Chapter 2

Deconstruction of Language and Fictionalization of History

The corpus of Indian English political fiction in the post-Independence era has witnessed a commendable metamorphosis in terms of its multiplicity of themes and plurality of stylistic devices through the works of a number of exemplary literary wizards. Salman Rushdie is celebrated as the bandwagon of an altogether new mode of fictional discourse in Indian English fiction. He experimented with new paradigms of fictional techniques which had a tremendous influence on the contemporary writers, so much so that his successors were grouped under the name ‘Rushdie’s Children’. Rushdie’s writings has labelled a generation and liberated a literature. He deftly appropriated the indigenous oral narrative traditions and the techniques of western postmodernism in order to create a new and complex form of Indian fictional writing.

Rushdie’s fame mainly rests with his magnum opus *Midnight’s Children*. In contemporary fiction, it has proved to be a *tour de force* which asserts the native character of Indian English novel. It is
considered as a postmodern epic and a multifaceted piece of work. It combines in itself an autobiographical *bildungsroman*, a picaresque narrative, a political allegory, a surrealist fantasy, a topical satire and a humorous extravaganza. It makes a radical departure from what has been written by Indian novelists in English till that time. *Midnight’s Children* brings heresies in the field of literary creation into the open and transforms them into the trademarks of the Indian English fiction. Both in its enormous strength and in its equally enormous weaknesses, this work captures the comedy and tragedy of the subcontinent more effectively than any formal and conventional historical narrations.

Rushdie, disenchanted with the degeneration in the contemporary political situation in India ventured to write a political novel by experimenting with innovative stylistic strategies. The publication of *Midnight’s Children* proclaimed a new era in the genre of political fiction, both thematically and stylistically. In the fictive interpretation of the history of India and that of the personal history of the protagonist, Rushdie employs several unprecedented demystifying techniques. He brutally violated all conventional strategies of writing and introduced an altogether new package of fictionalization. It is often considered *sui generis*, in a class of its own. In the novel, the terrible and the pleasant; the serious and the absurd are related with the same all-pervading, all-knowing smile.
Rushdie relates a fictionalized and farfetched story of the Indian subcontinent with a combination of Arabian night’s fantasy and raconteur’s humour. The geographical map of India becomes the stage on which the actors/actresses appear and disappear in the novel which is celebrated as the personification and realization of Indian life. It is first an epic that spans six decades and almost three generations of India’s pre and postcolonial twentieth-century history. The fictional family story is intertwined with the dismal political history of India in a totally comic vein. Rushdie does not deny the dichotomy between the private and the public; rather he demonstrates how the two partake of each other in a curious and often unexpected ways and how the possibilities of a situation may differ depending upon how it is perceived. He celebrates the creative tensions between the personal and national identity, playing up and playing with both their polarity and unity. In O. P. Mathur’s opinion:

The novel is a piece of ‘fiction-faction’, by one born in India but settled abroad who tries to recreate his homeland, mixing memory and desire, fact and fantasy, reality and vision, time and timelessness. (170)

The main thematic leitmotifs of the novel are pieced together with great skill and subtlety to give a sense and taste of history as specially concocted chutney. In the oriental fashion of story telling,
Rushdie presents his novel as one told by the protagonist Saleem Sinai to his beloved Padma. He uses the first person narrative technique in his fictionalization. The writer’s fecundity of fantasizing paradoxically enables him to re-construct reality as a pattern of relationships between events and people, and between people and people. The narrator Saleem Sinai being the most complex character elaborately dwells upon his family history; his birth in Bombay, his babyhood, boyhood and adulthood and the kinds of people he gets associated within his eventful life. At the very outset itself the narrator gives a feel of the entire work by stating that a person’s life is invariably linked to the history of his nation. The protagonist says: “. . . I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country” (MC 3).

The novel is essentially an autobiography of the narrator but it is also the political history of India in the post-Independence era. The temporal coincidence of the birth of the narrator and India’s independence puts him at the centre of a vast web of stories which constitutes the postcolonial Indian history and his own life story. He is the twin companion of history-its creator and its victim. Josna E. Rege comments:

Without denying historical necessity, MC reconceptualized the dichotomy between personal and national identity in a
way that made a new kind of social engagement possible. Rather than merely forcing the self into the image of the nation, Rushdie comically and mock-heroically insists on creating Nation in the imaginative image of Self. He takes on History, too, in the same way. The individual must either acquiesce to History’s grand narratives or be destroyed—swept aside, or crushed underfoot. (190-91)

If *Grimus* dramatizes the world of science and human creativity in their course of collision and fusion with each other; *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame* depict the sense of alienation and quest for identity of their protagonists—Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam respectively.

Saleem was born exactly at the stroke of midnight of August 15th, 1947: “Clock–hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came” (MC 3). He is the embodiment of a supreme moment of history. A sense of ambiguity and uncertainty is further created by the startling claim Saleem makes about the inter-relatedness of his own life with the history of modern India. More and more historical details are passed on to us either through his reports or through his direct participation in events as he grows up. He is at the centre of things instead of a victim at the periphery and he realizes his centripetal role in re-creating history in the phantasm of his psyche too. What Saleem does is to weave together the stories of his family
through several generations; of Indian independence, of Pakistan, of the state of Emergency, of Indian myth both Hindu and Muslim and of the thousand and one children born in the first hour of India’s independence.

The narration given by Saleem is disinterested, intelligent and unprejudiced. He does not lend any political or national colouring to the events narrated. Hence he transcends nationality, race, creed and even cultures and presents the history from a truly human point of view. He tries to be scrupulously truthful and attempts the evaluation of history through a humanitarian perspective.

