

The Shadows of Imperfection

**A study of Self-reflexivity in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*,
Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

By

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Table of Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
I Abstract -----	V
II Chapter I - Introduction -----	1
III Chapter II - A Precursor of Self-reflexivity: R. K. Narayan's <i>The Guide</i> -----	19
IV Chapter III - The Imitation of Non-literary Discourse An Analysis of Taslima Nasrin's <i>Lajja</i> -----	42
V Chapter - IV The Chutnification of Narrative Salman Rushdie's <i>Midnight's Children</i> -----	66
VI Chapter - V Conclusion -----	93
VII Notes -----	99
VIII Bibliography -----	102

Abstract

This thesis aims at examining the complex narrative mode of self-reflexivity, ascertaining how it serves the postcolonial agenda of destabilizing the power of Eurocentric literary discourse, the discourse that marginalized literary traditions of subject peoples. Derived from ancient literary traditions, self-reflexive narrative asserts the cultural identity of colonized societies. In particular, this thesis focuses on three self-reflexive novels from the Indian subcontinent: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The self-reflexive techniques employed in each of these narratives vary a great deal. Narayan's *The Guide* is modeled on various ancient patterns of storytelling and on mythic traditions. Nasrin's *Lajja* uses a distinctive technique of mixing non-literary registers with literary to resist the ruling culture in Bangladesh, and to represent the ruled. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* seems to combine the strengths of the other two narratives in the service of its decolonizing agenda. Like *The Guide*, it makes ample use of ancient storytelling techniques to validate indigenous discourses. And like *Lajja*, it makes ample use of historical and cultural events in India's history to interrogate many colonialist assumptions in discursive practices. All these novels employ a self-reflexive narrative mode as a counter-discursive strategy that resists totalizing colonialist literature and reconnects with their obscured literary past.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The post- Second World War period has been marked by the displacement of the cultural centrality of Europe, and by the creation of the alternative forms of knowledge. As a consequence, the last fifty years have witnessed a proliferation of heterogeneous cultural productions that have redesigned the intellectual as well as cultural map of the world. The “margin” now seeks the central position, and, by abandoning the pursuit of universality and totality, the contemporary discourse of marginality focuses on the local and the particular (Tiffin 98). The major concerns of postcolonial writing, therefore, are to resist the colonialist discourse that marginalized indigenous forms of knowledge, and to validate the distinctive qualities of local and particular discourses. The ideological domination of local discourses was a definite part of European colonizers’ scheme for political and economic control over of the colonies (Viswanathan 4). In the consolidation of political and ideological power, the colonialist text played a major role. The colonizers claimed that European discourse had qualities that transcended the barriers of time and space, and revealed “the universal human condition” (Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 85). They further assumed that indigenous literatures and forms of knowledge were only confined to local and particular cultures and, therefore, were inferior to those of Europe. To repudiate native discourse, Thomas Macaulay, while making a policy decision on Indian education, made a clear statement about Indian literature and knowledge, namely, that “there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own” (429).

By thus authorizing views on the inferiority of native discourse, the colonizers shouldered a responsibility to impart their 'superior' knowledge to natives for their "mental and moral improvement" (Viswanathan 5-6). To civilize the native, the colonial rulers institutionalized Eurocentric discourse in indigenous educational systems. Political power thus helped the colonizers to impose their discourse on the colonies, and in turn, the discourse helped them consolidate their power.

However, as Edward Said rightly observes, Western discourse has not only wielded power but has also stimulated opposition (*Orientalism* 58). Identifying the agenda of hegemonic control embedded in the Eurocentric myth of universality, postcolonial writers and theorists are now engaged in unmasking that same myth. European knowledge, they point out, is not objective, rational or universal as was assumed, but "provisional and contingent" (Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 55). Therefore, the claim to universality was ideological. With a clear objective of decolonizing literary discourse, many postcolonial writers are celebrating marginality and cultural otherness, and projecting alternative spaces of meaning, all as a counter-discursive strategy. Postmodernism is also engaged in a similar task of course. It problematizes the authoritative codes of previous literary periods, particularly of Enlightenment rationalism, nineteenth century realism, and avant-garde modernism in literature and theory (Waugh 10). Although the thrust of my study is clearly postcolonial, I would like to point out that both postcolonial and postmodern theories set out to destabilize the totalizing notions in literature and culture, and to accentuate the difference. So both theoretical approaches are anti-hierarchical, and, as part of their counter-discursive agendas, both invite the reader to explore various modes of narrativization.

