Chapter – IV

PRACTICE IN INDIAN NOVELS
Indo-Anglian fiction made its appearance about 150 years ago. Bankim Chandra’s novel *Raj Mohan’s Wife* (1864) is cited as the first Indian fiction in English. However, M.K. Naik and G.P. Sharma contend that Kylash Chunder Dutt’s futuristic novel *A Journey of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945* (1835) is to be taken as the first Indian novel in English. Fiction, as a genre, came to mean a widening of experimentation and awareness. It was a time when Western literature and knowledge were felt strongly by the Indians especially the writers. This allowed them to embark on a journey of exploration. Amidst this fervent activity, India’s freedom struggle became a focal point. Many writers used different literary approaches by keeping into view other social, economic and religious aspects of society.

The year 1935 is truly significant because it saw the arrival of two important novels - Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Untouchable* and R.K. Narayan’s
Swami and Friends. They were followed by Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938). Sunanda Mongia pointed out:

The focus shifts to the Indian multicultural society linked by an English language unapologetically Indianized and strewn with the anglicized idioms of the Indian languages…. In other words, like the novels of the first phase it is still a colonized discourse.¹

These Indian novels had to deal with the various ramifications that came out of the psyche of a people haunted by the spectre of colonization. The writers were in a tight spot for they had to take up a stand which needed to be accepted by the colonizer. This necessitated the use of a counter-canon that could not do away with the realistic mode of presentation.

The publication of Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981) saw the dawning of a new phase in Indian fiction in English. A peculiar style of writing was born, and the following years saw the spawning of new writers. The counter discourses which were employed by the novelists became the main tools in the hands of the writers of the 1980s. Because of the need to deal with variegated issues, the writers had to have complete control over the medium. They had the feeling that the Indian ethos, if packed well, will find a ready reader and buyer in the West. Such a cosmopolitan approach was never experienced in the different phases of the development of Indo-Anglian fiction.

Writers who were writing before 1981 also continued to write. But they were not interested in the new literary techniques of the 1980s. As demanded by a change of internal and external forces, new themes came to be taken up in
the course of time. This was true of the writers who later on became the representatives of a new discourse known as postmodernism. The old writers remained immune to those changes. On the contrary, the younger writers felt the need of adapting to changing environments. This urged them to dismantle the old tradition of fiction, as they found it too tame and incongruous. *Midnight's Children* harps a lot on Indian independence. The theme of freedom reflects the manner of the new writers who wanted to be free from many of the stereotyped literary traditions; they wanted to create something new. This novel of Rushdie introduces, for the first time in the Indian subcontinent, a literary practice known as postmodernism. It can be assumed that the wind of globalization has come; such a happening was never thought of before. It is symptomatic of a people, who are always ready to assimilate and absorb any influence if it will allow them to vindicate the achievement of certain ideological goals. The writings of Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth are affronts to the Western concept of a centralized authority.

This canonizing gesture will become an indicator for the Indian writers. Aijaz Ahmed is conscious of it and says:

> The range of questions that may be asked of the texts which are currently in the process of being canonized within this categorical counter-canon must predominantly refer, then, in one way or another, to representations of colonialism, nationhood, post-coloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, corruptions, and so forth.
India, as one of the cradles of ancient civilizations, boasts of a rich literary heritage. Narrative literature is believed to have existed in classical and medieval times. But it did not materialize in the form of writing a modern novel. This literary genre is believed to have come up in the mid and late 19th century with “English influences upon various vernacular writers.” The growth of the novel is again looked at from another angle with Meenakshi Mukherjee saying that the advent of the novel should not be simplistically attributed to the influence of the English language and its accompanying literary wealth. She says that many other determinants are to be considered as to have given the impetus in the creation of the Indo-Anglian fiction. Such a claim reflects the unwillingness of the colonized people against the hegemonistic intentions of the colonizer. As such the relationship between a variegated culture and a creative activity is to be considered. What is found in a work of literature always shows that it originated out of an accumulated experience of an individual. C.D. Narasimhaiah has correctly pointed out: “There must be numerous counter - cultures and sub-cultures in any society … culture in its very nature is … a struggling complex of currents. And this is a sign of vitality.”

If literature moved on a linear path, which was guided by a singularity of purpose and technique, the same cannot be expected from a new environment that thrives on pluralism. In the name of creativity and newness, the present Indo-Anglian novel triumphs with elements of multiplicity, fragmentation and radical utterances. This pluralism is echoed in the innumerable thematic elements that constitute a major share in the practice of postmodern literary attempts. The Indian cultural heritage finds companionship with colonial experiences, oral traditions and the phenomenon of diasporic
writing. All of these entities are realized through the use of English, and the writers are no more embarrassed about it. Consciously or unconsciously, they have come to accept English as a part of the nationalistic consciousness. This has allowed the present fiction in English to thrive well. It is this element of multiplicity that paves the way for the adoption of postmodernism as a favourite means of giving expression to contemporary experiences. But this transition is often marred by the unseen hand of nationalism. It might have once inspired many of the writers in English, particularly fiction writers; however, it has come to mean a hurdle in free expression. This demands the application of a middle path that does not favour extremes. This is acutely felt by every Indo-Anglian writer who is of the opinion that he or she needs an adjustment, either with the language or the theme. Gita Hariharan, as such, says:

