

Chapter Three

Narrativizing Alternative Histories : Salman Rushdie

Just as Sahgal presents an alternative version of history in parallel to the so-called official history and thereby not only questions its validity or truth-claim, but also challenges it by creating a fictional microcosm of its narrative, so also Salman Rushdie deconstructs the "official" account of history by representing several alternative fictional histories. In Rushdie's novels history has been envisaged from different perspectives which blend together in his narrative accounts. By mingling the different views of history, Rushdie purports to re-vision history in all its colours and nuances. In his fiction one becomes aware of the Marxist and Marxist-feminist views of history; at other times it seems that Rushdie juxtaposes the grand master narratives of history with a common man's subaltern version; sometimes he presents a diasporic and cross-cultural aspect of history, at yet another time, he combines the view of an individual with that of the nation. In short, in the fictional re-telling of history as the leitmotif of his fiction, Rushdie endeavours to narrativize different alternative histories *vis-a-vis* the official history.

Rushdie represents these perspectives through different narrative modes/methods. More often than not he provides realism, magic realism, fantasy, black humour, irony and metaphor as the pre-dominating components of textual narrative. Through these tools of narrative art, Rushdie constructs a world of diverse historiographical narratives that vies with the official or politician's version. Like other postmodernist fiction writers, *e.g.*, Gunter Grass, Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Rushdie also employs his narrative voice to compete with the suppressing master narratives of the world history. In his re-visionist agenda of

fictionalized history, therefore, he makes use of different literary and linguistic devices in order to silence the stifling din of traditional historiography. To that extent, Rushdie's fiction may be read as new-historicist in outlook. By doing this re-vision, Rushdie establishes his proposition that a historian's version is as much governed by narrative imperatives as his own version is. In the final analysis, therefore, writing history becomes the quest/question of narrative which is as much valid for a novelist as for the historian himself.

Since Rushdie competes his view of history with that of a politician's version, his work becomes intensely political. And it is political in at least two ways: it is political in that his major novels contain the political history of the Indian sub-continent from time immemorial, taking political to include the essential religious and mythical basis. Secondly, Rushdie's work is political in that it criticizes – both directly and through subversion/sub-version – the political regimes that are responsible for human division and disorder. Incidentally, the concept "history" also, like politics, is never innocent in the work of Rushdie, the trained historian. For his work has definitely introduced people to a subaltern historiography of India and thereby foregrounded the problematization of "official" historiography. It is not surprising why his fiction excavates what lies beneath the "histories" that the nation's intellectual and political leadership suppresses or excludes. That is, Rushdie's novels may be taken as the modern fairy-tales that distort the officially established "truth" only in order to draw better maps of reality. It is for this reason that Rushdie pits his "truth" against the politician's version and his fabulous tales quite competently give the lie to the official "truth". By doing this in a revisionist manner and raising the question of narrative, Rushdie blurs the boundaries between fiction and truth and story and history.

Born in Bombay in June 1947, Rushdie got his higher education from the Cambridge University and specialized in the discipline of history. His keen interest in the history of the world, therefore, is duly reflected in his writing. His one optional paper was the history of Islam which few students chose at the Cambridge. Further, having spent his childhood in Bombay, Rushdie continues to keep fascination for India. He has also special love for Kashmir from where his ancestors came and in his latest novel so far, *Shalimar the Clown*, he turns to the setting of Kashmir. In his celebrated novel *Midnight's Children* too, Rushdie started his story with Kashmir. In short, even after having migrated to England, and now to America, Rushdie still nurturs his love for his mother country. This mother country, however, has become an "imaginary homeland" for him which he never forgets even in his dream.

V. S. Naipaul "...pointed out in 1964 that Indian literature in English had ceased to exist... But in fact, Naipaul spoke too soon, because the most fertile period of Indian writing in English began in 1981, and has since shown no sign of coming to an end." (Cronin 204-205). The reason for this is the publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. It is true that there had been several prior stages of Indian writing in English, but the most creative period began after 1981. In the words of Jasbir Jain "...the fourth period begins with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, a period which heralded a greater freedom with language, fantasy, laughter, irony and satire" (60). In other words, before the eighties the Indian writing in English was passing through the defined stages of historical romance, and realism. It is only after the eighties, however, that it has matured and continued to evolve since then.

Before delving into the detailed analysis of Rushdie's individual novels, it would not be irrelevant to cast a glance at the overall contribution of his literary production. Roughly speaking, Rushdie's fictional output may be classified into the two narrative modes – magic-

realist and fantastic, with the former predominating. His first published novel, *Grimus* (1975), set in the imaginary location of Calf Island, is fashioned in the fantastic mode throughout and revisits that dimension in the central part of *Haroun and the Sea of stories* (1990) and in the final section of *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1985), whose nominal Spanish setting is like an arbitrary dream-world. For the rest, Rushdie's writing is magic-realist with the main emphasis on the realist component. It is located either wholly or mostly in the Indian subcontinent and with the explicit presence of real, if partially distorted historical event. This is the pattern established in *Midnight's Children* (1981) and repeated in *Shame* (1983), and the first three-quarters of *The Moor's Last Sigh*. In his later novels, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001) and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie turns to Western Zone also. The Location of *Fury* is set in America's New York, while that of *Shalimar the Clown*, it is set in Los Angeles. In these later novels, the Indian sub-continent is narrated not as a closed-in universe, but in its dynamic interaction with the rest of the world. It is narrated in the interaction with the west from the colonial period through independence and partition to the era of globalization. For instance, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Moor's Last Sigh* all range in chronology from the Raj era, early twentieth century to the actual time of writing, a pattern which is repeated in *The Ground Beneath*. The action of *Midnight's Children* takes in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and while not straying topographically outside the sub-continent, introduces British and American colonials and expatriates. *Shame* focuses on Pakistan but also includes episodes in Britain. *The Moor* is set in its first three sections in India, again including turn-of-century colonials in its cast, before moving out at the end to an invented Spain. On the other hand, the short stories collected in *East-West* (1994), take the reader from the sub-continent to an Asian emigre's London. In all Rushdie's novels other than *Grimus* and *Haroun*,

invented characters co-exist with historical figures. The latter appear either under their own names or disguised, satirised but still clearly recognisable. All in all Rushdie's fictional output, taken as a whole, may be read as constituting an alternative history of the Indian sub-continent so far.

Rushdie's first novel *Grimus* (1975) is variously described : as a science fiction, as a fantasy novel set in an imaginary island out of space and time and as a quest novel based on ideas from Sufi poetry. According to Margareta Petersson, *Grimus* "...contains a patchwork of myths collected from different parts of the world" (1). She believes that it is largely based on the alchemical tradition which becomes a discernible pattern of the novel. Rushdie attempts, however, to show that there are various dimensions of reality – both internal as well as external. And they both co-exist simultaneously and demand a definite vantage-point to understand them. Here Rushdie raises a question of perspective which becomes one of the central themes in his subsequent novels. Reality is after all a question of perspective and this perspective may be articulated by a definite mode of narrative representation.