A clear metaphorical parallel is drawn between the growing up of Saleem and the development of the newly independent nation. There is virtually no event in the novel which does not have an individual meaning either for Saleem himself or for his ancestors. The novelist not only comments upon the socio-political history of a nation, but also gives a feel of those times through the medium of an ironical narrator. As O. P. Mathur records:

The narrator is not a “lucid reflector” but a bizarre refractor of reality and he helps us in a better understanding of contemporary society and of historical events, figures and trends interpreting them from a supremely comic angle based on a stance which is profoundly moral, humane and cosmopolitan. (178)
The array of events covered include the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre which Saleem’s grandparents witnessed; the formation of the Indian National Army, the communal riots in India, the dawn of independence, the assassination of Gandhiji, the language riots, the elections of 1957 and 1962, the death of Nehru, the Indo-Pak war, the Bangladesh war and finally the imposition and the lifting of the Emergency. This is Indian history in its canonical form as found in encyclopaedias and textbooks. The whole life of Saleem is inextricably intertwined with the history of India. He candidly admits: “Public announcements have punctuated my life . . .” (MC 389). The entire book is strewn with such incidents which in turn confirm Saleem’s belief that, “I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively . . .” (MC 330).

Hence *Midnight’s Children* gets elevated to the level of political fiction and resists being labelled as an autobiographical novel. Rushdie has narrated, commented upon or referred to these events and their multifarious relationships with Saleem, his family and the midnight’s children. As a representative of history, Saleem is made into a receptacle of what has happened and is happening around him. There is an amalgamation of the public and private in Saleem, who is presumed to be Rushdie’s fictional alter ego. Through his character, Rushdie makes a private statement of
public realities, valuable as such and authentic in that limited sense. T. N. Dhar comments on the role of Saleem:

A closer look at him shows us that, although, he has the semblance of a man grown from a child, he is, in effect, more of a voice-a reliable authorial voice, reliable because he does not have a life of his own. (“Micro Macro” 19-20)

Saleem himself says about his self: “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” (MC 535). The eloquent narration of the protagonist of the pathetic and tragic days of his life is without any excessive emotional exuberance. He maintains his calm and cool stance even while dealing with the atrocities, the torture, the oppression and the forceful castration during the Emergency time. He does not resort to any melodramatic rhetoric while narrating the notorious and inhuman incidents like the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre:

Brigadier Dyer’s fifty men put down their machine-guns and go away. They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person. ‘Good shooting,’ Dyer tells his men, ‘We have done a jolly good thing.’ (MC 41- 42)
The understatement used here is more powerful than any verbose outpouring of hatred and protest. Rushdie has strategically devised such a disinterested tone to make it more effective. He maintains the same tone while narrating the distress and devastation of the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. The author does not take sides but blames both the nations for the hardships incurred by their citizens. In 1971 war, Saleem lost his family members which left him an emotional wreck. Having preternaturally developed olfactory capabilities, Saleem has been chosen to function in a CUTIA Unit as a sniffer dog. His degradation into a bestial state is symbolic of the inhuman nature of the war. Ironically he claims himself to have sniffed out Mujibur Rehman, the popular leader of Bangladesh: “. . . it was I who sniffed him out. (They had provided me with one of his old shirts; it’s easy when you’ have got the smell)” (MC 496). Rushdie’s ironical humour gets conspicuous in such scenes.

The protagonist stands as a symbol of the contemporary fragmented Indian reality. He is a broken self, living on the edge. Saleem’s identity as revealed in the novel is fractured, fragmented, merged and superimposed. The theme of fragmentation is palpable even in the personal appearance of Saleem especially in his grotesque face. R. S. Pathak observes:
The motif of fragmentation is present throughout the novel. But in no case is it so prominent as it is in the case of Saleem. He is fully aware of his problems and plights, misfortunes and discordances, so typical of a rootless person. (163)

At a deeper level, the disintegration of Saleem is symbolic with the decay and decomposition of the post-Independence India. Through the medium of the protagonist, the author tries to project the fragmentation that has crept into the Indian polity. Saleem’s fractured body from which history pours out is a possible allusion to the underlying political fragmentation and fissiparous tendencies of Indian politics. In spite of the fragmented self of Saleem Sinai, or perhaps because of it, as O. P. Mathur comments: “. . . he is able to project what may be called, a sort of prismatic vision of reality, partial, fissured and fragmented, but highly absorbing and deeply meaningful” (171).

Saleem Sinai stands in the centre of the novel as a pivot upon which the entire plot of the novel rotates. He is portrayed as a victim of the paradoxes of Indian nationalism which itself is a conflict between pragmatism and idealism; the elite and the masses, centralization and federalism, rationalism and spirituality. The protagonist also represents the intellectual, imaginative Indian who can think, feel and communicate with others; and whose mind is a parliament of various view points. Saleem Sinai, with all his
humanism, talents and inadequacies, is an individual worthy of admiration, sympathy and love; a paradigm of an alienated human soul “...sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace” (MC 647). S. P. Swain remarks on the character sketch of Saleem:

Infact, Saleem has no real self image. He exists only on the metafictional canvas of historiography. Too romantic to be rational and too subjective to be polemical, he is a veritable postmodern hero that fits squarely into the mode of postmodernist fantasy in his ability of splitting into doubles and multiples. (39)

At the centre of the novel stands not only the persona of the narrator but his alter ego; Shiva, the second of midnight’s one thousand and one children. He is presented as the principle of violence and destruction, the true son of Saleem’s father and also as the father of Saleem’s son. Even though Saleem desperately seeks to avoid Shiva it would seem that the enmity between the two of them is inevitable. Shiva brought up in a slum has more direct philosophy than that of Saleem.