Nationalism needn’t be a rigid thing, it needn’t be a limiting thing, but I think there must be some sort of ground-level link. Already, you are writing in English, and this is a certain thing of historical twist which you can’t do much about. Nobody chooses which language they will write in, really, but already those of us who write in English are cut off from the main stream literatures in India.6

The question of language always looms large over the process of expression. The onslaught of intellectual control over the outlook of language could be felt in the writings of postmodern writers. The Indian writers in English also felt that a crisis was initiated in the Western World, and its repercussions were strongly felt in the Indian soil also. Sunanda Mongia says:

An aspect of the modernist and post-modernist sensibility of the ... century is the linguistic crisis
which sees language as fissured, layered, and elusive language is seen to be a system with sub-languages, self-generative, impregnated with culture and power systems. In India this is compounded by the controversy about English.²

The power of language was clearly discerned by a writer like Rushdie. It is used to sweep across a wide range of emotions and situations. New words are born and never-seen structures of language move about on the pages of his novels. His spontaneous outburst is followed by writers like Hariharan and Tharoor. They share a flair in the presentation of many of the literary devices that derive their uniqueness from distinct twists of Indian languages. Hariharan has, without any reservation, introduced many South Indian linguistic and cultural elements to a wide area of readership. This shows that literary expressiveness is no longer confined to pockets of cultural activity; it has assumed a proportion that encompasses a wide area.

The entrance of postmodernism has given way to a mixed kind of reaction. Its adoption is meekly accepted, though branded as an outside entity, because it promises a lot of possibilities in terms of creativity. In spite of India having got freedom in 1947, the hangover of post-colonialism still persists. The feeling of being fragmented, and the inability to speak out cohesively still occupy the Indian writers. Jasbir Jain is of the opinion that,

While modernism is imported, post-modernism is native. Post-modernism is the creation of the colonial countries..... post-modernism in its multiplicity, in its fragmented sense of reality, in its fractured sense of character, and inconclusive and ambiguous endings is
essentially the "ism" of the refugees, the post-colonials, the oppressed and the marginalised.\textsuperscript{8}

It will be interesting to deal with the works of some postmodern writers. Rukun Advanis' work, *Bethoven Among the Cows* (1994) is a postmodern attempt. It is metatexual, self-conscious, and punctuated with episodes. The novel begins in the 1960s and embraces such historical marks as Emergency and Operation Bluestar. Though dubbed the biggest democracy in the world, the writer mocks at the way things are run here in India. Everything and anything is possible because no one cares a whit for the welfare and integrity of the country. Rukun Advani is not myopic to the presence of a vast number of languages, cultures, literary practices and religions. The depiction is carried out through an irreverent approach.

Mukul Kesavan's novel *Looking Through Glass* (1995) is an epic with a comical touch. With the help of magic realism, the writer moves through time. *Red Earth* and *Pouring Rain* of Vikram Chandra is self reflexively critical about the ethos of the Indians. By positing himself inside and outside of the line of narration, the novelist emphasizes his role as one concerned with the creation of textual comprehensibility. The novel is candid about sexual matters, and he exults in the presence of plurality, and the power of the marginalized. He is amused by the modernist's lament over a fractured self. This celebratory note is very much a part of his postmodern approach.

The sympathetic note found in the writings of postmodernists seem to declare indirectly that they stand for the rights of the "other". This "other" can mean low cultures and ethnic interests. Any discourse that is not in a favoured
position always attracts them. It is this intellectually challenging stance that inspired writers like Amitav Ghosh, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Rukun Advani. Their works are sometimes described as lying between modernism and postmodernism. This is so because they lie between two literary evolutions – one belonging to the late 1970s and the other beginning from the early 1980s. It was the manner of presentation, not of the content, that declared their position as postmodernists. The human situations belonged to the social complexities of the Indian society, and as such the novels of the postmodern Indian writers could not be described as being similar to those of the Western World.

Fantasy forms an important ingredient of the postmodern fiction. This element is abundantly present in postmodern Indian fiction of the postcolonial period. From the early part of the 1980s, it is discernible that novelists are slowly turning away from the descriptive and linear mode of writing. Though fiction writers were engaged, sometimes, in self-introspection, the ability to expand the inner voice became quite prominent only with the coming of the postmodernists. This forms the basis for the utilization of structures that cannot be called simple. The approach of the novelist becomes a multifaceted one. A singular view is not sufficient enough to project the realities. He, thus, uses multiple techniques of presentation that makes his work, at once, to be three-dimensional and complex. The traditional real world which he faced with a certainty is now challenged by uncertainty. It creates an atmosphere in which he can fantasize fully. Fantasy does not belong wholly to a categorized branch of expression; it can go along with writings that are very political and realistic. The amalgamation of politics and fantasy is a natural phenomenon because
India is a thriving democratic country. It allows everybody to be conscious of the political elements that silently creep into their consciousness.

The very mention of the word “fantasy” conjures up an image of escapism, adventure and individual freedom. Julia Segal says:

In some ways the word fantasy seems to me to give a similar freedom a child gains when it learns the concept of ‘pretend’. What is ‘pretend’ can be subjected to different laws from what is ‘real’ as a result the child is free to play and to experiment in a way that it could not do it if it did not make the distinction.