The revival of the age-old traditions of oral literature and storytelling is a meaningful step in this exploration. The writers of post-independence India are eager to subvert the hegemony of the literary discourse of their former colonizers, and to revitalize their obscured oral and written literary traditions, reflecting through narrative diversity the diversity of postcolonial experience of the subcontinent¹. To represent such diverse experiences, postcolonial writers have recently developed a form of narrativization, known as self-reflexive narrative, from the old tradition of storytelling. I propose to examine this self-reflexive narrative form in my thesis. My goal is to ascertain the role that this narrative mode plays in resisting Eurocentric literature and in legitimizing the experiences of marginalized cultures, Indian culture² in particular. This study focuses on how this process works in three significant self-reflexive narratives chosen from the Indian subcontinent.

In this chapter, I would first like to theorize the notion of self-reflexivity and then show how this form counters the dominant discourse of Europe. I would begin with the examination of various definitions of the term. Patricia Waugh suggests that the self-reflexive novel, also termed “metafiction,” is a kind of novel which shows “extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions” and “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as “a fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its narrative and/or linguistic identity.” She calls it “narcissistic,” and states that “it provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its processes of production and reception” (1, xii). Mas’ud

Zavarzadeh asserts that “[t]his intense self-reflexiveness of metafiction is caused by the fact that the only certain reality for the metafictionist is the reality of his own discourse; thus, his fiction turns in upon itself, transforming the process of writing into the subject of writing” (qtd. in Ommundsen ix). Michael Boyd suggests that self-reflexive novels “do not seek to tell yet another story but to examine the storytelling process itself,” and that they “must be seen as works of literary theory and criticism.” Robert Siegle, on the other hand, holds that “[i]n the final analysis reflexivity is a way of understanding the semiotic, philosophical, and ideological processes taking place in any narrative alongside those issues our existing poetics equips us to find” (both qtd. in Ommundsen ix). In short, self-reflexive narrative systematically calls the reader’s attention to its linguistic and narrative structure, and to its fictionality in order to explore the relationship between narrative and reality. The self-reflexive novel often contains a framed story structure that encloses a story within a story, and, at the same time, comments on the act of storytelling. The self-reflexive narrative of today is an “interesting new direction in the old art of storytelling,” suggests John Barth (qtd. in McHale 3).

The terms “self-reflexive narrative” and “metafiction” are relatively new. The term “self-reflexivity” is normally used in the ambit of postcolonial theory, while “metafiction,” usually in the ambit of postmodern theory. But these terms are often used interchangeably. M. H. Abrams describes the self-reflexive novel as “a variety of self-conscious narrative, exploited in recent prose fiction” (168). The term metafiction originated in the 1960s in an essay by William Gass, and was popularized by Robert Scholes (Waugh 2, Abrams 135).

Although self-conscious fiction has recently become popular, its genealogy can be

traced back through storytelling practices of various ancient literary traditions, for instance, those of India, Persia or China. The practice of using a story as an occasion to tell some more stories is ancient. According to Brian Alderson, it originates in the Buddhist lore of the Jatak Tales dating back to the third century B. C. (185). The classic collection of fairy tales, *The Arabian Nights* is another remarkable example of this mode of narrativization. Collections such as these serve as archetypes from which contemporary self-reflexive narrative evolves. In the English literary tradition, Chaucer uses self-reflexivity in *The Canterbury Tales*, Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, and Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones*, while in the European tradition, Miguel de Cervantes employs this mode in *Don Quixote*. On the more contemporary scene, writers like Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, J. D. Salinger, John Barth, Robert Coover and John Fowles are writing self-reflexive texts. Recently, a relatively new variety of metafiction has also proved popular. Linda Hutcheon terms it “historiographic metafiction” (xiv). She argues that these narratives are historically mediated forms, in which the reader becomes the actualizing link between history and fiction, and she also adds that in this internally conflictual new form, “the hard-won textual autonomy of fiction is challenged paradoxically, by self-referentiality itself” (xiv, xv). So the reader becomes a link between history and self-referentiality. Thus derived basically from ancient storytelling practices, the self-reflexive mode serves as an alternative to the established Eurocentric forms of narrativization, such as the English novel. And the use of the self-reflexive form becomes a subversive gesture. But before considering the subversiveness of the act, I would like to examine how this challenge is situated within the form of self-reflexivity itself.