Incidentally, the character of Virgil Jones in *Grimus* anticipates Rushdie's subsequent characters, too. He has several traits which recur in the other characters of Rushdie's fiction. The most important of them all is that Virgil Jones is, or once wanted to become a historian, and he realises that a historian is not a neutral, olympian chronicler, but takes part in the events he is describing. And that his present influences the image of the past. In that way there is a definite relation between image and perspective. For this reason Virgil believes that perspective determines or rather shapes the reality. Behind and beneath the story of *Grimus*, one can at once see a metafictional meaning. The novel's significance lies in the focus on narrative methods and on Rushdie's way of applying the myths.

Syed Amanuddin, on the other hand, maintains that in *Grimus* Rushdie "...initiates the exploration of the heritage of colonialism" (qtd. in Petersson 22). He sees Grimus (the character) as a European, "discovering" the native Eagle and exploiting him for his own purposes. In other words, Grimus may be taken as a Prospero figure and Eagle as a Caliban. It is the oppressive presence of the white power that colonises the native. This analogy perfectly works out in the thematic significance of the novel.

Rushdie was not satisfied with his first novel, however. He felt that it was something in which he could not earnestly find his voice. This voice was to become clear and defined only in his next novel, *Midnight's Children* – the novel which became his *magnum opus* and made Rushdie well-known all over the world.

Midnight's Children is essentially concerned with man's quest for his identity and the writer relates this quest of his individual hero to the past of his life. With *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie established a most distinctive pattern for the Indian novel : the family chronicle that is also a history of the nation, a distorted autobiography that embodies in equally distorted form the political life of India. The action of the novel moves from India to Pakistan to Bangladesh, acknowledging an India that failed to be adequately imagined even at its inception and establishing an idea of the nation that is properly defended not by politicians, whose devotion to a monolithic idea of truth is inevitably divisive, but by novelists, whose imagination rejoices in a human diversity that politicians seek only to control. In the words of Richard Cronin, "[I]t is as if Indian unity has become a notion so difficult that it can no longer be sustained, except in writings that address themselves not to historical facts but to the truths of the imagination" (216).

Rushdie makes his narrator Saleem Sinai move in time and space : covering the years from 1915 to 1978, Saleem narrates the fate of his family over three generations. Along with his grandparents he takes the reader from Kashmir via Amritsar to Agra, where their children are born. His parents settle temporarily in Delhi, move to Bombay where Saleem is born exactly on the stroke of midnight of India's independence and finally emigrate to Rawalpindi in Pakistan, where they perish in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Saleem subsequently lives in the border area of Pakistan, is sent to Bangladesh just before East Pakistan declares its independence in 1971, returns to Delhi, is taken to Benares by force and finally, settles in Bombay to write his book because, as he says, he wants to preserve memory and save it "from the corruption of the clocks" (*Midnight* 38). The immediate action of the novel is in the present : Rushdie makes Saleem tell the story of his family in 1977 with the narrator interrupting himself quite often in order to comment on his present situation, on the act of writing, on history and a number of related issues. Rushdie does not confine himself to a re-telling of history through the portrayal of individual characters, however. Rather, by inter-relating character and event or individual and history, he reveals his keen interest in the question of memory, a category which constitutes the aesthetic genres of the autobiography, biography and history. Here memory is not used as a dream but rather as a mirror in which the narrator tries to recognise his own identity.

Saleem tries to deal with memory in a very unique way. He projects his memories in a self-conscious and self-reflective manner. For example, he rightly conceptualises and verbalises the term "recollection" in phrases such as "... no escape from past acquaintance. What you want is forever who you are" (*Midnight* 356). Or, towards the end of his story, when he sums up his insight : "Who what am I, My answer : I am the sum total of everything that went

before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done to me..." (370). There is, thus, an intricate relationship between Saleem's re-telling of history and his searching for his own identity. The relationship between historical events and personal experiences in the Sinai family enable Rushdie to build up a myth of history. It is important, therefore, to see how Saleem conceives of the past and through his memory reflects his author's notion about how to deal with history.

As a chronicler of events, Saleem moves through time and space to grasp the totality of the Indian sub-continent. To Saleem history is a closely-knit, complex and intricately interrelated sequence of events not ruled by any logic exterior to it; rather, it creates its own logic. He returns again and again to a central passage of his story, Nehru's letter to his parents on the occasion of his birth on 15 August 1947, the day India became independent. "We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own" (*Midnight* 122). This letter is the clue why Saleem, re-telling the history of his family, also writes the history of the sub-continent. His motive, like his author's, of course, appears moralistic, attempting to answer the questions he asks the midnight children: "We must be here for a purpose ...?" (215). Saleem's method of combining the individually subjective with the objective – that is, the family history with that of the sub-continent, is prompted by the disposition of the Indian mind to see correspondence in seemingly unrelated events. For this reason he does not doubt the unreliable nature of his story. As he argues that the only reality for man is the one derived from his memory:

I told you the truth [...] Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies, also; but in the end it cre-

ates its own reality, its heterogenous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own. (207)

Towards the end of his account Saleem reveals his ulterior motive – the reason why he wants to preserve the past, using the comparison of pickling fruit to preserve it :

To pickle is to give immortality... The art is to change the flavour in degree, but not in kind; and above all [...] to give it shape and form – that is to say meaning.

One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. [...] I hope [...] they possess the authentic taste of truth [...] that they are, despite everything, acts of love. (444)

There is virtually no event in the narrative of *Midnight's Children* which is not given an individual as well as a historical meaning. For instance, Saleem's grandparents, on their way from Kashmir to Agra, stop over in Amritsar, where Dr. Aziz experiences the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre. Saleem's parents marry on the day in 1945 when the first atom bomb is dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Sinai family depart for Bombay on 4 June 1947, the day partition and the date of independence are announced by Nehru and Mountbatten; they acquire their own house on 15 August 1947 from Mr. Methwold, who claims that his ancestors were instrumental in establishing the British rule in India. Likewise, Saleem's grandfather returns to Kashmir on the same day in December 1963 that the Prophet Muhammad's hair is stolen from the Shrine in the Hazrat Bal mosque in Srinagar. On 23 September 1965 Indian Air Force strafes Rawalpindi and Saleem's family is killed. Shiva, the narrator's powerful adversary, moves in with Parvati-the-witch on the day in May, 1974 when India explodes its first nuclear test bomb in Rajasthan. Their son Adam is born on 25 June 1975, the day Emergency is declared. As a result of all this, Saleem rightly believes that he "... was linked to history both literally and metaphorically..." (*Midnight* 232).

As far as metaphor is concerned, Saleem becomes the metaphor for the nation and its reality which are duly worked out by memory. Such an assertion of reality, however, can be defined only as a subjective entity, because it cannot claim to be truth *per se*. As a commentator the narrator illustrates it thus : "Reality is a question of perspective, the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible..." (*Midnight* 164).

