Not many trains stop at Mano Majra. Express trains do not stop at all. Of the many slow passenger trains, only two one from Delhi to Lahore in the mornings and the other from Lahore to Delhi in the evenings each scheduled to stop for a few minutes. The others stop only when they are held up...  

All this has made Mano Majra very conscious of trains. The sound of the arrival and departure of trains regulate the activity of the people of Mano Majra. According to C.N.Srinath, "the train is metaphorically time and consciousness." Then one day a grisly railroad cargo arrives from the west, carrying hundreds of mutilated bodies of Hindus and Sikhs, bound for their new homeland but attacked and murdered enroute by Muslims. The cry for vengeance goes up among a group of young Sikhs who make plans to sabotage the next train to Pakistan, which will carry, in reverse, Muslims to their new homeland. A young Sikh called Jugga, famed in the village as a trouble maker, a thief and a general badmash, gives his life to save the train, for abroad is the Muslim girl he loves. So the train passes into Pakistan and with it the assurance that man possesses an innate nobility even amidst widespread evidence to the contrary.

The next of these historical accounts is Manohar Malgoankar’s A Bend in the Ganges (1964), a sprawling narrative which depicts not only
the aftermath of Independence but the struggle leading to its actuality. The complex plot, embraces the lives of a number of characters who represent typical Indians in British India—the wealthy, anglicized Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, the devout followers of Gandhi, the poor and the downtrodden, oblivious to the imminent disintegration of their lives. When freedom comes they are all caught in the explosion of fury, some beheaded, some castrated, some raped, some rescued, and some unaffected—all by chance it seems. *A Bend In the Ganges* recounts no heroic act to attest to humankind’s nobility, for in this fictional world the people—Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, violent or non-violent, rich or poor—are capable of behaviour so selfish, so atrocious, that it renders void all the good they might possess.

Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* appeared in 1975. The narrative traces several Hindu families beset by violence, mishap and misery as they make their way across the Punjab to the comparative safety of Delhi. Of the three novels presenting the partition tragedy, *Azadi* tries to be most objective. It neither reveals any unexpected nobility among its characters nor shows them as pawns at the mercy of chance in a world ruled by chaos. It is Lala Kanshi Ram who stops amidst the chaos to contemplate the significance of what he and his fellows are suffering, only to conclude that in this most unreal of worlds the true reality exists far beyond the senseless going on of which they are all a part.
Common to all these novels is a sincerity and authenticity of depiction. The tone is uniformly sombre. The writers, having witnessed the carnage of partition, are more concerned with a realistic presentation of history rather than its imaginative transformation. In contrast, the theme of partition in the novel of the 1980s moves into a different realm. In an interview, answering a question on contemporary India, Rushdie remarks:

Yes, it was amazing. It seemed to me what if you had to choose a form as for that part of the world, the form world choose would be the comic epic. It seemed like the obvious the most natural form and it seemed amazing to me that when you looked at the literature that had been produced about India, it seemed dated and I wondered why these dainty, delicate books were being written about this massive, elephantine place? It was as you'd seen an area of cultivable land and the richest soil in it had never been cultivated. You know that everybody is trying to grow crops in the stony ground around the edges and this wonderful prime soil is just left there.

And from that wonderful prime soil, Rushdie produced *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983). In these novels Rushdie, born in the
year of partition, moves into a different dimension and in an innovative way represents the partition. The juxtaposition of the very personal and the historical describing the most tragic events in comic terms gives the event a refreshingly new perspective.

The drama that swept the partitioned land on the evening of 14th August 1947, is reduced to a comic countdown as the hero/narrator's mother's family awaits his birth, praying that it will take place at the moment of independence. The narrator does mention that outside the Bombay hospital, "the monster in the streets had already begun to celebrate the new myth coursing through its veins" (MC-134). A few minutes later this monster, the narrator reveals, "has begun to roar", while in Delhi a wiry man is saying, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India awakens to life and freedom." (MC-134)

The carnage of the communal war underway a thousand miles to the north, the narrator relegates to the background of the light hearted account of his birth, switching moods, for just a moment to sum up simply-while trains burn in Punjab, with the green flames of blistering paint and the glaring saffron of tired fuel, like the biggest dias in the world.

And the city of Lahore too is burning (MC-134).
Then as the monster with its new myth continues to roar and the mythmaker to speak, the sounds of birth join the din and the hero arrives. In fact, he adds to the record of his own birth,

All over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents—the children of midnight were also the children of the time, fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen especially in country which is itself a sort of dream. (MC-137).

The reality of the transfer of power is presented in an equally comic and imaginative manner through the game played by Sir Methwold. In a symbolic representation of the partition, Methwold, a British administrator, is shown to be partitioning his bungalow into five parts. The final discarding of the hairpiece revealing the comic figure of a bald Sir Methwold humorously depicts the hollowness of British pomp and vanity.

The treatment in Shame of partition and its subsequent violence leans even more towards the comic. The religious war set off by partition the narrator explains, is the result of a dispute between two groups he calls the “veg and non veg” (SH-61) or the “one godly” and the other “stone godly”. Rushdie telescopes all the tumult so carefully reproduced by the earlier
novelists into the bombing of a Delhi movie theatre. When some "gardeners of violence" (SH-63) plant a bomb in the theatre belonging to the father of the heroine, she escapes but is left naked and eyebrowless a condition which Rushdie soon transforms into analogy. "It is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history, to stand naked amidst the scorn of strangers upon whom they see the rich clothing, the brocades of continuity and the eyebrows of belonging" (SH-63). Rushdie continues to derive comedy at the expense of his heroine's nudity, a state disgraceful to Indian women a condition hardly to be considered comic. How unorthodox is this treatment of feminine modesty becomes more evident when set against one of the scenes in Azadi, which depicts a group of Hindu women paraded naked through the streets for the shameful delight of their male communal enemies. No analogies, no comedy here, only the stark record of an ultimate degradation.