Perceived not so much as realistic human beings but rather as metaphorical and symbolic characters, Saleem and Shiva embody the principle of preservation and destruction; of idealism and materialism, of good and evil, of selfless search and selfish motives.
The women characters are seen to be the powerful practitioners of yet another mode of connection, the passive aggression. Though they do not have any definite role to perform in the public sphere, they enjoy absolute control in the domestic affairs. Each women character of Rushdie has her own identity. Parvati-the witch is the most powerful female midnight’s children because she was born a mere seven seconds after midnight on the 15th of August 1947.

The one thousand and one midnight’s children in the novel stand for humanity in the essentialist sense of the word. All these children have special gifts or powers or physical peculiarities. They are exposed to strong political forces which strip them off their illusions, alienate them from others and from themselves for a short time and finally exterminate them.

The harmonious collision and fusion of the national and domestic history throws into focus many related themes of the narrative; such as secularism, national growth and development, and the question of values and morality in public life. Rushdie unleashes his wrath against the rise of pseudo-politics, the regression of public politics into private, dynastic politics etc. There seems to have an ideological conflict in the novel as well. The writer focuses on the modernization of traditional agrarian societies, the exploitation of the rural majority by the urban minority and the unjustified use of excessive political power. The entire work could
be viewed as a sensitive mind’s response to his contemporary political events

*Midnight’s Children* is certainly not a tightly structured novel but it is held together by a scaffolding of images, metaphors and other narrative devices. Rushdie has introduced an entirely new package of the techniques of demystification in this towering work. He became the pioneer in manoeuvring with the realist mode of writing offering an absolutely fresh fictional experience. Viney Kirpal aptly comments:

*Midnight’s Children* is that fictional creation which, in a way, pulled together all the earlier phases of the Indian English novel—the historical, the social, the political, the psychological, the metaphysical—into one hold all of a book—and concurrently also revolutionized the fictional technique.

(25-26)

The ingenious craftsmanship of Rushdie is apparent in the employment of two discernible narrative structures in the novel. The superstructure of the world of desire is realized in a rarefied world of fantasy and dreams, and this is superimposed on a world of grim reality. Novel is the field in which Rushdie makes all sorts of stylistic experiments which provides an excellent reading experience. He is a brilliant juggler of words with which he could
arrest the attention of his readers. Uma Parameswaran remarks on the stylistic ingenuity of Rushdie:

. . . there are picture windows to which he takes the reader for panoramic views of the historical landscape. There are recurring motifs and murals that are like melodic refrains in a symphony. And then there are gargoyles-scatological or pornographic interludes—a few of which are functional and other gratuitous. All in all, certainly not an edifice of streamlined functionalism but a rambling rococo manor-house. (42)

Rushdie’s use of a highly obtrusive narrator, the substitution of fictional reality for objective reality and the manipulation of chronological events, all are instances of his application of the techniques of non-realistic fiction. The first person narrative provided Rushdie with greater flexibility in narration and also in correlating the political and the personal. The narrator often interrupts himself in order to give an image of a situation or of the background of a character which will be introduced later. The narrative techniques employed in Midnight’s Children enabled the writer to tell a story in the familiar Indian way, which is full of digressions and jokes, asides and parentheses.

Rushdie consciously breaks away from the realistic tradition of fictional writing and presents the fictional material through the consciousness of the narrator which refracts it. The wavering and
The shaky nature of Saleem chimes with the unstable and slippery narrative technique of the novel. He oscillates between the past and the present, the historical and the personal, the apocalyptic and the expansive. He is too eager to complete his narration when he says: “I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning–yes, meaning–something. I admit: above all things, I fear absurdity” (MC 4). Though in the autobiographical form, it transcends the boundaries of a purely personal account and acquires epic dimensions. T. N. Dhar rightly points out:

*Midnight’s Children* exploits the formal features of the fairytale, the romance, the confession, the anatomy, the novel, the epic, and some other forms like the journalistic and the purely fantastic. Through a judicious combination of these features, Rushdie evolves a form suited to putting together his experiential content by weaving the personal story of Saleem Sinai with the larger story of his country, thus forging the micro-macro symbiosis. The style of his narration, the personality of the narrator, and the various scenes and episodes which constitute the book are governed by this principle. (“Micro-Macro” 16-17)

The whole story is presented as narrated by the protagonist Saleem Sinai to Padma who functions as a chorus character or audience. The episodic, metonymous quality of the story balances
perfectly with its drive for meaning. The threads are drawn together at the focal point of meaning in two fold images of creativity; of the writer telling the story and of the reader who responds. Padma is not just a silent listener. She also represents the artistic conscience of the writer. She brings Saleem back on track whenever he appears to be straying:

But here is Padma at my elbow, bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next:

‘At this rate,’ Padma complains, ‘you’ll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth.’ (MC 44)

The protagonist-narrator strikes one as not only preternaturally clever; but also as impish, omniscient and wholly incredible as a human being. Saleem Sinai is a highly self-conscious narrator. The narration produces an altogether unreal atmosphere, created judiciously by the author which makes the common human world shrink into insignificance. He tries to reinforce the impression that political forces have created a macabre world alienated from the ideal human world. Ashuthosh Banerjee observes:

This vast sprawling narrative of a nation’s history over a period of some sixty–two years—indeed, it is proper to call it the history of three nations over various lengths of time—has been given a certain integrity by means of special devices. The centrifugal movement of international relations has been
partially undercut by the centripetal devices of strictly chronological progression, repetitive imagery and fortuitous parallelisms. There are also frequent summaries of previous events to refresh the reader’s memory. (29)

Rushdie’s narrative technique violates the unities of time and place. He flouted all conventions of linearity by inserting events from the past, present and future. This dislocation of the sequence of events makes a mockery of the unity of time giving a circular pattern to the novel which defies closure and welcomes continuity. Saleem, the protagonist is apprehensive about the outcome of his narration when he says: “And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!” (MC 4)

Rushdie makes abundant use of both linguistic and aesthetic deviations through which he could defamiliarize the familiar historical events. He playfully divides the novel into different episodes. It is a calculated method to maintain the suspense to arouse curiosity and to give the impression that the story is all of one whole piece. Rushdie makes use of an intricate fictional design to offer a comprehensive vision of the multi-dimensional Indian society. He copiously employs all sorts of narrative devices like metaphor, myth, satire, parody, fantasy, allusions, linguistic
experimentations, magic realism etc. in order to capture the history of Saleem Sinai as well as the history of a nation.