Perceived from this angle, the delineation of history becomes mythical. For this reason Saleem shows despondency in grasping the meaning of history which becomes illusive when looked from the point of view of the present. Indirectly it also points to the hubris of the historian who tries to explain to people what really happened in the past. For instance, Saleem cuts out newspaper items, words, syllables and letters, piecing them together to form a message to commander Sabarmati that his wife betrayed him (*Midnight* 252-53). Seemingly important political news are cut up at random to constitute a version of reality when rearranged in a new way. Saleem's act thus reveals the absurdity of the historian's claim to render history as objective reality. On the contrary, history may be bent by the historian to serve his own subjective and individual purpose. And this all becomes evident by the way he manipulates his narrative of history. In that way Rushdie's *Midnight* challenges the official history by alternative modes of remembering and forgetting.

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee *Midnight's Children* has gradually been "... appropriated into a theoretical discourse about nation, history and their narrativity" (9). In other words, *Midnight* becomes a paradigmatic post-colonial text subverting the notions of received historiography and indigenising both the language and the narrative mode of colonising culture. It destabilises different versions of the so-called history. Obviously there is a central

axis of narrative in any writing of history. For this reason Saleem's mnemonic enterprise lacks the professional historian's claim of objectivity because he knows his fallibility and the fragmentary nature of his vision through a perforated sheet. Everything cannot be known in any case, far less recorded. If family history has its own dietary laws, so does national history. Saleem's pickle metaphor emphasizes that preservation is also an act of alteration. He does not discriminate between stories and chronicle – the history of Bombay is brought alive as much through the fact as through a legend. The legend can also become a part of narrativity in history because it is also a constructed narrative. Neil Ten Kortenaar rightly concludes that Rushdie's *Midnight* "exposes the fictionality, the constructedness of all the metaphors and narrative conventions implied in national history" (qtd. in Mukherjee 17).

Likewise, David Lipscomb in his essay perceives *Midnight* as a pastiche of Stanley Wolpert's *The New History of India* (1977) and comments that in the narrative structure of the novel there is "...a battle between two forms of history—fictional and non-fictional—one challenging the truth claims of the other." (Mukherjee 17). Rukmini Bhaya Nair, on the other hand, looks at *Midnight* as "history from below, constructed by humour and gossip, purveyed often by those with marginal status—people who have knowledge, often partial, but no power" (qtd. in Mukherjee 17-18). Nair therefore posits that gossip can produce an alternate and subaltern version of history, destabilizing the certainty of the official version. She maintains that gossip's lowly idiom can often create subversions/sub-versions of the grand narrative of history. As a corollary to this, Rushdie himself admits that *Midnight* is about competing interpretations of historical texts. The elaborate constructions of interlocking metaphors in the novel are therefore built upon a single principle—the provision of an alternative view of history. For example, Saleem comments pertinently : "The Mother of the Nation had white hair

on one side and black on the other; the Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part which, being secret, macabre, untold, must be a matter for us" (*Midnight* 406).

In like manner, men's histories in Rushdie's fiction are a matter of public record. Yet this public record is unsatisfactory because it provides only the official and therefore white-washed versions of their historical motivations. Women's voices, on the other hand, impart another version to the story and hence men's secret histories stand exposed. In a re-visionist novel like *Midnight*, therefore, public facts are not sufficient and reliable in themselves, for they leave out gaps for their parallel alternative views of history as well.

In this way the two versions – the narrator's as against the official – are juxtaposed skilfully in the narrative of *Midnight*. Saleem's attempt at re-writing history thus resists ideological state apparatuses in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. His attempt also endorses what Saul Bellow once pleaded : "For God's sake, open the universe a little more."

Different enclosures of official narrative constrain the freedom of Saleem as an individual who feels stifled and suffocated by its oppressive pressure. That is why he says that his body is cracking and exploding by this gruesome force. Viney Kirpal maintains that due to such conflictual relationship between the individual and nation, *Midnight* "provides a grave and depressing vision of India" (83). Due to divisive and disintegrating forces like the partition, the language riots, religious strife and so on, Saleem's body is exploding into various cracks and fissures and he feels that he is falling apart. Finally, with the imposition of Emergency and the muzzling of the people's rights, Saleem feels emasculated, drained, "desiccated". All this reflects in the final depressing view of Saleem when he says : "... it is the

privilege and the curse of midnight's children... to be unable to live or to die in peace" (*Midnight* 446). In short, Saleem feels helpless amid the fragmentation of India along communal, religious and linguistic lines.

Apart from this, *Midnight* may be read as a Marxist text which emphasizes "... Padma's symbolical value as a plebeian commentator next to Saleem, illustrative of the local elitism" (Brennan qtd. in Piciucco 122). Aijaz Ahmad also opines that "...Rushdie's treatment of female characters always denotes implied strategies of male dominance" (qtd. in Piciucco 121). This strand of criticism is at variance with the another which labels Rushdie's work as 'feminist'. This is, however, not quite right because both kinds of criticism are not totally fair to Rushdie, although there is a grain of truth in them both. The reason for this is that Rushdie does like women; secondly, there is a sense in which his work occupies that zone which theoretical criticism describes as 'The Other'. This kind of theory recognises that many of people's cultural and literary discourses are framed around an assumption that there is a 'centre' which is 'absolute' (and white, male, European, upper-class, educated) against which all that is 'other' is defined (as black, coloured, female, racially elsewhere, without privilege, uneducated) and which – because it is secondary – must always be subservient. As opposed to 'feminist', Rushdie's work may be defined as '*écriture féminine*', because he champions the second order. Consequently, Rushdie does emphasize Padma's narratological role in the fictional structure of *Midnight*. In the words of Batty, "Padma's role as Saleem's 'necessary ear' should not obscure her status as co-creator of the narrative" (qtd. in Piciucco 124). Doubtless, Padma pushes Saleem's narration in directions he has no intention of taking, despite the fact that she is a listening and textualized female narratee.

Finally, Rushdie's *Midnight* presents a powerful example of the postmodern paradox of anti-totalizing totalization which structurally both installs and subverts the teleology, closure and causality of narrative – both historical and fictive. That is, 'total history' is de-totalized in *Midnight* Fredric Jameson believes that narrative is a "socially symbolic act" and that 'history' is an 'un-interrupted narrative'.

Rushdie, however, contests this proposition by presenting the spiral, interrupted and unrepressed 'histories' in his narrative of *Midnight*. For instance, in Saleem's postmodern story-telling, there is no mediation that can act as a dialectical term for establishing relationships between narrative form and social ground. They both remain distinctly separate. The resulting contradictions are not dialectically resolved, but co-exist in a heterogenous way. In fact, *Midnight* works to prevent any interpretation of its contradictions. On the contrary, it works to foreground the totalizing impulse of western-imperialistic modes of history-writing by confronting it with indigenous Indian models of history. For example, though Saleem narrates in English, in 'Anglopoised-lit writing', his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled : they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, films, and literature and, on the other, from the west – *The Tin Drum*, *Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and so on.

From this it follows that Rushdie's paradoxically anti-totalizing totalized image for his historiographic metafictional process is indeed the 'chutnification of history'. Each chapter of the novel is like a pickle jar that shapes its contents by its very form. The cliché with which Saleem is clearly playing is that to understand him and his nation "you have to swallow a world" and swallow too his literally preposterous story. But chutnification is also an image of preserving what is past and bygone : "my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all,

connected to my nocturnal scribblings..." (*Midnight* 38). In both processes, however, Saleem acknowledges inevitable distortions : raw materials are transformed, given "shape and form – that is to say, meaning" (444). In brief, this is as true of history-writing as it is of novel-writing.