Fantasy has provided the Indians an access to a world where they are free to toy with techniques, use of language and situation-based line of narration. A writer like Rushdie played with plot, language, characterization and events in such a manner that every reader of his work, *Midnight’s Children*, feels that the novel has every element that will allow it to be called a product of fantasy. If repetition was not a part of a traditional work of literature, Rushdie has used it with abandon not forgetting to mock a whole range of literary tools and socially-accepted norms.

*Midnight’s Children* is a novel often referred to as a surrealistic work. Salman Rushdie is seen as indulging in a free and personal interpretation of events and characters without a voluntary check. Imagination is a provenance that supports no boundaries and it is allowed to run wild with no hands allowed to put a check on it. The result is interesting, though an acceptance of it throws the reader into bewilderment, because after being caught by the magical imagination no one is able to make an easy exit. This region of imagination
permits the novelist to use elements of impossibility and far-fetchedness which, as the novel goes on, begin to assume a credibility that could have been an impossible feat in the hands of a traditional writer.

Imagination can assume roles that are either logical or illogical; the second one is in the realm of open-endedness. A product of imagination often misses a coherent beginning, middle and end. This continuation brings forth the bizarre elements. *Midnight's Children* has a vast scope which allows the novelist to play spontaneously with words. The flight of imagination taken by the novelist is anything but normal. This might have allowed the critics to declare that the novel is bizarre in its content and expression. Both the reader and the critics are enthralled by episodes where the characters assume fanciful roles with costumes that are both recognizable and strange. Every individual acts independently; this is how all the characters play their assigned roles. An irresistible spectacle is flung open before everyday and all are mesmerised by the carnivalistic quality. It is generally agreed that nobody except a Salman Rushdie, could have painted this inventive picture.

Magic realism and surrealism are unmistakably present in *Midnight's Children* and most of his works of fiction. They are symptomatic of the hyperactive nature of the novelist. The background, environment and the characters involved provide the licence to Rushdie so that he may run wild with his whimsical adventures led by a strong imagination. India has a rich oral tradition; it is mainly found in the religious recitations and stories told of gods and goddesses and their exploits. This tradition, which allows personal additions and indulgences, has been skillfully assimilated by Rushdie to furnish a novel which has, more often than not, been described as full of a magical
style of narration. Many writers like Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia, Günter Grass of Germany, and John Fowler of England have created works that are known as "magic realism". Their pens created detailed accounts and scenes of everyday life with such a care that this kind of realism stands out quite prominently. This crafted creative effort is mixed with liberal amounts of fancy and has its origins in myths and fairy tales. There is a metafictional quality in them; nobody can fail to detect that the technique employed is one which no one has anticipated earlier. The fusion that takes place has blurred the distinctions that exist between the ordinary and the fantastic, the serious and the trivial, the bizarre and the normal. The literary technique known as "magic realism", besides being new and controversial, has given the opportunity to Linda Hutcheon to comment that it is one of the meeting points of postmodernism and postcolonialism. She traces the origin of "magic realism" to Latin America and the Third-World countries.

As a postcolonial writer Rushdie is burdened with many compulsions. He is expected to take a determined political stand that is to exemplify the predetermined expectations of writers and critics alike. Some are of the opinion that the works of Salman Rushdie can be enjoyed by willingly forgetting his critical postures, and by diverting the attention on his artistic enterprise. This is an indirect indicator that shows that the writer is an artist above anything else. M.K. Naik is without exaggeration when he says that,

> It is his hyper-active imagination that must have drawn Rushdie to Surrealism, and its modern cousin, Magic realism, as a strategy which has patent affinities with the strong oral traditions and narrative patterns of third world societies ....

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This charged imagination of Rushdie abounds among the pages of *Midnight's Children* where both the protagonist and his friends are depicted as being specially endowed with magical qualities. The importance of time and place are ignored the result is that Salman Rushdie is described by H.H. Anniah Gowda as possessing “Unreality or magic combined with post-structuralism recalling Laurence Sterne seems to flourish in Salman Rushdie.”

It looks as if a sense of strangeness is allowed willingly by the novelist, to cover the frame of history of the novel. When *Midnight’s Children* began unfolding before the gaze of the readers, the elements of fantasy were not visible. However, it began descanting on them slowly, and as the novel continued a sense of imagination encircled everybody. This decisive surrealist movement materialised with a suddenness when Saleem Sinai took birth at midnight, 15th August 1947, a moment very special for the Indians who were dreaming of a moment when everybody could be free. Just as he could tune in inside the minds of other people his colleagues also were equally gifted.

Out of the many works of Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* stands out on its being distinct because of fantasy and the way fantasy and symbolism are used to heighten the narration of the novel. Fantasy surrounds the reader through fantasy-working expressions, passages, episodes and unexpected twists of happenings. No one will believe that the main narrator of the novel is actually the son of an Englishman.

Though history lurks behind the chain of events that take place inside *Midnight’s Children*, the narrative structure operates on the levels of bizarreness and reality. This has created a sense of detachment in the reader.
The line that divides reality from fantasy is amorphous and no one can, with assertion, say where reality or fantasy begins and ends. If a description of reality is given, it is one that strikes the reader with force. The same can be said of fantasy also because Rushdie never gives the impression of preferring the one over the other. No one forgets the charm created out of his first novel, *Grimus* (1975). It is more of a fairy tale. Though the magical quality is not maintained long, every reader accepts the fact that the work possessed plenty of the quality of fantasy. The atmosphere of enchantment is the product of the presence of myths and a certain strangeness that go along with them. The hero is shown to be an Amerindian Flapping Eagle, a magician, who says, "I began to recreate Calf Island, exactly as it was with one difference. It was to contain no Rose. I had decided that this was a better alternative than physically breaking the Rose."