Contemporary self-reflexive writing, flourishing mainly in novels written since the 1960s, springs from “a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct, and mediate their experience of the world” (Waugh 2). It explores the complex as well as problematic relationship between language, fiction, and the world of everyday reality, and it provides “a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels” (Waugh 3). It thus becomes a good model for understanding contemporary reality. The self-reflexive novel challenges many traditional assumptions about literary writing. Unlike its predecessors, this narrative shows skepticism about the power of language to represent reality, and it upholds the view that it is impossible to represent the ‘objective’ world in ‘five acts of a play’ or in ‘fourteen lines of a sonnet’ (Waugh 5). As Waugh suggests, “[l]anguage is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own ‘meanings’” (3). There is no standard or privileged language of fiction, but there are languages of “memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, legal records, slang, documentary,” and all of them compete for privilege (Waugh 5). Self-reflexive narrative also uses abundant intertextual references that impart a sense of pluralism to the text. In short, self-reflexive narrative uses shockingly unliterary language in literary writing, and gives the language an independent status. This loss of belief in the power of language to reflect reality basically comes from a changed notion of reality. Self-reflexive narrative problematizes a nineteenth century view of objective, coherent, and static reality. The self-reflexive novel is based on an understanding of reality as a provisional phenomenon (Waugh 7). Novelists of this genre subvert the idea of organic unity in reality and therefore of structural unity in fiction.

Their works suggest that “it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed” and that “the world, as such, cannot be ‘represented’. In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to ‘represent’ the discourses of that world” (Waugh 3). To many contemporary novelists, the traditional novel form appears lifeless because of its inflexible adherence to rules and regulations, and to formal structure. They discover strength in the apparent formlessness of the self-reflexive novel. It becomes an appropriate model for understanding the uncertain and insecure world in which we are living today. For these novelists, reality is not certain, objective, and given, but subjectively constructed; it is not an organic unit but a set of fragments.

Contemporary self-reflexive narrative is further constructed on a fundamental opposition: the “construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion” (Waugh 6). In other words, the opposition is between creating a fiction and, at the same time, commenting on that creation in the same work. In self-reflexive narrative, the conflicting operations of the construction and the deconstruction of fictional illusion merge in the concepts of ‘interpretation’ and ‘deconstruction.’ To put it briefly, this narrative explores the theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction (Waugh 6). Thus self-reflexive narrative deconstructs the binary opposition between the creative and the critical. In this regard, William H. Gass, an American critic and self-conscious novelist, notices that a similar fundamental opposition underlies all arts. He says, “In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artefact out of the materials and so to treat the medium as an end” (qtd. in Waugh 14-15). Self-reflexive narrative

expresses a similar dilemma, as it tries to define its role in the real world. According to Patricia Waugh, this narrative aspires to “explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (2). In other words, it explores “the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction” (Waugh 3). Thus, rather than reflecting reality, the self-reflexive novel constructs it. This form further examines the fundamental relationship between fiction and life, between fictional reality and everyday reality. However, self-reflexive narrative does not completely abandon traditional realism. Instead, it transforms realism by turning the traditional fictional quest into the quest of fictionality (Waugh 49, 10). Fictionality becomes the main focus of the novel, rather than fiction itself.

Furthermore, the self-reflexive novel interrogates many totalizing notions in fictional writing of previous literary periods, such as the idea of a novel as an ordered unit having “the well-made plot, chronological sequence, the authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are,’” and also the “materialist, positivist and empiricist world-view” (Waugh 7). Self-reflexive narrative breaks such unitary frames of traditional narrative (Waugh 28). It questions the well-made frame of a “grand” or “master” narrative celebrated in the Victorian novels of writers such as Hardy, Dickens, and George Eliot. There are no dominant frames in self-reflexive writing. The grand Eurocentric narrative of the nineteenth century is the linear novel that adheres to the notion of the well-made plot having a beginning, a middle, and an end. But self-reflexive narratives question these notions with a conviction that there are no beginnings and no ends in reality. There are only continuations of events because “arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from

which to look ahead” (Waugh 29). In this sense, the self-reflexive novel is a nonlinear text that discards beginnings, ends, and chronological sequences of events. Hence, it rejects the framework often celebrated in the nineteenth century novel.

However, “[c]ontemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames” (Waugh 29). Contemporary self-reflexive narrative celebrates the concept of frame as a device, as a Chinese-box like structure (Waugh 30). This type of structure contains framed stories, the framing story and framed stories. The frame story contains, within its fold, many other framed stories. Calling this an embedding device, Tzvetan Todorov observes that the embedded story may/may not be directly linked to the embedding story (70-1). He further explains the internal significance of embedding: “embedding is an articulation of the most essential property of all narrative. For the embedding narrative is the narrative of a narrative. By telling the story of another narrative, the first narrative achieves its fundamental theme and at the same time is reflected in this image of itself” (72). Self-reflexive narrative employs the device of framing or embedding for achieving its theme, for separating reality from fiction and thereby, calling attention to the fictionality of fiction.