In his next novel, *Shame* (1983), Rushdie presents Omar Khayyam as another narrating historian like Saleem Sinai. If *Midnight* underlines the history of Indian sub-continent in all its diverse aspects, then *Shame* does the same about the history of Pakistan. Rushdie has, however, made use of a political allegory and therefore Pakistan is really a symbol which can be applied to any other dictatorship in the world. In *Shame* Rushdie also elaborately touches on the theme of partition which was cursorily dealt with in *Midnight*. Given this difference, both the novels read as family saga re-told in fairy-tale-like and magic-realist manner. In spite of such a fantastic mode of fictional account, the realistic component is never lost. As the narrator himself admits that the country he describes is both a real and fictional country. Realistically, *Shame* is set in an imaginary country that is and is not Pakistan. It retells the history of events that took place there in the late twentieth century when President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed and then murdered by General Zia-Ul-Haq. In that sense "*Shame* is a very painful political allegory" (Kirpal 147).

The narrative in *Shame* focuses on the careers, corruptions, ribaldries and rivalries of its two main protagonists – Iskandar Harrappa and Raza Hyder. Considering their conflictual relationships, one may surmise that *Shame* is a political novel in essence. The question of narrative and its representation, however, also foregrounds clearly in the novel. Silva Neluka gives his valuable comment on the nature of narrative in *Shame* thus :

Shame enacts the problematising of narrative in a socio-political context where 'speaking' is the privilege of the elite (often male) agent which is not to say that the subaltern cannot speak, nor mean that she cannot talk, even through unconventional forms, such as the shawls. Just as in the palimpsest where the imprint underneath can never be completely erased so the dissident voices of women cannot be suppressed either. (167)

The above-mentioned observation undoubtedly implies the contesting histories of men and women and elite *vis-a-vis* common people. Amid the protocol and high-sounding rhetoric of the politicians, Rushdie presents pieces of town gossip by common people in order to create the mystical setting. It also includes the exclusion of women from the master narratives of the male-dominating society. In this matter the narrative strategy of allegory powerfully though complexly articulates the history of the nation.

As a historian Omar Khayyam Shakeel questions the very function of writing factual history. He asks - which 'facts' make into history? And whose facts?" The narrator finds that he has trouble keeping his present knowledge of events from contaminating his representation of the past. In fact, this is the condition of all writing about the past – whether it is fictional or factual. Omar Khayyam Shakeel notes: "[I]t seems that the future cannot be restrained, and insists on seeping back into the past" (5, 24). He also admits frankly that "it is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed" (*Shame* 87). The narrator knows that it "is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her own vision on the world" (*Shame* 87). Further he goes on to ponder the similarity of impulse between historical and fictional writing: "I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change" (*Shame* 87-88).

What the narrator knows complicates his narrative task in that he is dealing with a past "that refuses to be suppressed, that is daily doing battle with the present" (*Shame* 88), both in his novel and in the actual, present day history of Pakistan. He even admits that the inspiration for his fictive investigation of the notion of "shame" came from a real newspaper account of a murder in London of a Pakistani girl by her own father (16) – or so he says. In this sense, in postmodernist fiction, the boundaries between the present and the past and the fictive and the factual are often transgressed. The issue of representation and its epistemological claims also leads to the problem of the nature and status of 'fact' in both history-writing and fiction-writing. All past 'events' are potential historical 'facts', but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be *narrated*. This distinction between brute event and meaning-granted fact is one with which *Shame* is obsessed.

The ideological as well as historiographic implications in *Shame* become quite overt. The text's self-reflexivity points in two directions at once – towards the events being represented in the narrative and towards the act of narration itself. This is precisely the same doubleness that characterizes all historical narrative. Neither form of representation can separate 'facts' from the acts of interpretation and narration that constitute them. Because facts themselves (though not events) are created in and by those acts. And what actually becomes fact depends as much as anything else on the social and cultural context of the historian. Omar Khayyam Shakeel, therefore, announces :

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this offcentring to be necessary : but its value is, of

course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (29).

Furthermore, the open mixing of the fictive with the historical in the narrator's storytelling is made into part of the very narrative :

In Delhi, in the days before Partition, the authorities rounded up any Muslims [...] and locked them up in the red fortress [...] including members of my own family. It's easy to imagine that as my relatives moved through the Red Fort in the parallel universe of history, they might have felt the same hint of the fictional presence of Bilquis Kamal. [...] (*Shame* 64)

Corroborating to this fact, Tariq Rahman rightly observes that "...bits of real history are presented.... to appear as integral parts of the narrator's consciousness" (105). In accord with Rahman's view, R.S.Pathak also believes that *Shame* "... tries to highlight complex network of transcultural relationships between the individual and historical forces" (125).

A few pages later, however, the narrator reminds : "If this were a realistic novel about Pakistan, I would not be writing about Bilquis and the wind; I would be talking about my youngest sister" (68) – about whom he then does indeed talk. The seeming *non sequitur* here points both to the arbitrariness of the process of deciding which events become facts and to the relationship between realist fiction and the writing of history. Although the narrator writes from England, he chooses to write about Pakistan, acknowledging that "I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors ... I must renconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits" (*Shame* 69). This is his clear warning meant for the reader of both fiction and history.

In *Midnight*, too, Rushdie makes cogent remark about the situation of contemporary Pakistan and says that it is largely governed by lies : "[I]n a country where the truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible

except what we are told is the case" (*Midnight* 15). Elsewhere Rushdie has written that Pakistan has been "insufficiently imagined". For example, the idea of triple pregnancy in *Shame* – where Omar Khayyam Shakeel is the son of three mothers – is actually a symbol of three countries after the partition. These countries are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh which trace to the similar origin of their births in the post-colonial history. The stained bed-sheet or the perforated sheet in *Midnight* becomes the inscription of bloody history on the Indian sub-continent. By using such a metaphor of blood, Rushdie suggests that these three nations share the same trajectory of history. Not surprisingly, therefore, Rushdie opens the narrative of *Midnight* with the image of "three drops" of blood – metaphorically meaning the creation of three nations. T.N. Dhar relevantly comments that "... besides problematizing the historical discourse, Rushdie also critiques the history of the two countries" (160).

Since its creation by the British, the Muslim League and the Congress leadership, the history of Pakistan has been nightmarish by the imposition of one dictatorship after another. This 'moth-nibbled land of god' becomes a battleground of embattling families of Iskandar Harrappa and Raza Hyder. The narrator's house is situated in the border town of Q. with its permanently closed windows and doors, which represents the decadent and feudal structure of Pakistan. While the protagonist Omar Khayyam Shakeel is the typical pseudo-westernised Third world intellectual, a product of colonisation. His father is Eduardo Rodrigues – a school-teacher and missionary. The narrator is completely alienated from the common people of Pakistan and their traditions. Like the typical third-world intellectual, he has a violent, protracted and ideological love affair with Sufiya Zinobia who is a symbol of Pakistan and to whom he marries. Iskander Harrappa is a barely-veiled portrait of Bhutto, the late and fiery ex-prime minister of Pakistan and Raza Hyder typifies the late Zia-Ul-Haq. The historic events of

the Partition, the loss of East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh, the death of Bhutto by hanging, the muzzling of democratic rights by Zia and all other real events are woven allegorically into the very fabric of the novel. In short, Pakistan under the authoritarian regime comes under direct assault in the novel.