Commenting on the refreshingly new technique deployed by Rushdie, Robert L. Ross says, "In both novels Rushdie seizes fragments of the partition and treats them for the most part as comic, but his intention is always serious."22 He brings out the partition carnage with nerve tingling effect through this new technique.

Salman Rushdie's fictional style lends a unique imaginative flavour to the treatment of the theme of partition. He breaks away from the
traditional Indian fictional style of the earlier novels of narrating the events of the partition in a chronological sequence. He gives a spatial poignance to the estrangement of the communities involved in partition by his metaphorical style. While the metaphor leads to a land of fantasy and entertainment, the undercurrent which is menacing comes out even more forcefully; the effect is chilling and horrifying. The comic perceptions, the extravagantly metaphorical presentation should not distract us from the undeniable seriousness of Rushdie's analysis of the partition era. For a brief moment Rushdie seems to be speaking through Joseph D'Costa when he says, "This Independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies in Punjab, in Bengal" and continues, "Just now our own people are dying. We got to fight back show the people who to fight instead of each other" (MC-120).

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* touches but briefly on the saga of partition. In a couple of pages it catches the essence of the emotional turmoil of a people of a divided nation.

It has been one long and lonely trek from Lahore to Madna for Mr.Multani. The dictum that life has to go on finds its best expression in the trials and tribulations of Mr.Multani. The satisfaction of seeing his son through medical college may be a comforting thought but true happiness is elusive as old memories continue to haunt him. The pathetic condition
of displaced people, victims of partition, is conveyed most poignantly when he tells Agastya Sen the protagonist, "Darshan (his son) is lucky, I would think, he has not been a refugee like me-wanderers clutching only our pasts—we had nothing else" (EA-229). Many years later this emptiness continues to haunt Mr.Multani.

The highly ruthless and frenzied nature of violence between the Hindus and Muslims is conveyed when Mr.Multani contrasts it with the nature of a contemporary riot: "Compared to the forties, these riots are like fire crackers—hoodlums having their special brand of fun and organising integration meetings" (EA-229).

It is a sad commentary on those people who now rake up communal passions for their own selfish and vested ends. Inspite of having lived during those turbulent times, Mr. Multani considers himself lucky for having experienced the most momentous time in the history of the country. These reminiscences of Mr. Multani are thought-provoking to Agastya, and he is shocked at his own insensitivity: "Multani’s father had known the sufferance of colonial rule, but Agastya and Darshan Multani had not, and unlike John Avery, had not even been particularly inquisitive" (EA-230). It is a sad reflection on the present generation’s ineptitude, for whom riots mean a chance of a holiday. Multani’s fear that the English "have left behind cultural cripples, incapable of appreciation" (EA- 230) may not be far from the truth.
From the foregoing it may be commented that Jugga in *Train to Pakistan*, Debi in *A Bend in the Ganges*, Lala Kansiram in *Azadi*, Multani in *English August* and a score of others are all inevitably presented as history suffering.

However the individual as history suffering can be best depicted through Biliquis Hyder in *Shame*. The partition violence leaves her father dead under bizarre circumstances. Running naked and eyebrowless on the streets, her suffering is beyond description. Her life in Pakistan in spite of all the physical comforts cannot erase the suffering in her mind. Biliquis Hyder's condition is truly symbolic of all those who suffered the inexorable forces of history.

**POST-INDEPENDENCE – THE INDIVIDUAL AS HISTORY CREATING**

In the novel of the 80s, the post-independence era is the centre of focus. Being products of this era the novelists of the 80s place it under closer scrutiny than the earlier epochs. The protagonists of these novels propel themselves into centre stage, refusing to let their identities be submerged by the forces of history. Stripped of the protective shelter of collective political and social movements, the individual stands alone, attempting to make his mark on the changing face of Indian politics. More
often than not, the endeavour ends in disillusionment but the very effort of trying to take charge is a positive step in the right direction.

The long-awaited independence finally arrived but marred by the horrors of partition. It left a permanent wound on the psyche of the nation, leading to a significantly different social and political ethos. The freedom struggle had united the politician and the common man. The negative forces which had always been present were submerged in the fervour of nationalism. These negative forces having reared their heads during the partition now attempted to establish themselves in the ethos of the nation. The post-independent manipulative, power-hungry politician has changed the very face of politics. The solidarity of the common man and his leader which was such a vital part of the struggle appears distant and in the nature of a myth to the post-independent generation. Nationalist visions, as a result, now seem no more than a lost ideal, occasionally resuscitated at the convenience of these politicians. Politics is no longer a passionate and selfless commitment but a game of intrigue and underhand surreptitious manoeuvrings. In these changed circumstances, the common man perhaps feels it imperative to combat these forces by playing a more dominant role as an individual in an attempt to give history and politics a more humanistic touch. As a result, in the words of Jehanara Wasi, "Rushdie's characters, however bizarre or idiosyncratic, always live in a real world of political pressures. We are able to see in his work, the many complicated ways in which public politics determines private behaviour."24
Rushdie’s analysis of the different “modes of connection” (MC-285) between history and individual which has been quoted earlier requires to be re-emphasised at this point. He uses the terms "actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally" (MC-286). The “passively- metaphorically” and “passively-literal” were the predominant modes in the earlier eras. Although these "modes of connection" are still present in the post-independence section of the narrative, the "actively-literal" and "actively-metaphorical" now gain pre-eminence. The multi-faceted dimensions of the connections between history and the individual often operate simultaneously and in conjunction with one another in this phase of the novel. However given the complexity of the post-independence scenerio, it is not easy to specify or categorise the modes as in the earlier sections. The protagonist flits in and out of different modes giving us Rushdie’s perception of history as a dynamic and multidimensional force in human life.

Rushdie depicts the individual as occupying a position of centrality in the scheme of things, both public and personal with his usual flourish. Incident after incident in the narrative reiterates this idea of centrality. No longer is the individual merely connected to history but is shown to attempt an "active- literal" role in the making of history of his times. It is similar to Nietzsche’s description about the critical-mode of history.
Rushdie’s depiction of the major incidents of the post-independent era has been categorised in this section into two groups—one dealing with incidents confined to the national boundaries, the other with those which go beyond these limits. The modes operating in the first group has been specified by the narrator himself.