By thus returning to the old art of storytelling, the self-reflexive novel also differentiates itself from the realist fiction of the modern period—such as that of Henry James, Chekov, and James Joyce—in which there is “no action,” in which “almost nothing happens” (Holloway 53). As a reaction against Western modernism and also with nostalgic yearning for storytelling, the self-reflexive novel returns to telling stories, to the *pastiche* of stories. Modernist narrative has also shown a deep interest in the workings of the human mind, more particularly, in the subconscious mind, in the theme

of alienation of the individual, and in the consequent despair. The modernist novel portrays “man’s relations with his environment,” focussing on the individual (Lukacs 28). In this novel, society figures as a force with which individuals interact and against which they often struggle. But contemporary self-reflexive narrative shifts its concern from the individual back to society, to social, cultural, and political aspects of life. This opens up an amazing possibility of themes for the self-reflexive novel.

Furthermore, the contemporary self-reflexive novel also reconsiders the authoritative position of the author or the omniscient narrator celebrated in the realistic novel of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the traditional realistic novel makes the author a god-like entity, and the romantic tradition similarly upholds author-centred criticism. On the other, Roland Barthes, a contemporary structuralist and poststructuralist critic, makes familiar the phrase ‘the death of the author’ (Waugh 133). Contemporary self-reflexive narrative refuses both these extreme positions; it restricts the authority of the omniscient author over the text but does not do away with him/her. It is based on the notion that a composition cannot exist without an author just as a story cannot exist without a teller (Waugh 27). In an attempt to restore a balance between the two extreme positions about the status of the author, self-reflexive narrative reintroduces the narrator device of ancient storytelling practices and the omniscient author sometimes appears in the form of a narrator. But the position of a narrator sets a limit on his/her omniscient, god-like authority. The narrator participates in the creation of fiction as one of the characters, while sometimes the author assumes the role of a storyteller, tells stories, and addresses the reader directly.

The self-reflexive novel similarly reconsiders the role of the reader. In the

dominant Eurocentric novel tradition, the reader often played a passive role in consuming the meaning of a literary text. However, self-reflexive narrative imparts greater freedom to the reader. It shows respect for the complex act of reading and invites the reader to participate more actively in re-creating the text. As Linda Hutcheon rightly observes, the reader becomes a co-producer of the novel, and the novel, in turn, participates in social change through its readers. She further states that today's metafiction is didactic in nature because it teaches that the meaning of a text is not only related to the context of its production but also to the cultural context in which it is read (xi-xii). The author becomes a position to be filled in and the reader becomes one of the collaborators of the novel (Hutcheon xiii). This reader autonomy opens up a possibility of plural authorship and of plural interpretation which undermines the authority of both the author and the critic over the text. This plurality of various narrative positions democratizes the process of creation and evaluation of the literary text, and enables the reader to play two roles, as an observer and as a participant. The reader does not become a passive recipient of the text but undoubtedly enjoys a privileged position.

The self-reflexive novel enables the reader to play the role of a critic as well. Earlier critical traditions imposed the possibility of one central meaning on the text, and the critic's role was to unfold it for the reader. Finding the notion of a single, determinant meaning authoritative, contemporary self-reflexive narrative discards such "closures of meaning," invites the reader to interpret the novel, and thus opens up a possibility of multiple interpretations of the text (Waugh 13). The possibility of plural interpretation enables self-reflexive narrative to interrogate authoritative value-judgements, and to unveil ideological assumptions embedded in the instituted patterns of

value-judgements, held as absolute critical standards in the dominant Eurocentric tradition. Since there are multiple authors, multiple readers, and multiple meanings that are engaged in the act of creating a single text, the act of constructing the text becomes pluralistic, and it thus rejects centralized literary assumptions. This pluralistic nature of self-reflexive fiction makes it a narrative of disempowerment. Rejecting the authoritative structure, the self-reflexive novel eclectically chooses the best from multiple traditions, and hence, can best articulate a contemporary multicultural spirit.

This “unprecedented cultural pluralism” is reflected in the changed conceptions of fiction and fictionality, and in the nature of aesthetic experience today, which the self-reflexive novel faithfully represents (Waugh 10). Challenging the literature of the Eurocentric canon, self-reflexive narrative refuses to accept established notions of aesthetic standards as essential, and turns to the egalitarian spirit of oral traditions (Waugh 67). In so doing, it blurs the binary between high and popular literature and celebrates folk literature and culture, popular and detective fiction, thrillers and fantasies, romances and pornography, television serials and films, and advertising and comics. Self-reflexive narrative esteems popular forms, such as fairy tale, parody, and fantasy—in short, the forms excluded so far from the contemporary mainstream of literature (Waugh 79). Parody and mockery enable self-reflexive fiction to undermine the high seriousness of modernist literature. Self-reflexive narrative also represents sensuality, gross emotions, and jarring repetitions that one normally associates with orature. By experimentally integrating popular forms into the mainstream of literature, the self-reflexive novel has given a new life to the novel genre, which otherwise was feared to be dead (Waugh 80).