While going through his journey as a narrator, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight’s Children* comes to know that he is not the most important part of the history of India. The fact that he was welcomed in relation with a fateful moment of India might have given him the idea that he was fated to act out an important role in the process of history. This belief began crumbling as the novel continued, with the narrator beginning to sense that he was nothing but a very unimportant unit in the major historical process. He began realizing that history was not a part of human awareness, and at the same time he was not the centre of his environment. This knowledge, coupled with his sensing that he was an outsider in his own land, and being an offering in the hands of history, forced him to adopt a style of life very remote in character. Saleem Sinai was always hoping of becoming a rooted individual, but history was against him. He had to have a refuse wherein he could feel that he was a whole being. For
this he was forced to withdraw into the world of fantasy. If he could not find
his history-based roots, he was again able to find his imaginary roots in the
realm of imagination. This root is not a fixed one; it could be traced anywhere.
Therefore, Dr. S.P. Swain says, “Saleem seeks to resolve his agonising
problems of identity by withdrawing himself into the realm of fantasy.” This
elusive search takes up most of the part of the novel.

A fairy tale tells stories that are far removed from reality. The story
teller is free to indulge in his personal explorations of impossible angles of
exploits. It is this fairy-tale-like fantasy that allows T.N. Dhar to comment that
“Midnight’s Children exploits the formal features of the fairy tale, the romance,
the confession, the anatomy, the novel, the epic and some other forms like the
journalistic and the purely fantastic.” That the novel enveloped by these
pavonine phases is one that requires to be remembered by readers.

“Chutnification of history” – found in Midnight’s Children conjures up
an image where all sorts of ingredients are allowed to mix together so as to
produce a highly-seasoned product. This chutnification has to do with the
public part of the novel which is again and again blended with the mystical
conditions of fantasy. The investment of Saleem is complete in the hands of
Salman Rushdie. T.N. Dhar says:

Rushdie has totally fantasticated his protagonist. He
employs the trope of magnification as a play to allow
Saleem to see, to know, and to report more than he
could as an ordinary mortal. He is invested with
extraordinary omniscience: he can know his pre-natal
past, which helps Rushdie to bring into the book the
story of his grandfather’s fantastic love affair, and the
equally unbelievable story of his mother’s first husband.... as a child he is a voyeur .... As a child he acquires a prophetic voice and communicates with many other miraculous children of his country.¹⁵

Fantasy in Indian writing is sometimes traced to the subcontinent itself. If the occidental mind is attuned to a scientific sensibility, the oriental mind remains rooted to its ancient heritage. The Indian writer cannot forget the myths, folklores, mystical attitudes and the aura of romance. These typical traits often inspire them to tackle the contemporary world. Besides providing a sense of belongingness to the local soil, a more original touch is imparted to the postmodern quests by them. Rosemary Jackson, thus, says that modern fantasy “is rooted in the ancient/myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tale and romance.”¹⁶

India, characterized by its sharp awareness of both the seen and the unseen always welcomed the concept of a mixture of reality and fiction. Literary works like Panchatantra, the Hitopadesa, and Kadambiri are examples of a judicious mingling of the above-mentioned concept of creativity. Such mythical stories and legends are freshly parodied, imitated and assimilated to come to terms with contemporary situations.

In the last century, the Indian writers started looking for inspiration in the Western World of literature. Before the achievement of independence, the writers were comfortable in dealing with several social and multifarious issues. They were tackled by using realism, which possessed an element of self-
satisfied zeal. This did not allow experimentation in language and structure.
Prema Nandakumar says:

The novelists who dominated Indo-Anglia in the fifties, sixties and seventies were almost all of them believers in photographic realism. There could be remembrances of things past and a welter of confusion in the thought-process commenting on the present .... They walked into middle-class rooms, wandered through the carpeted elitism of high society, dared a trip or two to the chandeliered brilliance of the Raj glory ... city slums the untouchables' quarters and the murky universe of the underprivileged and the unredeemed in our urban deserts.17

Upamanyu Chatterjee's novel, English, August : An Indian story (1992), is postmodern for the main characters move around with the traits that were left by the British. Such a character does not remain unadulterated because he is still not freed from being contaminated by values that he sucked up while he was serving under the colonial masters. Unfortunately such a character remains marginalized and does not represent the new Indian who moves towards a meaningful life. He finds no meaning in life, and moves around with no fixed goal. The protagonist of the novel, Agastya Sen, is a postmodern hero because he is the evidence of a life that refuses to take happiness out of the ordinary activities of life. Because he finds no meaning in the lives of others, he remains aloof as he does not have the yearning to become an active part in this sea of humanity. The world of Madna does not inspire him. P.V. Jayaraj finds Agastya being too self-centred.