In the history of any nation wars are an important landmark which inevitably touch the lives of the common man to a lesser or greater extent. The complexity of the post-independence period is further compounded by the three wars in which the country was engaged in, in quick succession. For the infant nation struggling to find its bearings, the wars proved debilitating both on the economic and psychological arenas. The novel of the 80s does not merely report the events as detached historical incidents but depict them through the individual’s reaction to these events and their impact on human lives. The idea that, however important historical forces may be, the individual is equally important and can never be relegated to the background is reiterated. The novels seem to be vehemently bent on expounding this perspective.

Rushdie’s treatment of the three wars-Indo-China war of 1962, Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 are characteristically innovative. His approach to the depiction of the individual’s place in a nation at war throws up an interesting array of possibilities. All the modes of connections
established by Rushdie are in operation, at some time or the other. The Indo-China war is presented predominantly in what Rushdie calls the "active-literal" mode. The connection between the nation and the personal events are many and always emphatically made with a flamboyant disregard for realism. It is a technique which Rushdie has mastered brilliantly, leaving on it the stamp of his exuberant imagination.

During the Indo-China war, the Sinai family was in Pakistan then, except for Ahmed Sinai who had refused to move from Bombay. On the afternoon of 9th September, 1962, Amina Sinai was busy trying to cut her verrucas out of her feet with a sharp-ended nail file and elsewhere in New Delhi, Krishna Menon, the then defence minister was reacting equally sharply, threatening to cut off the Chinese in the Himalayan front by the use of force if necessary. A telegram informing her about her husband's heart attack brought the Sinai family back to Bombay on 16th September 1962. Ahmed Sinai in his hour of despair and loneliness was very worried about the Chinese invading India. Back in Bombay, after a gap of four years, Saleem tried to convene the midnight children's conference in a personal attempt to tackle a national emergency. The optimism with which the midnight's children assemble mirrors the optimism of the Indian army as it prepared to confront Chinese aggression, both prove equally short-lived and illusory.
Saleem's attempt at convening a conference of the midnight's children is prompted by the necessity of bringing together various dissenting forces to tackle a national emergency. And on the personal level as Neeraja Mattoo remarks, "The emotional integration of the family echoes the fervour of the country's apparent emotional integration in the face of Chinese aggression." The attempt ends disastrously when his compatriots turn against him in a vicious attack: "his mind was no longer a parliament chamber but become a battle ground on which the midnight's children tore him apart totally annihilated him on charges of secrecy, prevarication, high handedness and egotism" (MC-357). Simultaneously on October 20th, there was an unprovoked attack by the Chinese army leading to a complete annihilation of the Indian forces at Thag La Bridge. The juxtaposition of the defeat of the Indian army and that of Saleem Sinai is significant. Rushdie seems to suggest that it was not so much the defeat of the Indian army but a weakening of the basic fabric of the nation due to divisive forces.

Undeterred by the crushing attack, Saleem tried to convene another conference between 20th October and 20th November. But the midnight's children started fleeing from him, just when in the high Himalayas, Gurkhas and Rajputs fled in disarray from the Chinese army. The connection between the nation puffing itself, convinced that the defeat of "the little yellow men" (MC-359) was imminent, and the puffing of Saleem's sinus is well made. Thus the most decisive moments of the war is presented in ludicrous
juxtaposition with the inflammation of Saleem’s sinues. The optimism disease held its sway over Ahmed and Amina. Amina gave away gold bangles and emerald earrings for ‘ornaments for armaments’ programme, and Ahmed bought war bonds in bushnels. In the clutches of the optimism disease, students burnt the effigies of Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai. They attacked Chinese shoemakers, curio dealers and restauranteurs...

(MC-359) As the Indians headed blindly towards a military debacle, Saleem too was nearing a catastrophe of his own. While his nasal passage was in state of acute crisis, the Indians had attacked under cover of artillery. From 14th November, Nehru’s 73rd birthday, the great confrontation with the Chinese forces had begun, but the Indian jawans were routed in Walong. November 20th was a terrible day; just when everyone feared that things would get worse, on 21st November, the Chinese suddenly ceased hostilities and announced cease-fire bringing much relief in New Delhi. Coincidentally Saleem’s sinus too is cleared on the same day. It takes away from him his prized possession, the power to tune in to the midnight’s children. However he realises that the loss has been compensated with the acquisition of an equally powerful sense of smell.

Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines deals with the same war in a more realistic manner. The actual incidents of the war are not given as much prominence as in Midnight’s Children, but the sense of participation of the nation is more predominant. While Midnight’s Children largely
confines itself to the impact of the war on the Sinai family, The Shadow Lines presents an entire cross-section of society affected by it. The war is presented in retrospection when sixteen years later, the narrator recalls it in vivid detail. The socio-cultural life of a community was thrown out of gear. The much-awaited ritual visits after Durga Puja were cut short when the narrator’s father announced that Nehru had told the army to drive the Chinese back from their border and that war was inevitable. The young narrator at that time little realising what war meant, was quite excited as he announced the news to his grand mother. An embittered Tha’mma, who had lost her nephew Tridib in the Dhaka riots not very long ago, wanted to teach the Chinese a lesson. The narrator and his friends recalled how as children they had learnt to distinguish between the Indian and Chinese warplanes. Women had donated their bangles and earrings just as Amina and Ahmed Sinai had bought war bonds during the war. Children too had participated and done their mite by standing in street corners taking donation and selling little paper flags. Some kind of euphoria was sweeping over the country, similar to Rushdie’s description of the ‘optimism disease’. But this soon turned to confusion when the news came that the Chinese had driven the Indian army back. The narrator recalls how, as children, they had feared that the Chinese would soon occupy Assam and Calcutta. Thus the two novels present two different perspectives of the same historical event, emphasising the connection between history and the individual in their own ways.
The two wars with Pakistan were different in nature from the Indo-China war. They were wars between two communities who had co-existed as one nation before the partition. The outrage perpetrated by the carnage during partition left the two communities deeply embittered, so that the slightest provocation could set light to the tinder. The dispute over Kashmir was the spark which resulted in the conflagration of the wars, thus indicating that Indo-Pakistan politics is still embedded in the trauma of partition. This aspect is most emphatically exemplified in the reactions of Tha’mma in *The Shadow Lines*. She, who had earlier been unable to come to terms with the idea that her native place had now become an alien nation, undergoes a total change of attitude with the gory death of her nephew Tridib at the hands of communal forces. With the outbreak of the war, she donates the chain which she had treasured for thirty-two years. On being questioned about it she screams "I gave it to the fund for the war. I had to, don’t you see? for your sake, for your freedom, we have to kill them before they kill us, we have to wipe them out...this is the only chance, the only one. We’re fighting them properly at last with tanks and guns and bombs." *(SL-237)* In another incident, her intense involvement reaches a frenzy when she shatters the radio with a punch. Her hand had started bleeding, and then very calmly she had announced that she had to get to the hospital because "I mustn’t waste all this blood. I can donate it to the war fund" *(SL-237)*.
Through Tha’mma, Amitav Ghosh is able to give a human dimension to the politics of the sub-continent.

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 is brought into focus by juxtaposing the personal with the historical. Saleem now in Pakistan for some time, hears the news of his grandfather’s death and about the arrival of his grandmother in Pakistan. It was then that he started dreaming repeatedly about Kashmir. His dream took him to the Shalimar Bagh, floating in Shikaras, and climbing the hill of Shankara Acharaya. Rushdie connects this personal dream of Saleem to what happened when the dream of Kashmir spilled over into the minds of the rest of the population of Pakistan. Saleem found in his private dream of Kashmir in 1965, the common dream of Pakistan. His aunt Alia had infused her old age frustrations into the curricula in her twin institutions, spreading hatred and vengefulness among the young students. The nation’s mood of hatred and vengefulness is likewise expressed through a situation brewing within the Sinai family, thus establishing the active- metaphorical mode of connection. This mood of hatred seeped through the windows of the house and took over the hearts and minds of the nation. Confusion thus overwhelmed both the family and the nation. When the war between India and Pakistan finally came, it was wrapped in the same fuddled haze of unreality. Newspapers in Pakistan were reporting about good Indo-Pakistan relations being just around the corner; in reality something else was happening in the disputed territory.
of Rann of Kutch. On the personal front, the Sinai family thrashed about in the web of their aunt's revenge, while the mill of history continued to grind. It is here that Rushdie lashes out at the distortion of history indulged in by unscrupulous politicians. And as Andrej Gasiorek remarks, "His most pungent satire is directed at the numerous falsification of history in the propaganda enveloping the war between India and Pakistan." 26

The incidents in the Rann of Kutch thus became the tinder that soon became a raging fire. As in any war, truth first suffered. Both sides started making contradictory statements. Exaggerated accounts of war were given from both sides, one outrageous claim keeping pace with a counter claim. Due to the many untruths reported, the real events of the war were wrapped in a haze. It fed people with all kinds of lies, lulling them into a false sense of security. When reality finally hit them with full force, it dealt a crushing blow both on the body as well as the mind. Saleem now discards the earlier mode of connection and takes on the passive-literal mode. Incidents accumulate to convince him that the pattern of the war was specially designed to annihilate his family. As the narrator points out, "Of the only three bombs to hit Rawalpindi and explode, the first landed on the bungalow in which my grandmother Naseem Aziz and my aunt Pia were hiding under a table; the second tore a wing off the city jail, and spared my cousin Zafar a life of captivity; the third destroyed a large darkling mansion surrounded by a sentried wall" (MC-407); the last was
the house in which Saleem and his parents were in residence. Saleem has a providential escape. However in a bizarre accident, the silver spittoon, a family heirloom sent whirling due to the explosion, hits him with full velocity on the back of his head. It obliterates both his consciousness and identity in the same way as the war had inflicted a violent injury on the psyche of the nation.

As in Midnight's Children, Shame also connects the events of the war with the life of the individuals. It presents the war from the other side of the Indian border. The war is brought into focus through a humorous presentation. Soldiers and all those associated with the war considered themselves lucky to be away from the plains and into the cool of the mountains: "foot soldiers, cooks all rejoiced as they headed for the coolness of the hills. Yara this is luck, na ...I won’t die in that damn heat" (SH-77). They went to war not as soldiers but more like holidaymakers. And those who died in the war were promised the perfumed gardens of paradise. The narrative presents contrasting moods. Even as the army morale was high, on the personal front, Rani Humayun was fuming, as she had to postpone her wedding reception. On the other hand Biliquis Hyder and Raza Hyder were extremely happy as hopeful parents. Raza Hyder’s victory over a part of the valley of Ansu is attributed to his happiness as an expectant parent. In its own way, this war paradoxically causes a personal rift between the two main characters, Raza Hyder and Isky Harappa, which ultimately
ends in disaster for the latter after some time. It also shows that in spite of the war, individuals are preoccupied with their own lives, as can be seen when Biliquis tells Rani, "Never mind this war foolishness, the important news is that I am making a boy to marry your unborn daughter" (SH-78).