The self-reflexive narrative further provides vitality to the novel form by experimenting with subject matter, language, form, style, temporal sequence, and by fusing everyday life with the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish. The introduction of magic into realistic narrative, termed “magic realism,” is another mode of self-reflexivity (Waugh 9). Blending these two apparently dissimilar elements, self-reflexive narrative obliterates traditional dichotomies between serious and trivial, tragic and comic, and horrible and ludicrous. The past and the present, the superhuman, the animal and the human, the good and the evil, as well as the beautiful and the ugly—all mingle here happily with one another. By juxtaposing such dissimilar elements, self-reflexive narrative often achieves its goal of exploring the manifold, complex, and unsettled relationship between fiction and life. And it teaches the reader to accept the role of the imaginary and the unreal in life, and also to place it on par with the real. Magical intrusions thus problematize the nineteenth century narrative of objective realism, and rightly asserts the distinctive qualities of ancient literary traditions (Slemon 408). The mingling of magic and realism, and of ancient narrative forms and the Western novel, makes self-reflexive narrative a hybrid form that opposes the centralized novel of Eurocentric tradition.

Having resistance thus located within its form, self-reflexive narrative further subverts all sorts of totalizing narrative practices. Therefore, postcolonial writers are increasingly using this narrative form as a counter-discursive strategy. Finding Eurocentric narrative forms unitary and incapable of articulating postcolonial cultural diversity, postcolonial writers turn back to their pre-colonial narrative practices. Derived from ancient literary traditions, self-reflexive modes of storytelling best represent the

cultural hybridity out of which contemporary narratives from postcolonies must emerge. They are, therefore, gaining more and more creative attention and popularity. Patricia Waugh observes that over the last twenty years novelists have tended to become more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fiction. And in consequence, she says, their novels have tended to embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and 'formal uncertainty' (2). Contemporary self-reflexive narrative is quite conscious not only of its fictionality but also of the goal it has to achieve through fictionality, the role it has to play in, what Lyotard calls, waging a war against universality and totality, and in showing appreciation for diversity (82). The self-reflexive narrative of today is playing this two-fold role quite successfully. Reviving the ancient traditions of storytelling and orature, self-reflexive novelists, such as Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie are waging a war against centrality, creating entirely new spaces of meaning, and making exciting contributions to the counter-canon of new literatures. And therefore it is not surprising that great novels today are coming from regions like the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and Africa. They project the vision of "an exhausted centre" and "a vital margin" (Rushdie, *Defence* 48).

Rather than turning to their metropolitan centre, self-reflexive novelists now turn inwards to the textuality of their ancient traditions. They interrogate the idea of a homogenized reality because for them there is no single postcolonial reality but a variety of realities, histories, and identities. They, therefore, prefer the inclusive form of self-reflexivity to verbalize heterogeneous postcolonial experiences. These writers relativize the notion of the Standard English language for literary expression by using varieties of the language. For example, Raja Rao, an eminent Indian writer, pronounces that Indian

writers writing in English should make a conscious use of Indian English for it is the only befitting language to convey Indian sensibility to the world outside: "We cannot write like the English. We should not . . . The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression" (296). These remarks explain the language situation in India, where English is and is not a foreign language. It is a means of communication among various language groups within India. Though English is the language of India's former colonizers, it paradoxically is the language of national integration. It is also the language of communication among various postcolonial countries. Indians, like other postcolonial writers, use English to express their own sensibilities. In so doing, postcolonial and self-reflexive novelists subvert the totalizing notion of one standard literary English language that can embrace all human experiences. They further find the self-reflexive narrative device of framing or embedding suitable for their purpose because it helps them break the dominant, universalist canon of Europe and uphold the marginalized canons of various local cultures. The device of framing gives more flexibility to the self-reflexive form in order for it to be adaptable to diverse cultural experiences. The literary collage of self-reflexive narrative, in which each part is struggling to find a meaningful place, thus becomes an appropriate tool for expressing alternative meanings projected by marginalized cultures.