But he is too wrapped up in his self to be worried about, say the bad condition of the roads in the town or the
delay in the arrival of the T.V. transmitter in Madna. For an urbanised Indian like Agastya the apathy of the local people towards a statue of the father of the nation, installed in a prominent locality of the town, is cause for amusement .... Here Agastya turns out to be a typical postmodern character who has a de-centred subjectivity and thereby freed from the imperatives of work and usefulness.18

The diverse visuals of the village life do not hearten Agastya. The sights may be drab, but a look into the mind of the main character would show that it was not the surrounding that spread a sense of purposelessness. It is interesting to note that Agasta does not fail to see a postmodern scene where the old and the new images mingle shamelessly. P.V. Jayaraj has said :

Chatterjee's heroes usually fail to rest their convictions in a meaningful context. Peace of mind for the real self is always elusive. In the case of a young man like Agastya, anchorlessness was to be one of his chaotic concerns during his life in an unfamiliar Madna.19

The hopelessness felt by Agastya points to his being qualified as a postmodern character. He remains fragmented in his views towards life. If he could have imagined a wholeness, he would not have felt depressed. In reality he must have felt a sense of exhilaration because he is no longer the victim of the system.

Agastya needs a clinical treatment. His self-imposed reluctance may have its source in his massive anxiety and depression. A professional helper is what he needs most. The existential question brought up by some critics does not provide a suitable answer to his vapid response towards life. As a public
servant he has so many things to perform with enthusiasm. The newly-achieved freedom does not let him act actively. The town, Madna, might have symbolized an active life that is found in a free India. Is Agsatya a real victim of a postmodern world? Under such a world no one is able to see and feel a thing as a whole. Because the environment is fragmented, it is reflected on the lives of individuals. These imperfect human beings are not able to think and act sensibly. Life is worth enjoying only because of the meaningfulness attached to it. Postmodern characters are victims of their own perceptions of the meaning of existence. Salman Rushdie is right when he says:

> Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood memories, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved.\(^{20}\)

The characters of Upamanyu Chatterjee recall the protagonists of Kosinski’s *Passion Play* (1979) and *Pinball* (1982). They reveal how “the protagonists of these two fictional works go all out in true maverick style to attain a detotalizing totalized self by means of sexual aggrandizement, deception, disguise and even libidinal force, which is perfectly in tune with the postmodern problematics.”\(^{21}\)

The protagonists of Chatterjee are affronts to the refined sentiments of modernism. This challenge is seen in the deliberate indulgences in drugs and sex. The challenging actions of the characters fail to sow that they were
reacting intellectually. That is why there is a dominance of sensuous response.

Satnam Kaur remarks:

Such animalistic and repulsive degeneration of the human world to the animal world symbolizes the influence of perverted deculture on human actions, a common feature of the post-modernist demonic civilization.

Indian writers in English, particularly those belonging to the 1990s, have taken the liberty to use any approach or method to put forward their new literary ventures. The stigma of plagiarism or imitation no longer embarrasses the present-day writers. Parody, as such, becomes a very powerful tool in the hands of a postmodernist. As one of the facets of satire, it ridicules and reforms. It has its seat on the perception of incongruity. The element of distortion, which forms a part of it, should not be taken as the main ingredient. That it is the culmination of a mixture of various elements must be kept in mind.

According to Peter Petro, "parody is imitation which strives toward a comical effect is indisputable, but parody can be seen also as stylization with a hostile tendency, a vehicle for reinterpretation and re-evaluation, and as a catalyst of literary change." Hariharan's novel, *When Dreams Travel* (1999), is based on a widely known story i.e. *The Arabian Nights*. The familiar story is again punctuated by many of her fictional people and events. Her intent is to destroy the citadel of patriarchal assumptions. The grim scenes remain associated with the thousand plus one nights of the old story.
The elements of parody that are found in this novel of Hariharan are metafictional in character. Rama Kundu provides this assertion:

Hariharan’s narrative mode ... affirms the metafictional ... function of intertextuality, parody and antireference. The novel depends upon intertextuality for its self-conscious narratives which signify their artificiality by reference to the traditional tale; the reader is reminded of the artificiality of its fictional world.24

Parody has the ability to repeat what is found in a work of fiction. The element of irony is predominantly present when this mirroring is done. It seems as if art is again imitating art. There are “direct references to ... authors, books and readers.”25 Parody, as found in postmodern fictions, has the ability to critically show the manner of the creation of the work. This is done by being inside the very body of the text. It remains critical of the traditional concept of imitation which once formed a very important part of every literary output. This does not dilute its task of self-reflexibly criticizing a work. According to Margaret A. Rose,

The criticism of the ‘truth’ of fiction in novels following Don-Quixote and Tristram Shandy, is part of a critique of unreflexive realism which has taken various forms in literary history. Even disparate works such as Diderot’s Jacques le Fataliste, Proust’s parodies of the Goncourt Journals, and the nouveau Roman, demonstrate a common critique of the myth of realistic representation in mimetic art; and of the assumption that art may truthfully mirror other worlds.26
When Dreams Travel has stories within stories. Such a device was common among many of the oriental and occidental literary works. In the Indian epic the Ramayana, Rama – the protagonist – is found listening to the narration of the long story. The intimate relationship between the author and the reader can be seen in The Canterbury Tales and Tristram Shandy. The metafictional delineation is the ideal medium for such creative works. The element of self-reflexivity often becomes the dominant subject of postmodern fiction. Reality and the canon of history are marked as images of provisionality; they are no longer examples of external verities, but are associated with a series of constructions, impermanency, artifices and series of constructions.