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 had its origin in the events of the 1970 elections in Pakistan. This election at that time split the country decisively into the East and West wings. The East wings under the leadership of Sheikh Mujabir Rehman started pressuring for a separate country. As a result the army was pressed into service in order to control insurgency and subversive activity. Commenting on his role in the historical event, Saleem says that "though he had refused to take responsibility, the metaphorical modes of connection refused to abandon him" (MC-420). In the passive- metaphorical mode of connection, Saleem as the Sniffer dog does what he has been ordered to do. As a result he successfully sniffs out Sheikh Mujabir Rehman. The election in Pakistan had led to uneasiness and the deep foundations of this unease lay in the fear of schizophrenia, of splitting, that was embedded in every Pakistani heart. The mass atrocities committed by the Pakistan army resulted in "the biggest migration in the history of the human race" (MC-427) into India. This had forced India into intervening in the war. However the war ended in three weeks, liberating the East wing, thus enabling them to form Bangladesh, paving the way for a re-entry of an old trusted friend Parvati the witch, into his
life. Through her, Saleem recollects his name and thus re-discovers his identity after having passed through a long and depressing period of blankness as the buddha. Through Parvati, Saleem returns to India convinced that "the purpose of that entire war was to reunite him with an old life" (MC-446).

Commenting on Rushdie's presentation of the war David W Price says, "The Bangladesh war is filtered through the experiences of Ayooba, Shaheed Farooq and Saleem common soldiers... their experiences comprise a more accurate history of India. Through this method Rushdie is able to convey the real human tragedy underlying the layers of misrepresentation created by both governments."27

What is noteworthy in the depiction of history and the individual in the novel of the 80s is the unmistakable centrality of the latter. History is never viewed in isolation, but as complementary with the individual's life. As Anita Desai aptly comments, "While an individual’s history does not make sense unless seen against its national background, neither does national history make sense unless seen in the form of individual lives and histories."28

In the novel Shame, Rushdie is highly critical of the people of the East Wing who had forced a split on the nation. Launching a scathing attack on them, the narrator describes them as "savages, breeding endlessly,
jungle-bunnies good for nothing but growing jute and rice, knifing each other, cultivating traitors in their paddies" (SH-179). Shame, like Midnight's Children, recreates the events leading to the civil strife in Pakistan. As in the earlier war, people were fed with all kinds of falsehood and disinformation, and when it was finally announced that the army had surrendered, it stunned the nation into shocked silence. "The traffic stood still in the city streets. The nation's lunch remained uncooked. In the villages, the cattle went unfed and the crops unwatered inspite of the heat" (SH-180). This humiliating defeat seemed to have perpetrated the final shame on the nation. However this division of the nation seemed to have suited the political ambitions of one individual Isky Harappa, as it enabled him to take over the reigns of the partitioned nation.

The manner in which a public event like a war impinges on the life of individuals and in turn, is affected by these has been explored in the previous section. The complex modes of connection between individuals and events that have shaped the socio-political ethos of the country have been specifically defined by the narrator in the crucial passage enumerating Rushdie's theory of history. The sudden shift into a non-fictional mode in the passage is consciously employed to concretize this theory.

As an exemplification of the passive-metaphorical mode, the narrator selects the episode entitled 'The fisherman's pointing finger.' The
fisherman's pointing finger refers to a painting hanging symbolically over the infant Saleem Sinai's crib, showing a fisherman with his finger pointed towards the distant horizon. The narrator interprets it as an indication of the future of both the child and the infant nations. The prodigious appetite of the child resulting in an abnormally quick growth is taken as an indication of the nation's ambitious development programmes. As O.P. Mathur points out, "Saleem's growth mirrors the development of free India. Soon after his birth his huge appetite seemed to be a pointer to India's ambitious five year plans and the large amount of foreign aid, especially American, swallowed by them."  

The two episodes of the terrifying time of the freeze and the explosion at Walkeswar reservoir establish the passive-literal mode of connection. In a highly imaginative exposition, the personal and the public are brought into focus. Saleem, in the course of the narrative, says that he was responsible for the drastic change in his father's life due to his mere presence. Having lost his place of centrality in the family to baby Saleem, a disillusioned Ahmed Sinai had taken to drink and pursuing an impossible dream of reclaiming land from the sea along with Dr. Narlikar. This project had induced him into spending his money indiscriminately. As a result the state had frozen his assets. What happens to Ahmed Sinai is mirrored in a wider sweep, when the country froze the assets of those it presumed were involved in dubious activities. The comment of Dr. Narlikar on this incident touches on rather sensitive issues when he says, "These
are bad times Sinai bhai - freeze a Muslim’s assets, they say and you make him run to Pakistan, leaving all his wealth behind him, catch the lizard’s tail and he’ll snap it off! This so called secular state gets some damn clever ideas”(MC-157).

Characters in *Midnight’s Children* are introduced to serve specific purposes. Evie Burns the American girl is introduced into the narrative to suggest the presence of American funds in the country. Her over-bearing and over-confident manner has its obvious associations. The uncertainty over the issue of partitioning of Bombay and widespread drought had brought misery and to add to these woes, the explosions at the Walkeswar reservoir, the main fresh water pipes “which were the city’s life lines began to blow fountains into the air like giant steel whales”(MC-268) resulting in an acute water shortage in the city. This breakdown of the water supply system, the narrator says, resulted in the great cat invasion on the Methwold estate, the only place in the city where water was available in plenty. It required the services of Evie Burns with her air gun to be rid of those marauding cats. Saleem’s sister, the “brass monkey’ who had always resented Evie Burns, makes this an excuse to have a show-down, with her ultimately emerging victorious. With a little stretching of the imagination the episode can be taken to indicate the country freeing itself from American dominance and interference through their offers of economic aid. This idea is reiterated in Saleem’s own words when he says, "I seem to discern
the driving force behind their battle to death, a motive far deeper than the mere persecution of cats, they were fighting over me" (MC-270). The connections are obvious again.