Side by side with this viotriolic attack, Rushdie also intersperses self-referential writing by the narrator. In a typically specific and illustrative paragraph, for example, Rushdie presents the self-conscious voice of the narrator that makes an important point about one's right to personalize history :

Outsider ! Trespasser ! You have no right to this subject ! [...] Poacher ! Pirate ! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag : speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies ? I reply with more questions : Is history to be considered the property of the participants solely ? In what courts are such claims staked, what boundary commissions map out the territories ? (*Shame* 28)

Omar Khayyam Shakeel is thus a spokesperson for the inclusion of oneself in the representation of history and he echoes a sentiment that most likely prevails in post-colonial nations – nations exercising their right to take part in the telling of history as they see it.

The impact of colonisation and neo-colonisation on the colonies emanate from the novel in a deliberate manner. Omar Khayyam is tutored by his "colonised" mothers not to acknowledge the shame of his illegal origins. He obeys them well and becomes the symbol of shamelessness, the antithesis of Sufiya who epitomises shame. He ceases to suffer from recurring attacks of dizziness only when he marries her. The marriage symbolises the accep-

tance and confrontation of shame, the emotion that he has always suppressed in himself, but this would mean a coming to terms with his colonised self. His new-found freedom, however, is curtailed when he betrays his "wife" to another woman – Shahbanu the ayah. The beast that had been quietened in Sufiya is now unleashed. In retaliation of her deep humiliation she spreads murder and death everywhere. Native leaders like Raza and Isky and intellectuals like Omar are colonised men, happy to be within the orbit of power but they do not know the real power of woman.

The woman as a colony and the link between sexual and political oppression are significant themes in *Shame*. Shame is the emotion that oppression – political, sexual or racist – breeds in a people : "[H]umiliate a people for long enough and a wildness breaks out of them". Rushdie extends his thesis to the immigrant experience in England. An Asian girl in London is beaten up in a late night underground train by a group of white teenaged boys. Such incidents, the narrator says, are quite frequent. What this girl experienced was not anger but shame. But what would have happened, he asks, if this girl had experienced fury instead of guilt ? Different kinds of oppression – political, sexual, racist, colonialist – are conveyed through Sufiya Zinobia. While the symbol carries off the weight of the first two kinds of oppression – political and sexual – and which the novel explores in detail through the lives of the characters, the latter two kinds – racial and colonialist oppression – become self-conscious interpolations in the novel. That is to say, they are reported rather than re-created in artistic terms.

Inscribing women's version on the secret history of men, the narrator also retells the story of Rani Harrappa's embroidered shawls. In fact, Rani's shawls tell the various stories of her husband's crimes. Rani continues weaving her shawls in those places where her husband's oppression is committed. Indirectly they become the itinerary traces or clues which are com-

pleted in a pattern or design until her husband's death. Every shawl, therefore, tells an important tale of historical circumstance which surrounds that of Rani's own. In addition, these embroidered shawls may be compared with Philomela telling the story of her rape and mutilation by Tereus by weaving the story into a tapestry. In the words of Syed Mujibuddin, "Rani Harrappa's shawls focus precisely on what is conveniently excluded in the recording of so-called great men's lives.. for each projected virtue of Iskander, Rani offers us an alternative view" (142). Everything about the dark regime of Iskander is thus woven into the brocade of Rani's shawls.

In short, Rushdie's *Shame* presents a necklace of colourful stories within the framework of official history and competently gives the lie to the official version. By incorporating story-telling in the historical narrative, Rushdie emphasizes the value of an artist's version and believes that fictions are worth while, for it is the "fictions where a man could live". This artistic agenda of story telling competing with the politician's version is best exemplified in this wonderful novel- *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990).

Haroun may be read as a kind of political allegory like *Shame*, but with a difference. Whereas *Shame* is focused on a localized setting inspite of its imaginary setting imposed upon the real one, *Haroun* does not contain any concrete local milieu. It is based purely on fantastic and surreal background. Given this imaginative ethos, the novel does imply the socio-political overtones and covertly express them in the narrative. In a way the novel "...shows the way in which power is manipulated and is an allegorical struggle between the human desire to communicate and the repressive forces which control freedom of expression" (Kapadia 217). *Haroun* is thus a sheer fantasy, but with a real though imaginatively interwoven socio-political basis.

After the unfortunate *fatwa* imposed on Rushdie for the publication of his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie was compelled to write a work which would espouse the cause of the freedom of expression. As a result, he wrote *Haroun* in order to justify his right of freedom of expression. This situation, however, has been depicted in the covert terms in the struggle between the forces of silence and speech, between the Chupwalas and the Guppy. Indirectly, it expresses the fatwa of Ayatullah Khomini against Rushdie wherein it was expressly stated that it was the sacred duty of every devout Muslim to put Rushdie to death. Now that the *fatwa* has been lifted, Rushdie's hidden intention in the narrative of *Haroun* becomes all the more clear. In the novel's end too, the army of Chupwalas is defeated by the vigour of the Guppy.

The political crisis in the fable revolves around the loss of Rashid Khalifa's speech. He is unable to tell his magical stories any longer. Even the politicians are fond of inviting Rashid to speak at their political rallies, because there is a charisma and power in the way Rashid tells his tales. The immediate reason for his loss of creativity is the order of Khatam-Shud to poison the ocean of stories. He represents the political, religious and dictatorial tyrant who is the enemy of all the noblest expression of human endeavour. The fight between the Gup and the Chup thus becomes an allegorical political struggle between the hegemonic power and the man's natural desire for telling a story. This story, however, may turn out to be a true story which speaks directly against power. Mr. Sengupta hence rightly questions : "What is the use of stories that aren't even true ?" (*Haroun* 20)

Like his previous novel *Midnight*, *Haroun* is also at once experimental, confessional, polemical and subjective. Indeed, it is a clever blending of history, political allegory and fantasy. The central part of the novel in particular is highly fantastic and follows the tradition of

The Arabian Nights. With such magic-realist and fantastic mode, however, Rushdie exposes and parodies the hidden obscurantism beneath all religious bigotry. The novel is thus a thinly veiled allegory and Rashid's fate closely parallels Rushdie's own pain. Joel Kuortti also believes that *Haroun* is "... more like a fable about the power of story-telling..." He aptly quotes Dean Flower and notes that "What the story is really about is the story" (31-41). Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that in *Haroun* Rushdie has merged not only "... fantasy and fable, but ...several other concerns—moral, aesthetic, political, ecological and intertextual ... are allowed to converge..." (*The Perishable Empire* 151). She further states that like all his other novels, in *Haroun* also, Rushdie "... valorizes a plurality of voices, privileging polyphony over an enforced unity of silence" (*The Perishable Empire* 152). In short, according to Mukherjee, Rushdie's novel is nothing but a celebration of multiplicity, plurality and heteroglossia. In short, *Haroun* is a re-statement on the basic similarity of narrativity between history and story. Rushdie has himself admitted this by quoting Milan Kundera that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" and observes : "[W]riters and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" (qtd. in Taneja 203). In *Haroun*, therefore, this struggle between the story-teller and the politician obtains an allegorical dimension.