The already-existing systems of fiction are examined critically in this chapter by incorporating both theory and criticism. This is followed by an exhaustive discussion on writers and characters. The aspect of theorizing is very much apparent because the writer is often seen intruding to commenting on the aspects of writing. He is not averse to mixing with the fictional characters and being directly addressed. The question of reality occupies the mind of the metafictional writer because he thinks that there is no singular truth or meaning. They are, besides, adulterated by the narrative assumptions of the fiction writers. Such a kind of metafictional approach, as is made evident by a questioning stance on the dominant gesture of the male characters. This allows Hariharan to do away with repeated concepts and conventions. She seems to emphasize the fact that her subversive intent is an effort to foreground her feminist views in the postmodern context. The refusal to maintain a clear division between critical assessments and fictional texts is itself one of the characteristics of postmodern metafiction. The novel, When Dreams Travel,
offers "a monistic world of representations in which the boundaries between art and life, language and metalanguage ... and fiction and criticism and [sic] under philosophical attack." Hariharan has not forgotten that there is a subtext of frustration and intolerable pain in the exotic adventures of *The Arabian Nights*. Shahrzad is depicted as a symbol of a woman who suffers a lot because she is trapped in the snare of patriarchy. If the princess survived through her skilful narration, the same is true of Hariharan who exists because she possesses a highly perfected mode of telling a story.

In the novel the novelist does not forget to revive Shahrzad by describing a meeting between Dunyazad and Dilshad; the former is the younger sister of Shahrzad and the latter is a slave girl. The character of Shahrzad embodies the modern legend of feminism. It should not be forgotten that this work of Hariharan is a fiction about fiction. Rama Kundu says: "WDT is a metafiction in the sense that it is ... a novel which is a commentary on its own antecedent." The novelist is not worried over the fact of the reader being in the dark in relation with the source of the novel. The technique of fiction becomes an example of self-referentiality. Hariharan builds up a literature land where the concept of creation and actually-created text, and the manner in which it is created - all mingle to produce a metafictional effect. The critical explanations are sometimes mistaken for the actual text of fiction. M. Currie has pointed out:

> the roles of the narrator and addressee go on interchanging. The speaker becomes the listener and vice versa again and again. And the stories or just hints of stories which would leave the listener perpetually
dissatisfied and thirsty for the knowledge of 'when then.' 29

A postmodernist writer does not hesitate in using the textualized past events as a part of the present situation. The intent is to rewrite the events of the past so that a new meaning and atmosphere may be created. This intermingling of the past and the present allows the writer to parodize particular lines of narration. The kind of linear presentation of the stories of *The 1001 Nights* can no longer be found in *When Dreams Travel*. It may be that the novelist is trying to shock the reader; she wants everybody to be aware of the position that women occupied both in the past and the present. She puts many questions into the mind of the readers but she does not wait for the conclusive answers. She, as expected, thus breaks down the narration of the novelist into inconclusive endings, twists and turns.

Postcolonial literature can mean those literary works that were written in the erstwhile colonies. The popular belief is that postcolonial writers always try to challenge the position of the colonizer. This is not always true; there are writers who work independently so as to create an individualized world. This is done through a conscious use of the language of the colonizer. It is seen that post-colonial literature does not fail to identify with the local rituals, traditions and environment. Arundhati Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things* is a representative example of such a postcolonial fiction with postmodern elements.

Just as in postmodernism, postcolonialism can assert its own identity by rebelling against the imperial “centre”. This is done through an affirmation of
both the theme and language of expression. As a general rule, it is stated that a postcolonial work is to be written in English. But the kind of English, as everybody believes, is not of the Queen’s English. The story of the novel, *The God of Small Things*, revolves around the love of Ammu, a high caste Syrian Christian woman, for Velutha, a Paravan, a low caste Indian. The postcolonial character of the novel is expressed thus by Bijay Kumar Das:

Ammu’s love for Velutha forms the core of the novel and makes the novelist’s preference crystal clear. The traditional society was not only conservative but authoritarian for it laid down who should love whom. It happened long ago and it is against this concept that the novelist protests vehemently. The right to love a man of her choice, is a woman’s birth right and it should not be scuttled in the name of religion, caste, colour and class. It is in this sense that the novel could be read as ... a post colonial novel for both feminism and post-colonialism aim at destroying the old power structure. Roy wants to break this age old tradition to uphold the right of a woman to marry a man of her choice.30

Arundhati Roy was not aware of the presence of certain laws that were in existence long before her intrusion into this world of conservatism. She writes:

it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama’s arrival, before the Zamorin’s conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began
long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a tea bag.31

A woman writer who takes up another side of the typical Indian family scene is Shashi Deshpande who tells the story of a love-and-understanding – starved woman in her novel, That Long Silence (1989). It tells about Jaya who suffers because of the negligent attitude of her husband. She tries to recover herself by writing about herself and her family, and in the process was ready to do away with “long silence”. It is the frustration of the protagonist that really takes up the major part of the novel. The broken marriage is clearly made known to the reader by the manner the marriage is described:

A pair of bullocks yoked together ... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visual I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman.32

This novel provides the picture of a woman who tries to reshape her own destiny. It shows that the main character, Jaya, is ready to be on her own, even refusing to relocate herself in the mould shaped for her by her husband. The “long silence”, which is symbolic of her silenced aspirations, is now ready to be threatened by her self-determined gesture of defiance.