Another important self-reflexive convention, the narrator, is similarly developed from oral storytelling traditions. For instance, ancient Sanskrit theatre, which is a remarkable example of metatheatre, commonly employs the narrator device. This drama has a framed structure; it has a frame performance within which two characters, the narrator or the co-ordinator and the heroine, who also happens to be the narrator's wife,

are introduced. They perform another play, a play within a play, and, more importantly, they address their spectators directly and call their attention to the structure of the performance. This practice is similar to the practice in self-reflexive narrative that calls the reader's attention to textuality of the text. The narrator function is also found in the ancient school of storytelling, in which different narrators tell the same stories, mostly mythological, over and over again to entertain and educate their audiences. The ancient storyteller establishes a 'direct dialogue' with his/her listeners to take them into confidence. The storyteller and his/her audience get together under a tree or in a temple when the day's work is over to tell and to listen to stories. During the storytelling act, the storyteller often addresses his/her audience, and asks questions to seek the responses of children, women, elders, and young men and women at various points of the narration. This tradition is still alive in India³. The self-reflexive novel can be read as part of an effort to perpetuate the personal elements of oral storytelling, and as part of an effort to reject the impersonal narrative of realistic Eurocentric novels. In revitalizing the oral tradition, the self-reflexive novel shows respect to the business of storytelling and regenerates it to suit new goals in literary writing. Thus the postcolonial self-reflexive novel maintains much of the essence of ancient narrative practices, and resists the centralized Eurocentric tradition.

Employed chiefly as a counter-discursive gesture, this narrative aims at relativizing many colonialist assumptions in literature. By interrogating the idea of the absolute truth and knowledge, and of the universality and totality of the Eurocentric canon, and by displaying anti-hierarchical impulses and practices, self-reflexive narrative emphasizes cultural diversity and heterogeneity. Self-reflexive narrative thus adheres to

the traditional belief that telling stories is an effective way of overcoming hatred, and tells stories of different local and particular interest. It calls the reader's attention not only to its own narrative and linguistic structure, but also to its construction of postcolonial realities. Self-reflexive narrative thus is an oppositional narrative, which seeks "to project an alternative, liberating newness against the absorptive capacity of those established discourses" (Terdiman 3). And it tends to be "decentered, transnational, interlingual, cross-cultural" (Rushdie, *Defence* 50). Self-reflexive narrative emphasizes the need to deconstruct binaries altogether. Richard Terdiman poses a meaningful question in this regard, "Do we all the time need to think in terms of binaries and hierarchies?" (38). Looking at the centre/margin binary, one notices their interdependence, rather than their exclusiveness. Thus the binaries can be deconstructed by creating, new ambivalent, hybrid "third space" which makes room for cultural differences and diversity (Bhabha, *Cultural* 208). In order for this hybrid third space to exist, contemporary writers are developing new hybrid narrative modes such as magic realism from the elastic forms of ancient literary traditions that best suit contemporary cultural hybridity. I propose to examine this process in the following chapters.

For this project, I am looking at three novels from the Indian subcontinent: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*⁴, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Narayan belongs to the first generation of post-independence Indian writers in English, while the two others, Rushdie and Nasrin, are more contemporary. Narayan is an Indian writer, Nasrin, a Bangladeshi, while Rushdie, though originally an Indian, now holds a hyphenated nationality, Indo-British. All three write with the clear objective of resisting the subordinating assumptions underlying Eurocentric literature and of

vocalizing the identity of their subjected country and culture. These writers experiment, blend, and hybridize ancient Indian literary traditions with the English novel form to decolonize literary practices. The three texts chosen for the study are not only significant in the writers' oeuvres, but also in Indian and in international literatures written in English. *The Guide* is a well-known novel by Narayan that uses the ancient Indian storytelling technique, while *Lajja* is a controversial self-reflexive novel of recent years that employs a distinctive narrative structure. Rushdie's major works are explicitly metafictional in character, and they combine the ancient art of storytelling with contemporary theory of self-reflexivity, but I find *Midnight's Children* more significant for this study than his other novels because it is another variety of self-reflexive narrative, historiographic metafiction. All three novels are distinct yet representative self-reflexive texts that examine the relationship between narrative and postcolonial reality in the subcontinent. Studied together, they throw light on the development of self-reflexivity in the contemporary Indian novel.

Chapter II

A Precursor of Self-reflexivity R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

K. R. Srinivas Iyengar, a prominent Indian critic, registers a meaningful observation about the changing face of English literature in his book, *Indian Writing in English*:

In an article entitled 'England is Abroad', a writer in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 18 April 1958 pointed out that "the centre of gravity" of English literature has shifted, and "while we are busy 'consolidating', a brand new 'English' literature will be appearing in Johannesburg or Sydney or Vancouver or Madras." Later, on 9 May 1958, the same influential paper carried a full page article on the novels of R. K. Narayan, who happens to hail from Madras. (5-6)

An awareness that the centre of English literature has moved, and the publication of an article on R. K. Narayan's works in the *Times Literary Supplement* hardly a month after that is more than a mere coincidence. As Iyengar rightly observes, R. K. Narayan and his contemporaries played and continue to play a pivotal role in building up the counter-canon of postcolonial literatures. An early exponent of this developing canon, Narayan was engaged in experimentally blending "Western techniques and Eastern material" (Walsh 6). In his novels, Narayan mingles two different literary traditions, the English novel form and traditional Indian patterns of storytelling, both classical and oral. The fusion of these two distinct forms, written in his characteristic ironic style, not only made Narayan popular, but it also made the Indian literary tradition more accessible to a

Western readership. *The Guide* is a good example of this amalgamation, the amalgamation that has given rise to a third, hybrid form which, in contemporary terms, can be called the self-reflexive narrative form.