Rushdie perfects the technique of magic realism in *Midnight’s Children*. Magic realism has been variously defined as an attempt to transcend the limitations of realism. In other words, it is a mask that the reality wears which does not change the essential truth but rather subverts it to the level of acceptability. The scene of action in such a novel is distanced by fantasy which takes reality beyond the real, thereby drawing multiple concerns. In *Midnight’s Children* magic realism is a device which unites the Indian culture of the past to the contemporary multicultural interface. There is an excessive mixing of fantasy and reality in the novel. Rushdie employs magic realism to substantiate the telepathic abilities of the protagonist, and the thousand and one midnight’s children which enable them to communicate with each other through their minds. In order to give credibility to the omniscient accounts of the narrator, Rushdie endows him with superhuman vision and extraordinary powers of thought-reading. Rushdie endows his protagonist with miraculous powers so that he can enter into the minds of others and understand their secret thoughts and feelings. He employs the method of magnification as a ploy to allow Saleem to see, to know and to report much more than he could as an ordinary mortal. It is a postmodernist technique used by the author
for glossing over a span of sixty years by one single narrator. He is invested with amazing abilities so that he could move in time and space. He could see his prenatal past which helps the author to bring forth the ancestral history of Saleem. Shuffling of time by the author can be compared to the shuffling of a pack of cards which is just a prelude to a highly organized intelligent game.

The writer tampers with the narrator’s personality and makes him perform all sorts of impossible tasks. He even makes Saleem invisible on one occasion, so that he can be transported from Bangladesh to India. In short, though we see him walk in flesh and blood he is no character at all. He is a symbol of history, a mere authorial voice. The midnight’s children are a magic realist’s device to emphasize the struggle to come to terms with identity within the polarities of the post-Independence Indian situation. The consequence of this special treatment given to the narrator by the author is that; the novel unfolds in a series of episodes with heavy trappings of fantasy and the historical details, which figure in it and are seasoned with varieties of spicy stuff, anecdotes, mythological lore and with very diverting comedy.

Recurring images and metaphors have an important function in Rushdie’s method and meaning. The most enduring metaphor is the ‘perforated sheet’ that appears all through the novel. One can read layers of meanings into the seven inch ‘hole’ in the bed sheet.
of Naseem Ghani; by peeping through which Aadam Aziz falls in
love. The perforated sheet replicates the metaphorical ‘hole’ that
has developed in Aziz’s heart. A whole identity is replaced by a
literal ‘hole’. It is this very ‘hole’ which traps Aadam Aziz into the
marriage with Amina Sinai; the grandmother of Saleem Sinai,
perhaps to fill up his own ‘hole’. Rushdie seems to imply that India
is a land whose people are figuratively full of ‘holes’.

Saleem’s life too is a perforated sheet and he feels a ‘hole’ in the
centre of his body. He feels, “Condemned by a perforated sheet to a
life of fragments . . .” (MC 165). Everything slips and trickles
through it. Things flow in and out of Saleem due to this leakage.
The perforated sheet is the open sesame through which Saleem
observes his life and the political history of his nation. Rushdie
holds the perforated sheet between himself and his reader
throughout the entire novel. He seems to be implying that nothing
can be seen, experienced or communicated in its entirety. Things
can be articulated only in fragments. Those who try to see or show
‘the whole’ will inevitably come to grief. Uma Parameswaran
comments on the perforated sheet:

. . . the perforated sheet goes far beyond its literal context. It
accumulates weight with repeated use; it becomes symbolic
of the passage of time in the way it gets moth-eaten and of
lack of unity within India in the way it develops numerous
holes; by cross-reference, it is associated with Pakistan “that moth-nibbled land of God”; the way the sheet is stored as a sentimental souvenir reflects an attitude to history, the attitude that treasures something long after it has become useless; or it could be a comment on the new generation’s ignorance of history or their callousness in letting it get moth-eaten. (44)

Saleem as a true representative of the midnight’s children; is himself a provoking metaphor for the contemporary fragmented Indian reality. He is literally disintegrating and has a fissured body from which history pours out. This is a possible reference to the underlying political fragmentation and divisive tendencies of Indian politics. Saleem’s growth also mirrors the development of free India. He ruminates:

I had also been overwhelmed by an agonizing feeling of sympathy for the country which was not only my twin-in-birth but also joined to me (so to speak) at the hip, so that what happened to either of us, happened to us both. (MC 538)

The one thousand and one midnight’s children also stand as a metaphor of Indian society. They represent the nation’s psyche; one thousand and one ways of looking at things.
Midnight’s children can be made to represent many things, . . . they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth-century economy; or as the true hope of freedom, which is now forever extinguished. . . . (MC 278)

There is a recurring reference to pickling or *chutnification* in the novel. Rushdie seems to imply that by *chutnifying* or by pickling, the intense pain of history could be reduced to some extent. Pickling becomes a metaphor for writing itself. Both serve the same purpose-preservation. Saleem has not only written his memory but also collected them in pickle jars, waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac country. It is also symbolic of the fragmentation of the self and the nation.