The active-metaphorical mode of connection is brought into focus through two incidents that happen to Saleem but exemplifying something deeper in a larger connection. The mutilation of Saleem’s middle finger during a fight with his classmates in the course of a school party, which results in a loss of blood, seems to suggest the blood spilled over the issue of Kashmir. In a larger context, it could also suggest the dismemberment of the nations on various other issues. Drawing the connection between the two, the narrator aptly comments, "When I was detached from my finger tip and blood rushed out in fountains, a similar thing happened to history, and all sorts of overwhichthing began pouring all over us, but because history operates on a grander scale than any individual, he took a good deal longer to stitch it back together and mop up the mess" (MC-286). The other incident of mutilation occurs when Mr. Zagallo gives Saleem a monkish tonsure during the course of a human geography class. The demented schoolteacher however draws a brilliant connection between Saleem’s face and the map of India, when he explains, "In the face of thees ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of India?... the Deccan Peninsula hanging down" (MC-277). Referring to the stains on Saleem’s face, he continues, "These stains are Pakistan! Thees birthmark on the
right ear is the Eastwing, and thees horrible stained left cheek, the west" (MC-277). During his virulent attack on the hapless boy, he pulls out a tuft of his hair which resembles a monkish tonsure. This baldness on Saleem's head seems to suggest the problem of Kashmir, an indicator that it may separate from the country through the process of virulent attack both from within and without.

The most important mode, the active-literal, is brought into focus through the incident of the language marchers. The division of Bombay had become a bone of contention between people speaking Marathi and Gujarati. An accident had brought Saleem face to face with one such language march, who demanded to know his loyalties. The terrified Saleem had blurted a few sentences in Gujarati -"Soo che saru che, danda lakhe maru che" (MC-228). The pro Marathi language marchers picked up this slogan and in course of time thus became a song of war to unleash violence. Thus Saleem says that by giving this slogan, he was directly responsible for the historical partitioning of Bombay. Similarly he holds himself responsible for the war between India and Pakistan, believing that his dream of Kashmir had triggered off a similar dream in the nation's psyche.

As in Midnight's Children so in Shame Rushdie's concern is with contemporary history. As pointed out by Sushila Singh:
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 expose of the bleak nightmare of Pakistan.

Both countries entered the post-independence era with great hope and aspiration. These expectations were belied in India through manipulative politics, whereas in Pakistan, repressive politics thrust upon the nation resulted in a nightmarish situation. Whatever may have been the shortcomings of a democracy, it does leave open the scope for individual expression and action, as has been seen in Saleem Sinai. An authoritarian political system has place only for the likes of Omar Khayyam Shakil, hovering ineffectually in the background. The repressive forces in Pakistan were not restricted to the political but found expression also through religious fundamentalism and social subjugation of women. These circumstances would make a realistic depiction lacking in force, hence Rushdie's recourse to the powerful fantasy figure of Sufiya Zinobia. Sufiya Zinobia, the 'wrong miracle', the mentally retarded daughter of Raza Hyder-the authoritarian leader of a country, again a 'miracle gone wrong',

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represents the collective consciousness of a repressed people. Rushdie befittingly chooses a female figure to represent the inter-twined nature of the various forces of repression at work—the political, the religious and the social.

Sufiya Zinobia from her birth is regarded as a misfortune for having shattered the expectation of a male offspring. The burden of shame, laid on Sufiya, increases with the realisation of her mental disabilities. The figure of Sufiya gains an increasingly horrifying, almost mythical, stature in the course of the narrative. Her actions exemplify the gathering storm on the political scene. The violence erupts in a small but significant manner when she strangles two hundred and eighteen turkeys belonging to Pinky Aurangezeb. The violence increases when she moves on to strangling human beings and finally reaches its terrible crescendo, when Nishapur, the edifice of shamelessness, is shattered to smithereens.

Many critics have failed to explore the full potential of the symbolic value of the fantasy figure of Sufiya Zinobia. They have under-rated this symbol by making facile connections and restricting her significance to the idea of shame by not viewing the concept of shame in a larger context. The shame of Sufiya is inextricably linked with the shame of the nation, however unacknowledged the latter might be. Like Saleem Sinai, Sufiya too is handcuffed to history. As in Midnight's Children, the infant nation
and the infant daughter of one of the makers of the nation grow together. Both nation and Sufiya are victims of an imposed sense of shame, burdened by a shame not of their own actions but forced on them by the larger forces—political, social and religious which rule their lives. As the narrator comments, "repression is a seamless garment" (SH-173). A nation which represses its women under a patriarchal puritanical code restricting their dress, mobility and sexual freedom, a nation which perpetrates authoritarian rule under the guise of democracy, a nation which imposes inhuman taboos in the name of religion is unabashedly shameless. The shame which should rightfully be felt by the perpetrator is transferred, in a tragic irony, on to its victims. What results is a grotesque and inhuman history and inevitably, the outcome is equally grotesque and inhuman.

In such a society individual action as was attempted in Midnight's Children is totally ruled out. It is only a collective will and consciousness which can express the voice of a repressed nation. Sufiya is the grotesque representation of this collective consciousness and dramatically brings out the 'seamless garment of repression' of a nation. Direct social and political criticism is avoided but finds expression in other more subtle ways. The most moving embodiment of Rushdie's power of intense social and political criticism occurs in the passage describing the designs on the eighteen shawls woven by Rani Harappa. Each shawl represents one aspect of repression, thus encapsulating the tragic history of a repressed nation.
What did the eighteen shawls depict?

Locked in their trunk, they said unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear: the badminton shawl, on which, against a lime-green background and within a delicate border of overlapping racquets and shuttlecocks and frilly underpants, the great man lay unclothed, while all about him the pink-skinned concubines cavorted... the slapping shawl, Iskander a thousand times over raising his hand, lifting it against ministers, ambassadors, argumentative holy men, mill owners, servants, friends... the hissing shawl, Iskander seated in the office of his glory... in silver she revealed the arachnid terrors of the days, when men lied to their sons and angry women had only to murmur to the breeze to bring a fearsome revenge down upon their lovers... the torture shawl, she embroidered the foetid violence of his jails... the swearing shawl, Iskander's mouth as wide as the abyss, the oaths represented by fowl creatures crawling from his lips... the shawls of international shame, Isky grovelling at primrose Chinese feet... Harappa and Shaggy Dog like cruel dogs slitting the throat of an emerald chicken and plucking the feathers from its east wing... the election shawls, one for the day of suffrage that began his reign, one
for the day that led to his downfall...figures breaking seals, stuffing ballot boxes... the allegorical shawl, Iskander and the death of Democracy, his hand round her throat, squeezing Democracy's gullet...he had taken for her model her memory of an idiot, and consequently innocent, child, Sufiya Zinobia Hyder( now Shakil), gasping and empurpled in Iskander's unyielding... the autobiographical shawl, the portrait of the artist as an old crone, that self-portrait in which Rani had depicted herself as being composed of the same materials as the house-merging into the fabric of Mohenjo and a fine mist of oblivion clouded the scene; that was the fourteenth shawl... the fifteenth -Iskander pointing to the future, only there was nothing on the horizon... and the last two were the worst: the shawl of hell... her eighteenth shawl and her supreme master piece, a panoramic landscape, the hard earth of her exile stretched across the cloth-(SH-191-195).