It is the social environment that restricts and expands the vision of an individual. If the person happens to be a sensitive human being, he will allow himself to absorb the environmental currents and express in an expectedly peculiar and creative manner. Such a supposition had its example in the
writings of those who could not escape from the turmoils of the 1930s. The period mentioned here recounts the heavily-charged atmosphere of the Indian subcontinent. The Indians believed that they would soon be freed from the shackles of the British empire. The writers of this juncture could not help being immersed in political turmoil. Every social and national happening attracted the critical writings of the Indo-Anglian novelists. This allowed the blossoming of a group of Indian writers whose main concern could not be characterized by the existential confusion of the individual. This vision of a society that gropes around for a method in their structure of existence found the clearest voice in the writings of the 1960s. The conflict is between the individual and society. This unit of society is affected, not by any specific cause, but by the onslaught of social norms. The major agent of conflict took on a new face after the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. According to Indira Bhatt:

novelists were inspired to take up the relationship between national issues and the individual .... A new group of writers found no distinction between traditional oral cultural history and a scientific objective history.

This view is supported by M.F. Salat also:

Postmodern historiographic fiction perhaps most deliberately contextualizes the postmodern interrogation of the fact and fiction divisionism by subverting and contradicting the modernist view of history as scientific and objective discipline.
Such an attitude may be questioned by every intelligent individual because there is the lurking doubt that postmodernists are all out to destroy the scientific concept of modern history.

After Rushdie, the writer that does his best to better the cause of postmodern fiction in India is Amitav Ghosh. His novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), provides ample opportunity for practising on some of the postmodern elements like metaphor etc. In this novel it recurs increasingly to form a circular pattern. Visual elements like a sewing machine appears more than often. This machine occupies the central position in the life of Toru-debi. She treats it as if it was her own child. In the novel, even the arrival of her husband’s nephew, Alu, can not move her as much as the sewing machine does to her. This may be because of her childless life. She can not bring herself up to love someone that she fails to translate as her own. Toru-debi takes refuge behind the sewing machine. The machine is shown, metaphorically, to be the saviour at various parts of the novel. Any impending gloom of disaster is dispelled by the very presence of the machine. It saved Alu when the home got engulfed with fire. The act of throwing out the machine saves the life of Alu. He is again saved by two sewing machines when a big house, named ‘Star’ falls on him. Such a postmodern use of the metaphor allows the novel to take on a deep hue of suspense. “Sewing machine attains the figure of God who saves and who destroys.”

In *The Circle of Reason*, the reader does not fail to detect the existential problems that constantly haunt the modern men. This novel is divided into three sections. They are Satva, Rajas and Tamas. The metaphor of the three
major phases of the human life is clearly visible. Satva stands for reason, Rajas for passion and Tamas for death. In this regard Darshana Trivedi comments:

Written for selected readers, the novel is neither a novel of plot, nor a novel of character, but a novel of thought. There is no conventional development of plot or character. Instead of dealing with one particular character like R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*, a story of Raju or Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable* a story of Bakha, this novel is a story of entire humanity.36

Ghosh is willing to follow the postmodern technique of allowing the past and the present to flow together. The events that unfold do develop independently. Even the chronological sequence seems to be ignored intentionally. He develops the time-bound sequences in such a manner that what belongs to the present can be understood only in the context of the past; the same is true with a past event. This rejection of a linear narration is pointed to the mental condition not yet ready to accommodate the Christian concept of history as a progression from Genesis to Doomsday.

In a novel it is often the narrator who attracts attention for it is in his actions that a reader looks for direction and motive of the narration. This narrator may not happen to be the writer himself; such an accountability may sit on the shoulder of one of the characters. The flow of the story loses or gains impact by the manner of managing the temporal and locational elements. In *The Shadow Lines* fragmentation reigns supreme. This allows the writer to move around, and through time and widely-flung locations. The writer or the narrator remains willingly fragmented; in fact, the story is a whole made out of pieces. The outcome finds the reader moving around with a dazed look.
In the novel there are locational changes, and sequential disruptions. The unfolding of the novel shows that it is a critique aimed at basic concepts of traditional novels. The postmodernist technique allows “a sudden shift from Calcutta to Dhaka to London without an account of a ‘proper sequence of time …’”

The novel takes on many hues; the different interpretations on time, freedom and history are a part of them. According to Nirzari Pandit:

All characters have different – at times conflicting – notions of freedom … Ila’s quest is for freedom from her roots and culture, while the grandmother holds on to her past and lives in nostalgia of her national freedom movement. The narrator is the most complex character. He loves Ila, his cousin, grows up under the almost patronizing influence of his uncle Tridib, and tries to free himself of the memory of the past, of loss and defeat, while at the same time holding on tightly to it.

Can a person remain immune to the forces of nature and time? The answer may be both a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’. A person remains obsessed by an idea; the dynamic nature of a changing world fails to put an impact on him or her. Remaining in an aloof world of imagination, this individual does not enjoy accommodating ideas that do not empathize. In *The Shadow Lines*, there is the grandmother who remains as a perpetual symbol of freedom that has its source in the Freedom Movement. Even the concept of personal freedom is unacceptable because this ‘self’ is to be subordinated to the idea of national freedom. She is the antithesis of Ila. The freedom of the latter is cheapened by her when it is commented that it is a “freedom bought at the price of an air ticket.”
A connection between the present and the past relies on the illogical shuttling of the characters. Amitav Ghosh employs a technique which may be called as a "contradictory enterprise". The postmodernist derangement is well echoed in his works. There is a willingness to do away with totalities. It does not mean that at the end of the novel, there should not be a coherent narrative. The different parts of the novel assume intensities of narration throughout the story.