Much of the criticism on *The Guide* is centred on its theme, on its use of myth and its representation of Hindu mysticism. Only a few articles consider the narrative technique of this novel. Chitra Sankaran speaks about certain patterns of ancient Indian storytelling, specifically the *Katha* tradition, on which Narayan models his storytelling in *The Guide*. She also speaks about the representation of the philosophy of the *Bhakti* cult, and that of Hindu mythology in the novel. Sura Rath and Fakrul Alam deal, to some extent, with the two-level narration of *The Guide* and its double perspective and point of view. Britta Olinder discusses various aspects of Narayan's narrative technique, such as the point of view, the narrator, and the chronological development of the plot. But none of the above essays focus on the novel's self-reflexivity. However, in Michel Pousse's work on Narayan, there is a reference to metafictional elements. While reviewing the representation of Indian social reality in Narayan's novels, Pousse comments that "[i]n each of Narayan's novels there is a certain amount of metafiction. How much this metafiction is controlled by the author remains a controversy among critics" (67). But Pousse does not develop this issue. In my opinion, *The Guide*, in particular, undoubtedly displays self-reflexive tendencies and its narrative structure resembles the contemporary self-reflexive form. This distinctive feature of the novel needs a full-length consideration. In this chapter, I focus on the self-reflexivity of *The Guide* and consider it a precursor of contemporary self-reflexive narrative. I call it a precursor because, published in 1958, *The Guide* uses the self-reflexive form much before it was handled

widely by contemporary writers.

The Guide calls attention to its fictionality, to its status as a story, by using a framing device. There are two stories in the novel, a framing story and a framed story. Raju, the protagonist, tells the story of his life to a villager called Velan, who becomes the former's disciple. The framing story narrates Raju's present life; the framed story, his past. To tell these two different, yet related stories, Narayan employs two different narrational levels—third person narration and first person narration. Told in the third person, the framing story depicts Raju's life since his release from jail, his coming to the deserted temple near the village of Mangal, his getting involved in the affairs of Velan and other villagers, and their mistaking him as a spiritual guru and forcing a fast on him to end a drought. And told in the first person by Raju, the framed story narrates the events since Raju's childhood: his career as a tourist guide; his meeting with Rosie and Marco, her husband; his falling in love with her; his developing her career as a dancer; and his forgery and imprisonment. His release from prison serves as a thematic as well as narrative intersection between the two narrative frames. Thematically, it marks the birth of a new Raju; structurally, the birth of a new story.

The framed story is embedded, both thematically and structurally, within the outer frame through linguistic links. For example, the novel opens with the third person narration, with Raju's present activities told by the omniscient author: "Raju welcomed this intrusion—something to relieve the loneliness of the place" (3). Here Velan's intrusion on Raju's loneliness also symbolizes the intrusion of the first person narration on the third, breaking the monotony of the single level of narration. The omniscient author then introduces the second story told in the first person, in the form of Raju's

reflections on his past: "Otherwise," Raju reflected, "I should have grown up like a thousand other normal persons, without worries in life" (6). The use of the word 'reflected' creates a structural link that connects both the present and past, and the two stories. As Britta Olinder observes, "[o]ccasionally, the novel moves from one level to another without any transition. Most of the time, however, there is some thought, detail or association that links one section to the following one" (470-1). Such connections between the two narrational levels help embed one story in the other.

The two narrational levels and the two narratives alternate constantly. As a result, the story continuously moves back and forth in time. The novel begins two days after Raju's release from jail. He then recollects his past unsequentially; he first remembers Rosie, and then his childhood. Thus, at least in the first part, the novel deviates from linear chronology, restoring it only when the actual act of storytelling begins in Chapter 7. In moving back and forth in time, the novel challenges readers who expect a linear, sequential narration. The novel represents this challenge in Raju's words when he tries to make sense of Rosie's incomprehensible account of her breaking off with Marco:

I did not know how to pursue this inquiry. I had no method of eliciting information of all that had gone before. I fumbled and hummed and hawed in questioning, till I suddenly felt that I was getting nowhere at all. I wanted a chronological narration, but she seemed unable to provide it. She was swinging forward and backward and talking in scraps. I was getting it all in a knot. I felt exasperated. (128-9)

Readers who expect a straightforward account of Raju's life-story are similarly

exasperated by the novel's narration. It fumbles, annoys, and frustrates conventional expectations of a chronologically structured story.