As M.D.Fletcher aptly sums up, "direct indictment is levelled at Isky by Rani. Abandoned to the loneliness of the rural Harappa estate, she embroiders a total of eighteen shawls depicting in miraculously fine detail his many crimes."31
Sufiya's bouts of increasing violence keeps pace with the developments in the nation. The years of shame heaped on the people of the nation is reflected in Sufiya: "Twelve years of unloved humiliation takes its toll" (SH- 138). In this twelve years, she had carried the burden of her parents' shame in having borne a female child who is doubly cursed by retarded mental growth after an unfortunate bout of brain fever.

The inaction of her father Raza Hyder over the matter of Pinkie Aurangazeb's turkeys due to an enduring weakness for the glamorous woman leads to Sufiya's first act of violence. In an act of unimaginable violence, she wrenches the heads of two hundred and eighteen turkeys. This incident establishes the link between sharam and violence. The link between the political developments of the nation and its collective consciousness as represented by Sufiya is established more forcefully in subsequent events. As a coup within a military regime establishes a new dictatorship, simultaneously a coup is also staged in Raza Hyder's family. Talvar ulhaq deposes Haroon Harappa from the affections of his fiancé Naveed Hyder and installs himself as the bridegroom. On the day of the wedding there is national as well as family turmoil. The political crisis results in wide spread national violence."Something else was happening that night-under cover of darkness, the people were assembling-that morning the people took to the streets and set fire to motor car, school buses, Army trucks and the libraries of the British Council and the United States Information Service to express their displeasure." (SH- 167).
The bizarre marriage which ignores Sufiya's rights as the elder daughter wakes up the somnolent demon in her. This time with increased violence she attacks the bridegroom, almost succeeding in wrenching off his head. Sufiya's outburst is an expression of the rage of a nation taken for granted. It is the year of the general election. Six years of Isky Harappa's tenure has passed and the farcical facade of democracy is maintained by announcing the elections. Once again manipulative and unscrupulous political forces undermine the spirit of democracy, which leaves the people highly agitated. This discontentment of the people is exemplified by the horrendous violence unleashed by Sufiya on the four young men on the streets. Such is the nature of violence unleashed, that it unnerves her father Raza Hyder. As the power-hungry Raza Hyder inflicts on the nation military dictatorship, individual liberty is curtailed when Isky Harappa is imprisoned on concocted charges. Repressive measures are introduced in the name of religion leading to the curtailment of the rights of women; an element of barbarity is introduced citing Islamic laws. Religious extremism has a free reign, forcing God down the throat of an unwilling nation. Raza Hyder, now President, perceives danger from Sufiya to his authority. His design to eliminate her is thwarted by his son-in-law Omar Khayyam Shakil. Sufiya Zinobia, who is now chained and kept drugged in a remote dungeon, symbolises the chaining and binding of the voice and spirit of the nation. However, on the day Isky Harappa is hanged, Sufiya breaks free and escapes into the countryside, symbolising the liberation of the people. From now
on, Sufiya becomes a frightful and mythical creature. She wanders all over the country, indicating the gathering of the storm in the nation. She moves towards the capital with the single-minded purpose of eliminating the person responsible for perpetrating such shame on the nation. When Raza Hyder flees, the attacks too stop. The story comes a full circle when Sufiya, now the beast, moves towards Nishapur. She is responsible for Raza Hyder's terrible nemesis. The end finally comes when she blows up Nishapur to smithereens, eliminating both shame and shamelessness.

Through his fictional creation of Sufiya, Rushdie portrays a social reality, but at the same time as Joan Rockwell remarks, "also a necessary functional part of social context and paradoxically an important element of social change." Rushdie has effectively used the art of the novel as a weapon to provoke change in a situation which Tariq Ali describes as the "undeniable intellectual, moral and political degeneracy of Pakistan and a dictatorship that can no longer differentiate human beings from animals."

Rushdie's theory of the modes of connection between the individual and history is equally applicable to Shame. The modes of connection can be seen to be embodied in the depiction of Sufiya Zinobia. Her role in the novel takes her through the entire gamut starting as a passive-metaphorical figure, moving on to the active-metaphorical and finally culminating in an active-literal role. Representing the collective consciousness of the people,
she exemplifies the effects of a repressive socio-political environment, and as such symbolises the passive-metaphorical mode. Her mental retardation, the stunting of her as an individual is a symbolic manifestation of the malady afflicting the nation. The active-metaphorical mode of connection which finds a reflection of things done to or by her comes into focus in one striking incident. The violence that she unleashes on Talvar ulhaq during the wedding reflects the violence unleashed on the streets of the nation by a people frustrated at the never-ending political turmoil. Her potential to play the active-literal role reaches a crescendo in the later part of the novel. The terrible violence perpetrated by her results in Raza Hyder’s flight from the capital, thus marking a decisive turn in the history of the nation. In a larger context the narrative emphasises that this violence is not limited to the family but deliberately creates a vision of a country in flames. It is through violence that the oppressed nation attempts to take charge of its own destiny, creating history through a process of destruction. In other words, as Timothy Brennan says, Rushdie’s writing is "dedicated to recovering individual expression and to weakening the power that various governments as 'sales persons' hold over us."34

The active-literal mode of connection finds its most powerful expression in the formation of the midnight children’s conference. As Sufiya in Shame represents a collective consciousness although a violent one, so also the midnight children’s conference exemplifies a national
consciousness attempting to function on more democratic lines to create history. Saleem Sinai uses his supra powers to convene the midnight children's conference with the belief that the congregation of responsible and enlightened citizens could play a decisive role to create a more positive history for the newly independent nation.