Rushdie is inexhaustibly and relentlessly interested in re-writing history in the alternative versions in all of his novels since *MC*. Most of them dwell on the different aspects of history, but fundamentally they centre around the quest/question narrative. This quest narrative assume multiple modes/methods in his writing – satirical, political, social, allegorical, magic-realist and fantastic. Apart from all this, it also underlines the nation/narration mode

which is found in each and every novel right from *Midnight*. In his next novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie embarks on the same quest narrative of nation/narration and shows what happens when the existing religious ideologies mix with the trappings of nationalist politics.

In *The Moor* Rushdie explores the tensions between inclusive and exclusive forms of Indian nationalism. While the novel reaffirms the Nehruvian idea of India as secular democracy, it also moves past the crisis of governance of the 1975-77 Emergency and into the ideological crises of the 1980s and 1990s. For Rushdie, the rise of the religious right in that period is like "corrosive acid [...] poured into the nation's bloodstream"; it violates "the old, founding myth of the nation (*The Moore* 351), just as the Ram cult reduces polytheistic Hinduism to a religion in which "only one chap matters" (338). In his satire of an exclusive Hindu nationalism, Rushdie again, like in *Midnight*, makes the human body the main site where literal and metaphoric versions of the national health or disease are enacted. And again the body's fluid dynamics (blood, food, poisons, breath) serve as markers of both an esteemed intermingling and the invasive "purifying" violence that opposes admixture. According to Jyotsna Singh, Rushdie destabilizes and pluralizes the category of "nation-in-formation" in *Midnight* and continues this project in *The Moore*, where he "lays to rest all the comforting myths of postcolonial Indian nationalism" (qtd. in Ball 37).

The Moore is a wonderfully playful family epic told by a descendant of the explorer Vasco da Gama. The Moor, Moraes Zogoiby, is born with a strange condition which makes him age twice as fast as everyone else. In a way it is a metaphor for his strange situation. Rushdie revisions the postcolonial history of India here by talking about the spice trade. He wanted to write out of Cochin (India), because he went there in the early 1980s and was very much affected by the place. Rushdie found that Cochin was the point of first contact between India

and the West. *The Moore* is thus about the meeting and mingling of two cultures. The beginning of the narrative deals with the activities of Vasco da Gama in Cochin, his death and burial there and subsequent post-death migration to Portugal. For this reason Rushdie starts the novel with Vasco and gives him a furious dynasty. It fascinated Rushdie to know that when Europe first came to India, it did not come for conquest, though subsequently there was certainly conquest. It came first looking for pepper. The whole incredible postcolonial history of India thus grows out of a grain of pepper.

Paul Cantor argues that by modelling Indian society through the lens of Moorish Spain in *The Moore*, Rushdie "... condemns efforts to impose a uniform culture on a nation and celebrates instead cultural hybridity" (qtd. in Ball 37). On the contrary, the fundamentalists try to poison people's mind by harping on the purity of blood and culture. They speak of nation as if it were made of pure blood like the human body. Consequently Rushdie critiques them by using reductive metonymy and calls them "[A]lphabet soupists" (363). He also uses analogy to criticize Mainduck as a "little Hitler" (297). At one point in the story, the Moor also becomes a target of satire when he becomes a temporary synecdoche for activities and ideologies attributed to others.

Despite his foray into such mimic fundamentalist adventure, however, Moraes Zogoiby is the most hybrid of Rushdie's characters. He possesses not two, but multiple identities, or as he says, none at all. Reinfandt also comments that "the emergence of a positive concept of cultural hybridity is one of the most prominent features of Rushdie's *oeuvre*" (qtd. in Hensen & Petry 129). In fact, both Rushdie and Homi K. Bhabha have successfully blended typical issues concerning migrant identities and cultural diversity with post-structuralist and postmodernist theory. Both point to a concept of fruitful in-betweenness—a powerful "third

space" between one's own and an other's culture. Sometimes such a third-space operates through different points of departure. For example, Moraes Zogoiby can trace his history to fixed points of departure : Vasco de Gama's historically recorded travels eastwards; fantasy narratives of Boabdil's Jewish mistress escaping to India and the more historical diaspora of the Jews.

The present troubled times, however, disaffects the rich hybrid zeal of the Moor and he notes :

What started with perfume ended with a very big stink indeed. [...] There is a thing that bursts out of us at times, a thing that lives in us, eating our food, breathing our air, broking out through our eyes, and when it comes out to play nobody is immune; possessed, we turn murderously upon one another [...]." (36)

Indeed, the Moor is unhappy to find "the plague-spores of communal fanaticism" eating out at the heart of the nation. And that is why he says that it is now stinking. At the end, he escapes from such a filthy place to Granada in southern Spain. Before leaving for Spain, however, he makes a final note on the present situation : "... the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. We were our own wooden horses. [...] The explosions burst out of our very own bodies. We were both the bombers and the bombs" (372).

In *Shame*, too, Rushdie quite pertinently writes : "[A]ll migrants leave their past behind; it is the fate of migrants to be stripped of history" (*Shame* 63). This is precisely the tone of the Moor in *The Moor*. And it is particularly more true of Rushdie himself who is also a migrant writer. Satish C. Aikant aptly notes that "a migrant writer ... carries a baggage of memories that must find some transmutation into a proper narrative framework" (213). In his novels,

therefore, Rushdie often resorts to a device of linking personal life of his protagonists with the historically famous events, because this is the technique which he employs to burlesque history. In short, through such a device in *The Moor* too, Rushdie tries to deconstruct the political and cultural history of India.

Just as V.S. Naipaul is known as the founding writer of the history of the old diaspora, Rushdie is also regarded as the pioneer of the new diaspora. *The Moor* therefore depicts such a new diasporic history where India is seen as literally exploding into various fragments. *The Moor*, then, is about the disintegration and fragmentation of India and Rushdie's deconstructive narrative therein may be an outcome of the new diasporic consciousness. The similar concern with the diasporic discourse is also duly reflected in Rushdie's short fiction-*East, West* (1994).

East, West is a collection of short stories which questions the strict dichotomy of East/ West. It uses a comma rather than a stroke to separate them and brings the two together, especially in its final section. It has three sections, each with three stories. Section one ("East") has three modern but oriental tales, section two ("west") starts with the "Yorick" story and ends with one about Spain and the discovery of America : "Christopher Columbus and Queen Isabella of Spain consummate Their Relationship (Sante Fe', AD 1492)". The final section, "(East, West)", has again three stories which explore East-West relations in literature, the occult, the cinema, and such modern ailments as terrorism. For example, in the second story, "Chekhov and Zulu" there are diplomats involved in the assassination of Indira Gandhi playing out *Star Track* fantasies.