Rushdie uses the genre of myth as an ideological form as well as a strategy of liberation. He dilutes realism by incorporating mythical elements. The real pain of some one cut off from an authentic indigenous past can be expressed in mythic and surreal terms. But despite the attractiveness of the mythic mode, myth itself is ultimately no solution and can never replace history. The entire work is strewn with mythical images which Rushdie has very judiciously selected. One can trace both mythical and realistic traits in the character of the boatman Tai. He is mythical in that:
“Nobody could remember when Tai had been young. He had been plying this same boat, standing in the same hunched position, across the Dal and Nageen Lakes . . . forever” (MC 10).

Saleem first receives the knowledge of his magical powers while hidden in, of all places a washing chest: “A washing-chest is a hole in the world, a place which civilization has put outside itself, beyond the pale; this makes it the finest of hiding-places” (MC 215). By selecting a washing chest as a mythical retreat, Rushdie tries to debunk the conventional concept of myth.

Rushdie has incorporated the mythical elements from all kinds of sources including Hindu, Greek, pre-Islamic, Sufi, Christian and Persian mythologies. He alters and moulds these myths to suit the needs of the contexts and presents them through multiple fictional devices.

The narration of the story by Saleem to Padma is raised to the level of myth as if Lord Vishnu is narrating the story to Goddess Lakshmi. Padma is given a divine status by naming her after the lotus goddess: “The Lotus Goddess; the One Who Possesses Dung . . .” (MC 270). Rushdie makes a Biblical reference when he names a chapter ‘Revelations’. This implicitly refers to The Revelation of St. John, the Divine, the last book of The New Testament. Rushdie efficiently select a few significant myths from The Ramayana too. One such is that of the Ravana which suggests an all-pervading evil and
violence. The chapter heading ‘Many-headed Monsters’ is a clear reference to the atrocities committed by the ten-headed mythical figure. The high ideals engendered by Rama and Sita are used metaphorically in sharp contrast to the concomitant violence perpetrated by Ravana. Characters bearing mythical names such as Shiva, Parvati and Padma help Rushdie to add a mythical dimension to the novel that deals with the contemporary reality. Rushdie invests the character Shiva with the qualities that his mythical figure incarnates—destruction and procreation. His victory over Saleem is symbolic of the victory of the disruptive elements in Indian politics: “Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim; understand our rivalry, and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live” (MC 604). Apart from the destructive function, Shiva performs his procreative function also in the novel. He fathers a whole bunch of children. Rushdie also uses the Sakthi-myth in reference to Indira Gandhi. She is depicted as an incarnation of Kali, who dominates the masses, “. . . you know what is OM? Very Well. For the masses, our Lady is a manifestation of the OM” (MC 612). The author also refers to the Kali-Yuga as the age of darkness. He records:

. . . it is Kali-Yuga; the children of the hour of darkness were born, I’m afraid, in the midst of the age of darkness; so that
although we found it easy to be brilliant, we were always confused about being good. (MC 277)

Rushdie extensively makes use of The Mahabharata myth too in the novel. The mythical framework of ‘Maya’ provides a logical answer to the imaginary and improbable world of Saleem and his friends. He says: “Maya, in its dynamic aspect, is called Shakti . . .” (MC 567). He introduces the Brahma myth as supporting the very structure of Midnight’s Children. Saleem asks:

Do Hindus not accept-Padma-that the world is a kind of dream; that Brahma dreamed, is dreaming the universe; that we only see dimly through that dream-web which is Maya. . . . If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma’s dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right? (MC 293)

The author employs a variety of Indian myths and a lot of unconventional images and metaphors to present his cultural, historical and political concerns. Amnesia, like myth serves to protect the narrator from facing up to the cruel reality of history. It provides the protagonist with a natural means of escape from his pathetic predicament. The protagonist remarks: “But how convenient this amnesia is, how much it excuses!” (MC 496)
Rushdie’s potpourri of demystifying techniques is brimming with myriad stratagems which he cautiously employs to augment the artistic excellence of the novel. He uses parody in its full bloom in *Midnight’s Children*. It is evident in the very beginning itself when the narrator introduces himself:

I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldly, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon, had become heavily embroiled in Fate—at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. And I couldn’t even wipe my own nose at the time. (MC 3)

The novel could be considered as a mock-epic of the post-Independence India, parodying many events that shook the nation. Almost all the great names and events in the political history of both India and Pakistan are having their ridiculous counterparts in the novel. In its form itself, by dividing of the book into three parts, parodies the usual run of three-volume Victorian novels. Besides parodying incidents and persons, Rushdie makes many illuminating literary allusions through the medium of parody: “Telepathy set me apart; telecommunications dragged me down . . .” (MC 409). These lines are a direct parody of the famous lines from T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*: “Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew/ Undid me” (230). Similarly he alludes eloquently from James Joyce also.
Rushdie is audacious enough to parody even a Hindu prayer when he says: “Om Hare Khusro Hare Khusrovand Om” (MC 371). Rushdie integrates parody into the very centre of the fictional narrative. The entire novel can be considered as a parody of the postcolonial Indian society.

Allegory assumes gargantuan stature in the hands of Rushdie and is deployed as an effective demystifying technique. The novel becomes a national allegory of India in its portrayal of the contemporary life. From the beginning itself, Rushdie maintains a continuous effort at synchronizing national and domestic life. He presents the national allegory giving an imaginative form to India and its history. The uniqueness of Rushdie’s treatment of history lies in its universal and illusionary nature. He clarifies this in Shame which is an allegory of the history of Pakistan:

The country in this story is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality. I have found this off-centring to be necessary; but its value is, of course, open to debate. My view is that I am not writing only about Pakistan. (S 29)