What does the novel – *The Shadow Lines* – challenge? Postmodernism never lets any idea alone until it is squeezed to the point of being turned into an argument that is devoid of any sanity. Postcolonial or postmodernist theory has never left nationalism without being mauled. Amitav Ghosh enjoys questioning the idea of nationalism which is based on a "few lines or boundaries". This concept of nationalism functions differently on individuals; none of them ever questions the manner of acquiring it. It is a man-made creation that is imposed on the general consciousness of a group of people. This demarcating line that singles out one political area from another operates on the level of the imagination. As such the conceptualized line often springs surprises.

The grandmother of the narrator in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, who stands aloof for her militant kind of nationalism, remains shocked when she visits Dhaka again to reaffirm her sense of belongingness. Her birthplace and sense of nationality can not be reconciled. She fails to find any visible sign of a political line of division between India and East Pakistan. This makes her to question the folly of killing one another for something that is not tangible. At the same time she feels that she still remains alienated mentally. She, the grandmother, can not belong physically to Dhaka, and at the same time the
country that makes her proud of her nationality fails to claim her whole being. She crossed over to India before the Partition. While staying in Calcutta she does not forget her original home, Dhaka. Her obsessed position in relation with Dhaka does not help her in making her an insider of that place. Because she considers Dhaka as her real home, Calcutta remains only a symbol of alienation.

Coming back to the question of narration, which is very postmodern, Reena Kothari talks of space and time as found in *The Shadow Lines*:

Time in this novel can be illusory and concrete at the same time. The narrator is an extremely skilled person. "... in the art of recollection" (TSL 194) like his grandmother. The narrator keeps shifting the time and the focus of the story as and when he requires to do so, with great ease. The reader gets transported from Calcutta to London or to Dhaka within no time. Similarly "space" could also be fluid whether within a house or within a country, in the novel.42

The illusionistic temperament of the novel does not remain simple because there is no fixed personality with whom the novel can be associated. There is the narrator; he serves only as the "introduction" for every character. "Discarding a linear structure and the conventional narrative scheme, Amitav Ghosh employs a circular, loop-like structure and a multiple narrative scheme in the novel."43 Ulka Joshi confirms her expostulations by saying that *The Shadow Lines* functions on the creative use of "memory". The narrator is told stories by the grandmother and Tridiv. The stories are the memories of the two characters. The remembered stories ignite the memories of the narrator again. In this way stories give birth to more stories. Most of the characters in the
novel get transported temporally and three dimensionally. This element of fantasy is not accidental. The novelist does not forget his part of telling a really riveting story.

The vast canvas of the novel includes episodic parts that deal with the different stages of life, viz. childhood, adulthood and mature age; people belonging to different nationalities are brought together; the lines of the story assume variety and credibility because the novelist has deliberately given it the hue of postmodernism. Without this new position, The Shadow Lines will lose its creative strangeness. Inside the new structure provided by postmodernism, memory reigns supreme. The novel is rightly dubbed as a “memory novel”. It makes the reader remember of a modern artist who remains fascinated by the variety presented by values of different visual shapes.

Stories are told; they become memories. This is a method preferred by postmodernist writers. They know that everything, including the controlling forces of life e.g. political ideologies – can be reduced to the simplicity of telling a story. The penchant of telling stories was in the traditional structure of the Indian society. G.N. Devy points out:

The Indian Writers [sic] in English have started enjoying telling stories in the rambling manner of Kathasaritsagar, and telling them in one or the other Indian registers of English ... they combine a great playfulness with a serious involvement in history.

The story related may be one connected with a metanarrade; it includes the voices of the underprivileged. Such telling of stories build up and, at the
same time, cripple a society. Individuals build up hope based on them; others
taste hell while living on a vibrant earth. It shows that “producing narratives”\(^{46}\)
can encompass lines, geographical features and political events.

“The postmodernist writer distrusts the wholeness and completion
associated with traditional stories, and prefers to deal with other ways of
structuring narrative. One alternative is the multiple ending,\ldots\)\(^{47}\) It is not the
multiple ending, but the multiple narrative technique that makes *The Shadow
Lines* a postmodernist novel. There may be a single narrator but “He is a child
or an adolescent at times, while at other times he is a mature adult.”\(^{48}\) By
assuming different roles, there are multiple narratives that impinge on one
another. The narratives branch out through recollections. This adds more colour
and texture to the total personality of the novel. Childhood ruminations and
adulthood critiques serve as the internal framework; around them the sense of
prosaic variety is built. Ulka Joshi knows where the strength of the novel lies,
and says:

> Though Ghosh resembles other postmodernist writer in using the multiple narrative scheme, the story telling method and back and forth journey in time, his ease and brilliance in employing these devices makes his novel outstanding. The complex narrative technique is not there just for the sake of being but it very well matches with the mood and temperament of the characters and adds to the beauty of the novel.\(^{49}\)

In the following chapter an analysis on Salman Rushdie as a postmodern writer will be made.
Notes


7 Loc. cit.


12 Loc. cit.


15 Ibid., P. 19.


19 Ibid. P. 3.

20 Ibid. P. 6.


22 Ibid. P. 73.


26 Ibid., PP. 66-67.


29 Ibid. P. 185.


38 Ibid., P. 83.


49 Op. cit., 7; P.120.