Like all Rushdie's fiction, *East, West* is truly a great feat of the imagination. Bhabha aptly comments on the imagination of Rushdie in these stories and compares it with his unor-

thodox method of creating narrative suspense :

In *Midnight's Children*, it is the tic and twitch of Padma's thigh muscles, as they respond to every twist and turn in the story of Cyrus the Great, that provides Saleem Sinai with his first lesson in story-telling : "[...] what happened is less important than what the author can persuade his audience to believe". [...] The silences in these stories occur when the narrator pauses to make sure, like the young Saleem Sinai, that he is carrying his audience with him; that their muscles are twitching in time with the tale. (qtd. in Wallhead 2)

Celia Wallhead, on the other hand, argues that in the Columbus story, Rushdie "...explores the interface of power and sex. But the seriousness of the momentous occasion is subverted by his disrupting the tone and register of the formal discourse with a contemporary informal discourse" (3). For instance, the traditional view of Queen Isabella as being powerful, almost masculine, is maintained. Her husband, king Ferdinand, is called by the narrator "an absolute zero : a blank." There is humorous word-play here in that "absolute zero" contrasts with the reference to Queen Isabella as "an absolute monarch" (*East, West* 110). The fact that king Ferdinand served as a model of the modern prince for Machiavelli and had four children out of wedlock does not seem to back up this idea historically, however; which reminds one that Rushdie is only re-writing history for fictional purposes.

Consequently, the narrative device used by Rushdie in the Columbus story is to disrupt the written, history-book norm by the low-register oral interventions. Of course Rushdie reviews history fictionally, where fact matters but is inconsequential, where the momentous is seen to depend upon what Bhabha said as "little things of life", and where historical personages turn out to be (fictional) real people with personal problems that are often as interesting as the great facts they have accomplished. The event or the person, thus, is not an isolated

phenomenon, but part of a complex context and the novelist has a much freer hand than the historian. The lingering suggestion Rushdie makes is that the original historian may have been as partisan in the creation of history through narrative as a novelist like him.

Apart from fictionally re-writing history, Rushdie also traces the diasporic nature of all historical event in these stories. In the words of Elsa Linguanti, *East, West* "... explores what Naipaul has so appropriately defined 'the enigma of arrival' " (26). In *Imaginary Homelands*, too, Rushdie writes about the reality of migration and the sense of loss which immigrants experience. For them the past becomes " a foreign country", but the experience itself opens out other possibilities.

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by same sense of loss, same urge to reclaim, to look back [...] But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge ... that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

In the second story of the third section, "*East, West*", "Chekhov and Zulu", a friendship is compromised by history and politics. While in the first story "The Harmony of the Sphere", there is a search for harmony which subsequently proves to be ephemeral, or even dangerous. In the words of one of the two friends, it is a question of trying to find "... a bridge between here-and-there, between my two othernesses, my double unbelonging" (*East, West* 141). In the third story "The Courter", a young Pakistani in London observes the two worlds pulling the old nurse Certainly-Mary, in opposite directions. And in spite of the fact that he has acquired British citizenship, he is, in turn, torn in two directions. In his case, however, the verse "home is the best" does not work :

I, too, have ropes around my neck [...] pulling me this way and that, East, West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *Choose, Choose*.

I back, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear ? I refuse to choose. (*East, West* 211)

It seems that the narrator of this story has already solved Naiparllian "enigma of arrival" ! In other words, one finds here the "double unbelonging", and the need for a "bridge", the refusal to choose between alternatives as if they were mutually exclusive, and the much-desired redefinition of "home". In this sense, Rushdie works on edges, borders, thresholds, and boundaries, looking for "links", "bridges", something that will allow him to share, instead of dividing, what is on either side. For example, in the last few lines of *The Moore*, too, the final words of dying Moraes confirm : "Our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self" (435). According to Rushdie, "cross-culturalism" thus goes beyond multiculturalism. For depicting such cross-culturalism, he employs the metaphor of "crossing", "cross-pollination", "translation" etc., all of which become the warp and woof of his novelistic narrative. Rushdie believes that in the trajectory of the world-history such "crossing" naturally takes place and so it is interesting to trace out the origin of "contact" and "mixing". Rushdie never leaves this project in his novel and continues writing about it in novel after novel. In his novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), for example, he again takes up the theme of cross-cultural contact and the re-writing of history in terms of narrative quest/question.

The Ground Beneath Her Feet is essentially based on a literary conceit which is partly musical, too. Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara are both two famous Indian rock stars. Ormus Cama was born into an old Bombayite Zoroastrian family in 1937. And Vina Apsara was born

in the US in 1944 to an Indian father and a Greek-American mother. She was raised in America till her parents died in 1956, and then sent "home" to India. She and Ormus, then aged nineteen, meet in a Bombay record shop. The two migrate in the 60s to London, where they form the group VTO, and achieve stellar success. Ormus writes the lyrics and both sing. The two megastars fall in and out of love, move to the US and go on notching up superplatinum sales world-wide through the 70s and most of the 80s. The VTO group, however, breaks up and they start as solo artists. After Vina's death in 1989, in an earthquake in Mexico, Ormus carries on, despite increasing mental break-down, until one winter's morning when a crazed woman fan kills him in New York. The whole saga is narrated in the first person by another Bombayite, Rai Merchant, an internationally known photographer of secular Muslim origins who bears a second, secret identity as Vina's occasional non-platonic lover. In short, through the narrative tale of Vina and Ormus, Rushdie brings in the whole sweep of today's globalized world in terms of its cross-cultural and historical aspects.

The two protagonists and the narrator of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are Indian or half-Indian, while Rushdie also uses the Balzac-like device of recurring characters. The Englishman William Methwold, who plays a key part in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, has walked in from *Midnight's Children*. Homi Catrack, also from *Midnight*, and Aurora Zogoiby, from *The Moor*, are resurrected for bit-parts. In terms of fictional chronology, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* begins, like its predecessors, in the Raj of the early twentieth century. In narrative sequence, however, it opens in 1989, in Guadalajara, Mexico, with the earthquake and Vina's dramatic disappearance, before shifting back, in reverse mode, to the characters' Indian past. The reader, however, becomes aware of the fact that in the East-West alternation in this novel, East is being replaced by west as its epicentre.

Despite its centre of gravity on the Western component, however, Rushdie has articulated the economic and cultural process that has come to be known as globalisation. In today's world, no culture can lay claim to be pure and unmixed. Everyday the negotiation and give-and-take among different cultures question the very claim of "purity". In the words of Christopher Rollason, Rushdie's "...narrative and stylistic strategies – the use of mythology, the East-to-West sweep of the tale, the multilayered allusiveness—represent an attempt... to create a fiction that will adequately reflect ... globalisation" (117). By inventing two Indian rock celebrities, moreover, Rushdie seems to have subversively rewritten rock history.

Commenting on the theme of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Rushdie himself admits in an interview : "I wanted to take this [rock 'n' roll] world and treat it seriously as a vehicle to examine our life and times" (qtd. in Rollason 97). In other words, rock fact as well as fiction interwine in the novel. At the same time, Rushdie also re-writes the myth of Orpheus-Eurydice. Across his text, references to the orpheus myth come thick and fast, the very title expressive of this myth. In fact, Rushdie envisages his musician protagonists as the manifestations of the Orphic principle of the indestructibility of music. In an interview, he declares : "the myth of Orpheus tells us that you can kill the singer, but not the song" (qtd. in Rollason 102).