Midnight’s Children is the mediation on the textuality of the official history of India paralleled inextricably with the odyssey of
the Azizes’ and Sinais’. The protagonist had a multiple role in his relation with history; as its twin companion, its creator, its victim, besides being a chronicler. He is also a participant and an ironic over viewer of the political events in the country. There is always a convergence of the national and domestic elements throughout the novel. Saleem’s elaborate description of his grandfather shows significant resemblance with Nehru. Both are from Kashmiri families, both have been educated in Europe and both uphold secular ideas. Using allegory as a literary medium, Rushdie conveys his excessively felt emotional sentiments towards the utter chaos and degradation of the post-Independence India. He blames people for their complacent attitude and for not seeing the country’s drift towards disaster. Saleem emerges as the symbol of the alienated, defeated and disillusioned ordinary Indian citizen. He pathetically laments:

. . . I am tearing-myself apart, can’t even agree with myself, talking arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up, memory going, yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark. . . . (MC 589)

The bleak picture of the defeated human spirit at the hands of social and political forces echoes the sentiments of anti-Utopian novels. The interplay of the personal and national histories is the
most significant feature of *Midnight’s Children*. As Mujeebuddin Syed records:

Saleem’s account of Indian history then is an alternative history, a tale of marginalized who persevere in spite of the attempts by centres of power to sweep them under so-called “history”, and an assertion of his polyglot identity as an Indian. (107)

The protagonist asserts his intimate link with the national history when he records in a boastful vein:

And (without any assistance from me) relations between India and Pakistan grew worse; entirely without my help, India conquered Goa . . . I sat on the sidelines and played no part in the acquisition of large-scale U.S. aid for Pakistan, nor was I to blame for Sino-India border skirmishes. . . . (MC 406)

As opposed to the deliberately demonstrated parallelisms between national and personal life, there are passages of straightforward journalistic account of national and international events: “On October 20th, the Indian forces were defeated–thrashed-by the Chinese at Thag La ridge” (MC 414).

Though the novel opens in a fairytale style, ‘once upon a time’, it does not fall in the category of a fairy tale at all. The distinguishing point of fairytale from fantasy is that fairytale creates a world which
is safely removed from the real one. It does not challenge the factual world even though it constantly threatens the notions of the real one. Rushdie has made elaborate use of fantasy in order to project the morbid and horrid theme he is handling. The magical aura of fantasy is superimposed on a world of history and facts. The effective use of fantasy enables Rushdie to narrate the saga of three generations extending over six decades in a realistic manner. Ron Shepherd comments:

Saleem’s subjective reality remains consistently at one remove from actuality, the underside or obverse side of actuality, just as the concept of “midnight” in the novel stands in diametrical opposition to the light of midday. Midnight is the province of fantasy which is a dream-like recreation of the actual world. And fantasy is an escape from the pressure of an outside “midday” public world which threatens the quality of individual sensibility. (38)

The narration of Saleem itself has the semblance of a dream. Most of the characters presented have larger than life proportions. The meddling of the narrator with the unities of time and space is an effective technique to accommodate the numerous characters in the novel. It also makes the shifting of scenes between the two countries more convincing. There are fantastic metamorphoses of characters like that of Parvati into Jamila Singer, Saleem’s ego into
the many egos of the midnight children etc. The zenith of such transmutation occurs in the transmogrification of Saleem into a man-dog in the CUTIA Unit. It is the inner self-contempt that makes him fantasize in the level of a bestial. The entire episode is presented as if in a dream. Saleem records that he had entered into the realms of absurd fantasy and had surrendered to the terrible phantasms of the dream-forest. The narrator always tries to establish a relation between the past and the present by constantly going back to the past: “I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present” (MC 206).

As subtlety and self-consciousness begin to govern the narration, there is a corresponding increase in the complexity and variety of structural devices employed by the narrator. In the beginning, the narrator dwells on the problems of writing a novel. He is not sure of how to begin; when to begin and what are things to be included, omitted and edited:

I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar’s Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it’s important to be more . . . On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. (MC 3)
The novel itself is about writing a novel which invariably makes it a metafiction. The narrator is neither proud nor boastful about his method of narration. He says: “I make no comment; these events, which have tumbled from my lips any old how, garbled by haste and emotion, are for others to judge” (MC 33). He is also apologetic for any deficiency in his narration when he states:

Because I am rushing ahead at breakneck speed; errors are possible, and overstatements, and jarring alterations in tone; I’m racing the cracks, but I remain conscious that errors have already been made. . . . (MC 375-76)

At the very outset, Saleem mentions the problems of his writing and his apprehensions regarding the successful completion of his fiction. In response to the constant queries of Padma, Saleem tries to explain to her his art of writing. Rushdie also ensures the reader’s participation in his creative endeavour by continually drawing attention to the artifice of fictionalization. This kind of metafictional historiography helps the author to actively intercede into the problematics of history. The narrator is constantly aware of the fictive nature of his interpretation of history.

The writer employs historical parallels as a fictional technique in the novel. The method enables the unfolding of meanings at a paradigmatic level. At each point where a historical event is
mentioned and narrated; parallels are drawn between it and fictional events, connecting and developing the significance of both. For instance: “Doctor Aadam Aziz . . . died five days before the government announced that its massive search for the single hair of the Prophet’s head had been successful” (MC 386). This method of using a historical framework for incidents in the novel makes the entire narrative a historiographic metafiction. Such novels are intensely self-reflexive ones. They generate an extremely fierce commentary on historical problems.

Irony is yet another effective narrative strategy employed by the author. Rushdie fences his interpretation of history with the protective armour of irony. He has made it a point not to relegate his irony into unpalatable cynicism. Rushdie adheres to his deep love, interest and freedom throughout the novel. At the same time he also ridicules whatever is outdated, narrow and constricting. Saleem with an ironic air attaches enormous importance to his part as the prime maker of history and the centre of the very universe. Sometimes he even claims himself to be the manipulator of history. Finally he realizes that he has been a victim of history rather than its creator.