The depiction of the historical Hazaratbal incident can be taken as a clear instance of the pre-occupation of the novel of the 80s with the interconnection of history, politics and the individual. The episode gains more significance because it occurs in both Midnight's Children and Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines. Rushdie's treatment of the episode is rather cursory; his interest seems rather to re-emphasise the connection between the nation's history and that of his family, than to explore the significance of the situation. He implies that his grandfather Aadam Aziz could be responsible for the disappearance of the holy Relic, "as a revenge upon God by a father who had lost his son"(MC- 333), Aadam Aziz dies in Kashmir five days before the relic is recovered. Soon after, the head of the nation Nehru too passes away.

Amitav Ghosh's treatment is not only more detailed and imaginative but also more significant in its understanding of the role of politics in the sub-continent, and its effect on history and the individual. He suggests that the politics of the nations of the sub-continent are inseparable, that
incidents in one reverberate in other parts of the sub-continent. And as Sushila Singh says, "Drawing heavily from his personal experiences, he brings in collision personal and public happenings with locales shifting and merging between Calcutta, London and Dhaka." The volatile nature of political forces has turned the sub-continent into a tinderbox ready to ignite at the slightest provocation. The Hazaratbal episode is used by Amitav Ghosh to expose the fragile nature of communal harmony, its vulnerability to manipulative politics. Tracing the history of the Mu-i-Mubarak, Amitav Ghosh shows that it had grown into a symbol of unity among the various communities of Kashmir. The shrine sheltering the holy relic had become a great center of pilgrimage; multitudes of people, Kashmiris of every religious faith, would throng to the shrine on occasions when the relic was displayed. Over the centuries, the shrine became a symbol of the unique and distinctive culture of Kashmir. The disappearance of the sacred relic had spontaneously brought the people of Kashmir together in a feeling of shared loss. As Amitav Ghosh comments, "There is a note of surprise, so thin is our belief in the power of syncretic civilizations- in the newspaper reports that tell us that the theft of the relic had brought together the people of Kashmir as never before"(SL-225). This was possible through the efforts of people like Maulana Masoodi, an authentic but unsung hero. In a small but significant gesture, the Maulana persuaded the demonstrators to march with black flags instead of green. Rumours and mischievous political and religious forces however soon
disrupted this collective display of mourning. There were demonstrations and meetings in both East and West Pakistan and it was declared that the theft of the relic was an attack upon the identity of the Muslims. Local disgruntled communal forces were quick to capitalize on these insidious pronouncements. The edifice of unity was shattered, resulting in large scale rioting not only in the country but also in the other parts of the sub-continent.

The tangled web of communal politics in the sub-continent entraps Tridib, an important character in *The Shadow Lines*. Significantly he is gruesomely butchered to death, not in his own country but on the streets of Dhaka, aflame with the repercussions of the Hazratbal incident in distant Kashmir. Surrounded by a rioting mob, Tridib yet attempts to rescue his elderly uncle and faces the consequence.

Tridib’s heroic attempt, and its tragic failure, symbolizes the positive potential of the active-literal mode, as does Saleem Sinai’s aborted endeavor to unite the midnight’s children similarly. Alu in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason*, a victim of political forces that have hounded him out of his country fails in his brave attempt to create history in far away al-Ghazira. However, Agastya in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August*, emerges victorious in his attempt to leave a mark on the wretched conditions of an obscure and oppressed tribal village.
The narrator of *Midnight's Children* mourns the failure of the active-literal mode. "The active-literal passed us by" he says (MC-286). However, to dismiss the attempts of Saleem or Sufiya or Tridib or Agastya as failures does not do justice to the courage and potentiality for positive action that they exemplify. The new novel of the 80s ultimately holds out a ray of hope in its depiction of the multifarious connections between history, politics and individual. The individual has the determination and will to rise above all disruptive political and communal forces to forge a new and more positive history. And as Aruna Srivastava aptly comments, "such a view of history does not allow humans to hide behind ideas of destiny or fate."36

Saleem Sinai is the embodiment of the new individual. In spite of the many physical mutilations he suffers, he is still determined to combat the forces of history. History's oppression does act as a deterrent in his attempt to create history. And in the process enables him to find a new identity for himself and his nation.
NOTES


7. Salman Rushdie, interview, by Gordon Wise Gentleman
   Feb 1984: 59.

8. B.K.Joshi "It may be long, but it is not overwritten," The Times
   of India 1 Nov 1981: 8


10. Wise, 57.

11. Niel Ten Kortenaar, "Midnight's Children and the Allegory of

12. Neeraja Mattoo, "Indianness in Midnight's Children: Rushdie's
    view of an 'Amnesiac Nation," The Indian Novel in English:
    Essays in Criticism, ed. Ravi Nandan Sinha and R.K. Sinha

13. Tariq Rehaman, "Politics in the Novels of Salman Rushdie," The
    Novels of Salman Rushdie, eds. G.R. Taneja and R.K. Dhawan
14. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (1988; New Delhi, Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1992) All subsequent references are to this edition and will be denoted by the abbreviation SL.

15. Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (1986; New Delhi, Roli Books International, 1986) All subsequent references are to this edition and will be denoted by the abbreviation CR.


21. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (1983; Calcutta: Rupa & Co. 1983) All subsequent references are to this edition and will be denoted by the abbreviation SH.


23. Upamanyu Chatterjee, *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988; New Delhi, Rupa & Co., 1994) All subsequent references are to this edition and will be denoted by the abbreviation EA.


25. Mattoo, 66.


27. Price, 104.