Rushdie's next novel *Fury* (2001) also imparts the same re-writing of old story and myth in terms of the modern globalized world. In this novel Rushdie re-employs the myth of Greek Furies and the new version of Shakespeare's *Othello* in the character of Professor Malik Solanka. Malik Solanka is a historian of ideas and world-famous dollmaker, but due to the weariness of the soul, he steps out of his married life, abandons his family in London without a word of explanation, and flees for New York. Fundamentally there is a fury within him and he fears he has become dangerous to those he loves. He often tries to relate his

situation to that of Othello who was greatly angry. Professor's wife held the thesis that in fact "Othello loves only himself" (*Fury* 11). In his attempt of self-denial, however, Malik arrives in New York at a time of unprecedented plenty in the highest hour of America's wealth and power, seeking to "erase" himself. Unfortunately fury is all around him.

If *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has the dominating narrative of the Western world, *Fury* is completely centred on the first years of the twenty-first century of America and its socio-political and cultural ethos. Rushdie looks piercingly at the heart of American "illness" in this story. He thoroughly examines man-woman relationship in the disintegrating ethos of cultural values which are continually changing. Rushdie maintains that betrayal of personal relationships is this typical illness in America. In addition to this, the novel may be read as an American fairy tale wherein Rushdie explores the issues of race and class. In other words, Rushdie captures the dark side of American society in a comic and satirical way. His examination of the uneasy alliances between men and women in America is insightful, enlightening and ethical as well.

Unlike Othello, however, Professor Solanka does not kill his wife, but runs away from her. Unlike the avenging furies, the professor does not kill people actually, but only in imagination. As a matter of fact, through the narrative of this novel, as in all his other novels, too, Rushdie presents a counter-culture of imagination. The fury of Malik Solanka at once becomes highly comedic and imaginative rather than tragic and real. By depicting the character of the professor, Rushdie seems to present a paradox between the strong Greek man in the past or the medieval age where Othello belonged and the modern weak man. In short, *Fury* underlines the problematic nature of "power" and how power vitiates one's personal relationships.

In his latest novel so far, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie once again takes up the link between history and individual destiny and how personal passion is interwoven with the ruthless march of history. In the blurb of this novel, it is stated how "[l]ives are uprooted, names keep changing - nothing is permanent, yet everything is connected. Spanning the globe and darting through history, Salman Rushdie's majestic narrative captures ... the spirit of a troubled age". The crux of this trouble is Kashmir around which the narrative revolves. Here Rushdie shows how an apparently political assassination turns out to be a deeply personal matter. This intermingling between history and the individual is spanned in sixty years and three continents – Asia, Europe and America.

After his total immersion in America, as has been noted in the narrative of *Fury*, Rushdie again returns to his beloved country-India. Although it is not his favourite Bombay, nevertheless it is his fondness for Kashmir which makes it the central setting in the novel. In fact, Rushdie had already written on Kashmir in the opening chapter of his *Midnight's Children*. Here he extends his narrative of Kashmir more fully and more comprehensively. Rushdie's ancestors originally belonged to Kashmir and therefore he dedicates this novel to his grand parents. In this story, however, Rushdie links all the three major continents of the world and thus expresses his faith in the inter-cultural relationships of the globalized world.

According to S. Prasannarajan, *Shalimar the Clown* brings back to fiction the grandeur of narrative, and reaffirms the narrator's status as the unauthorised - and unmatched - biographer of the midnight nation. It is another "... last hurrah for a lost world where the performance of history is matched by the passion play of those who can't survive it, and where few come out alive from the whirl of love and madness, of fantasy and fanaticism, of revenge and re-tribution" (70). In this novel Rushdie pours scorn on both India and Pakistan for their

greedy capture of Kashmir. If Pakistan sends the extremist militants into the valley to destroy the Kashmiri Pandits, then the Indian Army is also responsible for the raping and killing of those women and men who happen to be relatives of the terrorists. In fact, Rushdie expresses his indignation at this sad condition : "the Pandits of Kashmir were left to rot ... why was that why was that why was that." (*Shalimar the Clown* 297). Rushdie believes that it is not just Islamo-fascists who may be blamed for Kashmir's plight, but there are other factors like state Apparatuses which are also causing damage to Kashmir. The savaged site of Kashmir arouses sentimental response in the narrator : "[W]ho raped that grey-haired lazy eyed woman as she screamed about snake vengeance ? Who raped that dead woman ? Who raped that dead woman again ?" (*Shalimar the Clown* 308).

For Rushdie, there is hardly much difference between the absurdity of the state or the fantasy of the fanatic, the mad mullah or the manic officer. The arrival of the Iron Mullahs - with "skin the colour of rusting metal" and the "hobnailed boots and *lathi*" - of the Indian Army ensures that paradise (Kashmir) is lost and Pachigam's inhabitants are thrown from the comfort of inter-communal Kashmiri harmony into the jaws of neighbour versus neighbour, Muslim versus Hindu. In reality, the narrative of the novel is less about communalism and terrorism than it is about the betrayal of trust and love in the inter-personal relationships. This betrayal is clearly shown in the relationships between Boonyi Kaul and Shalimar and between Max Ophuls and Peggy Rhodes. Boonyi betrays her clown husband, while Max does the same to Peggy. Shalimar chooses the path of terrorism because of the violation of his trust and therefore he determines to kill both—his wife and Max. In short, Shalimar is a victim of his times and he is more sinned against than sinning. The narrative comes full circle when Boonyi's daughter, Kashmira (or India Ophuls) kills her own step-father Shalimar the clown.

From the above discussion of Rushdie's fiction, therefore, it follows clearly that he is ceaselessly occupied with the re-writing of history by positing the quest/question of narrative in both history-writing and fiction-writing. Rushdie has rightly observed that "[H]istory has become debatable. In the aftermath of Empire... We can no longer agree on *what is the case* ... Literature steps into this ring. Historians, media moguls, politicians do not care for the intruder, but the intruder is a stubborn sort..." (*Step Across This Line* 66-67). In the narrative framework of his fiction, Rushdie always shows the battle between the two versions. Rushdie's version partakes of several perspectives and corresponding narrative strategies to contest the official version of history. By the literary devices like fantasy, allegory, magic-realism, irony and metaphor, he tries to cope with the historiography of the nation and thereby present his own alternative histories. These histories assume different dimensions and ramifications – ranging from the marxist-feminist to subaltern, diasporic and de-constructive perspectives. In short, Rushdie presents all the nuances of alternative historical narrative in his writing.

Like Rushdie, many other Indian and diaspora writers have tackled the question of narrative fiction *vis-a-vis* historical narrative in their individual novels in the post-80s period. Among them, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and Rohinton Mistry emerge as the successful practitioners of this genre. In particular Ghosh comes much closer to Rushdie in his diasporic imagination of history. The next chapter, therefore, takes up the detailed discussion of Ghosh's writing.

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