The reference to the olfactory powers of Saleem is also full of ironical fantasies. He uses his nose to sniff out people and also for identifying the correct combination of pickling ingredients for his
living. He has a nose for details and he pokes his nose into others affairs. Though a Muslim, Rushdie ironically makes fun of the purdah system in the episode of the perforated sheet in good spirits. O. P. Mathur states:

In fact, the superficial objectivity of narrative perspective and the sharp radiant ironies are woven of the threads of sincerity and love which encompasses the whole of mankind. The protagonist emerges as an Indian at the crossroads of history, gifted with a fertile imagination, having no illusions and mental cobwebs, and cherishing truth, sincerity, love and tolerance even amidst a barren and hostile world. Disenchanted, he can laugh at himself as well as at others. (177)

The syntax functions as the weapon with which the narrator constructs, deconstructs and re-constructs his narrative. Rushdie uses interrogative and exclamatory sentences to tell the story in an extremely cogent way. This method gives depth to the linear narration and also gives a breathing space to the reader from the long drawn narrative sentences. Saleem asks:

Questions: did I ever, after that time, employ the services of pink plastic? Did I return to the café of extras and Marxists? Did I confront my mother with the heinous nature of her offence—because what mother has any business to—never mind
about what once-upon-a–time-in full view of her only son, how could she how could she how could she? Answers: I did not; I did not; I did not. (MC 302)

This question-answer method again suggests the mental agony and conflict of the protagonist. Rushdie adopts the same interrogative structure in the narration of historical events as well. This is a scrupulous method which maintains the objectivity of historical incidents. The events of the 1965 war are narrated in the form of questions:

One week before my eighteenth birthday, on August 8th, did Pakistan troops in civilian clothing cross the ceasefire line in Kashmir and infiltrate the Indian sector, or did they not?. . . . If it happened what were the motives? (MC 470)

Exclamatory sentences are also used along with the interrogative ones in order to create an impression of witness report. Saleem narrates about the battle of Lahore: “Voice of Pakistan said: O memorable day! O unarguable lesson in the fatality of delay!” (MC 472) The picturesque description using exclamatory sentences makes it a first hand account by an eye witness. Rushdie also uses sentences without appropriate punctuational pauses, suggestive of haste and confusion, psychic turmoil and estrangement of Saleem. The breathless outburst of
long sentences without any full stops indicates the breathless and fragmented inner self of Saleem:

But imagine the confusion inside my head! Where, behind the hideous face, above the tongue tasting of soap, hard by the perforated eardrum, lurked a not-very-tidy mind, as full of bric-a'-brac as nine-year-old pockets . . . imagine yourself inside me somehow, looking out through my eyes, hearing the noise, the voices. . . . (MC 235)

Rushdie exploits the advantages of a circular configuration in his narration starting with a prologue showing Saleem’s present situation as a writer. It also presents a fictional level separated from the level where Saleem is the protagonist. At the end of the novel the two levels coincide. Ends are contained in the beginnings, beginnings in ends. Since each end is the beginning of a story, the narrative follows a circular path. The narrator begins the story with the life of an Aadam and ends with another Aadam, the great-grandson of the first. The birth of the new child is narrated using the same words he used in the beginning to narrate his own birth, but with necessary changes:

He was born in Old Delhi . . . once upon a time. No, that won’t do, there’s no getting away from the date: Aadam Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And
the time? The time matters, too. As I said: at night. No, it’s important to be more . . . On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms. (MC 586)

Rushdie deliberately meddles with the chronology of the historical events. He mistakes the date of Gandhi’s assassination. Since he does not fix the date of Gandhi’s death, the reader is not able to cross-check it with historical facts. He also places an election incorrectly in time. An anticipatory bail was already taken by the narrator when he states that his memory is affected due to the cracks and disintegration. This is a bold act of liberating the reader from the heavy burden of dense narration. S. P. Swain is possibly following a similar train of thought when he judges the narrative style of the novel:

The desultory style of narration, leaping from one matter to another, constant shifts of perspective, frequent eruptions into the narrative of marginally related incidents, symbols and anecdotes and ubiquitous drift of the narrative into dream and nightmare etc., tend to blur the spatio-temporal continuum and symbolise the fragmentary existence of Saleem, the narrator protagonist. . . . (38)

Besides being a master craftsman of innovative stylistic pattern, Rushdie is unparalleled in his unprecedented use of Indianized
English. He bent and kneaded the English language until it spoke in a genuine Indian voice. He *chutnified* the language so that it catered to the needs of the subcontinent. Rushdie was trying to create an Indian novel in an Indianized English, a novel about India and everything Indian. He shook the very foundation of English morphology by ruthlessly incorporating non-English words into it. He blends them so exquisitely that the native idiom and speech stand out as distinctive stones in the tinted mosaic of the language. The Indianization and indigenization of English has been done through the twin process of abrogation and appropriation of the language.

Rushdie borrows extensively from Indian languages especially Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani. He has brought into his writing the rhythms, intonations and even dialects of the Indian vernacular tongues. The whole repertoire of English as it is often spoken in India is unfurled to entertain and jolt the reader. His chaotic style is seen as a reflection of the chaotic situation of India after independence. Hence he formulated a new style which caters to the new circumstances.

Apart from performing the basic function of articulation, language serves as the cultural ambassador as well. By subverting the ‘English’ English and replacing it with an Indianized English, Rushdie tries to reiterate the cultural identity of our nation. He
chutnifies the ‘King’s English’ transforming it into a hybrid form. The intentional double coded usages also symbolized the fragmented postcolonial Indian society. The ramifications of Rushdie’s technique extend far beyond the mere substitution of a lexical item from one language with another alien word.

Rushdie has adeptly handled the powers of the language to convey various Indian habits and even for delineating characters. He inserts crisp, befitting vernacular words and phrases into flawless English sentences as a deliberate attempt of deglamourizing the glory of the King’s English: “Yes, tickety-boo! The boy is really ship-shape! Come on phaelwan: a ride in my Packard, okay?” (MC 332-33) Rushdie realized that the subtlety of one language cannot be caught in another and hence he resorted to using untranslated words from the vernacular tongue in abundance. He clarifies this in Shame:

To unlock a society, look at its untranslatable words. *Takallouf* is a member of that opaque, world-wide sect of concepts which refuse to travel across linguistic frontiers: it refers to a form of tongue-tying formality, a social restraint so extreme as to make it impossible for the victim to express what he or she really means, a species of compulsory irony which insists, for the sake of good form, on being taken literally. (S 104)
Double usage of the same word was employed for fluent effect, “‘Chhi, chhi! Filthy!’” (MC 214), “Child, child, don’t fear; your clouds will soon roll by” (MC 338), “O! O God, O God, O!” (MC 347) and so on. The use of run-on-words and other Rushdiesque linguistic devices also foregrounds Indian English usage. This is a technique of running together two or more words into one word: “whatsitsname” (MC 76), “everywhichthing” (MC 331), “hullabaloo” (MC 380) etc.

Rushdie also makes new coinages like “glass-kissery” and “hand-dances” (MC 302) to describe his mother’s secret attempt of drinking from the same cup as her paramour at the Pioneer Café. In order to delineate character belonging to the lower strata of the society, Rushdie makes them say what is considered as Babu English. The characteristic features of Babu English are that it is stilted, bookish and flowery. It is replete with unfamiliar syntaxes, invocational forms of address and coloured imprecations. For example: “‘Mother raper! Violator of our daughters!’” (MC 98) Ghani tells the young doctor Aadam Aziz:

‘You Europe-returned chappies forget certain things. Doctor Sahib, my daughter is a decent girl, it goes without saying . . . . You will understand that you cannot be permitted to see her, no not in any circumstances; accordingly I have required her to be positioned behind that sheet. (MC 23)
The words ‘Doctor-Sahib’ and ‘chappies’ are clear deviations from Standard English. The use of Babu English indicates the characters’ lack of education and civilization. Rushdie also does some transliteration and transcreation of language: “. . . You newlyweds, I can’t stop coming to see, cho chweet I can’t tell you!” (MC 89)

Rushdie was successful in capturing the cadences of Urdu and the wry irony and humour that mark Urdu speech: “What, Father? You are comparing Our Lord to jungle wild men?” (MC 138), “Sing, little bulbul! Sing!” (MC 282), “Badmaash!’ my aunty screams” (MC 348) and so on. Rushdie’s characters would say “soo-soo” (MC 214), “Hee hoo ha” (324), “Funtoosh” (MC 388) etc. and neither word is italicized.

The novelist also makes interesting coinages like “What do you mean how can you say that” (MC 315) and “Thees ees what?” (MC 320) Rushdie has experimented with the Anglo-Indian dialect with its colloquialisms in his later novel The Moor’s Last Sigh: “Long ago when I was green my beloved said to me in fondness, ‘Oh, you Moor, you strange black man, always so full of these, never a church door to nail them to”’ (TMLS 3). The author is also audacious enough to use small and capital letters erratically for enhanced dramatic effect:
From GOAN LIBERATION COMMITTEE LAUNCHES SATYGRAHA CAMPAIGN I extracted the letters ‘COM’; SPEAKER OF E-PAK ASSEMBLY DECLARED MANIAC gave me my second syllable, ‘MAN’. (MC 360)

The names of characters provide a clear indication of Rushdie’s attempt to create an Indianized variant of English. He makes a comprehensive use of the device of ‘naming’ in order to build up a composite structure of narration. Naming plays a crucial role in the narrative strategy and Rushdie exploits its suggestive and semiotic powers to the maximum. He has used different methods of naming in this seminal work. The names of most of the major characters and many minor characters are drawn from Muslim and Hindu sacred myths or from famous personages or places such as Shiva, Parvati, Padma, Mary, Joseph, Musa etc. Another method of naming is to refer to a person with a sarcastic or funny distortion of his real name or by giving them nicknames. Saleem calls himself snotnose (his leaky nose), sniffer (his olfactory powers), Buddha (his grey hair), stain face (his fissured face) etc. Memories of his childhood were narrated mostly by using nicknames. Brass monkey, Eyeslice, Hairoil etc. Allegorical method of naming is also used in the novel. This is the method of naming a person according to his occupation in the society.
Rushdie's use of a hybrid language strengthens his critiquing of the forces of nationalism in India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children*. The ease with which he blends the native tongue with English adds new dimensions of beauty and charm to his style. The inventive purity of Rushdie's heteroglot style brought the spoken language of the street onto the printed page with such energy that India finally saw the two tongues as one. Rushdie twists, transforms, and re-fashions it to fit the experience of contemporary Indian life. Agnes Scott Langeland comments:

All in all, the total effect of Rushdie's linguistic techniques is to mould a vibrant prose whose positive tone makes language a bridge between cultures, enabling a new process of enculturation to take place. . . . (21)

*Midnight's Children* encapsulates in its epic framework the whole of India, though in fragments, with astonishing vigour and vitality. Rushdie's fiction is a unique combination of history, myth and fantasy; integrated deftly to give an encyclopaedic picture of the contemporary times. It unravels the picture of India; its ups and downs, unity and diversity, friendship and enmity, mythology and politics.

Rushdie places a mirror against history which reflects the confusion and alienation that defines postcolonial societies and
individuals. He masks and demystifies the dismal condition, by expressing it through fresh fictional techniques. New demystifying strategies were needed since the conventional ones failed to express the intensely felt existential problems in the changed political scenario. Rushdie sifts history, spices it a bit and pickles it with his indigenous ingredients and bakes it using new aesthetic strategies and presents it to the reader in its enormous form to relish.