This zigzag narration serves many other self-reflexive functions in *The Guide*. It foregrounds the nonlinearity of the novel's narration, which the novel derives from the tradition of storytelling in ancient India (To this point I shall return later in the chapter). It also subverts the authority of the omniscient author over the text. The third person narration establishes this authority of the omniscient author, while the first person narration undermines it by establishing that of the narrator. Sura P. Rath calls the use of first person narration as "Narayan's strategy of allowing Raju the autonomy of self-revelation at the risk of losing his own authorial control over the protagonist" (130). Toward the end, when Raju's narration is complete, the authorial voice re-establishes its authority over the text. The omniscient author clearly loses control but the narrator cannot gain it absolutely. Thus the struggle for pre-eminence over the text between the two narrative voices, represented by two narrational levels, challenges the authority of a god-like author in a highly self-reflexive way.

The Guide draws attention to its linguistic structure by its gameplaying and through its use of irony. Patricia Waugh uses the term 'language games' to describe such gameplaying. In language games, she suggests, the logic of everyday world is replaced by contradiction and discontinuity, which implies that reality and fiction are all merely games with words (136-7). *The Guide* similarly manipulates contradiction, discontinuity, irony, and parody to play the game of raising the reader's expectations and then frustrating them by making fun of them. One example of such parody occurs early in the novel when Velan patiently waits for Raju to wake. The omniscient narrator establishes

the pattern of a guru-disciple relationship between Raju and Velan: “The eight-o’ clock sun shone fully on his face. He opened his eyes and saw Velan standing respectfully away on a lower step” (14). This small incident not only establishes Raju as a spiritual guru, and Velan, as a disciple having an absolute faith in his guru, but also resembles a popular story from the *Mahabharata*¹. Before the beginning of the great Mahabharata war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Arjuna, a great warrior belonging to the Pandava clan and Lord Krishna’s best friend and finest disciple, goes to Krishna with a request for help. Duryordhana, the leader of the Kaurava clan arrives simultaneously with a similar request. Finding Krishna sleeping, Arjuna patiently and respectfully waits at Krishna’s feet, while Duryordhana sits at Krishna’s head agitatedly. On waking up, Krishna helps Duryodhana but greatly rewards Arjuna for his reverence. By alluding to this popular legend by way of association, the narrative builds a similar pattern of relationship between Raju and Velan, and readers familiar with the *Mahabharata* tradition look forward to witnessing a similar noble and divine exchange between this guru and disciple. But what happens challenges these expectations: “Raju sat up rubbing his eyes. He was as yet unprepared to take charge of the world’s affairs. His immediate need was privacy for his morning ablutions” (14). Raju thus turns out to be merely human, and not divine. The parody lies in Raju’s normal behaviour. By employing this parody, the novel challenges the expectations created by the allusion to the myth. The third person narration is full of such irony, parody, and gameplaying.

Apart from these language games, the third person narrative fulfils yet another important self-reflexive function in *The Guide*. It tells a story that leads to another story, to a story within a story. Soon after the novel begins, the omniscient author narrates

Raju's thoughts—"My troubles would not have started (Raju said in the course of narrating his life story to this man called Velan at a later stage) but for Rosie"—preparing the reader to listen to another story (7). However, the actual act of storytelling begins much later in the novel: "Raju asked Velan to go up with him to the river step. He took his seat on it, and Velan sat on a step below. Raju moved down to his side. "You have to listen to me . . . You must pay attention to what I say. I am not a saint, Velan, I'm just an ordinary human being like anyone else. Listen to my story" (98). This incident sets up an occasion for telling another story, for opening another narrative frame.

The storytelling in *The Guide* uses the framed narrative structure that can be traced to a narrative practice commonly found in the ancient Indian literary tradition; it mainly originates in Sanskrit literature. Arthur Mcdonell asserts that "[a] distinguishing feature of the Sanskrit collection of fairy stories and fables . . . is the insertion of a number of different stories within the framework of a single narrative. The characters of the main story, in turn, relate various tales to edify one another" (qtd. in Sankaran 129). The stories in *The Guide* similarly edify one another. Chitra Sankaran outlines Narayan's indebtedness to his roots showing its striking similarity to Somadeva's *Kath Sarith Sagara*². In the *Katha*, the omniscient narrative voice begins the narration. The frame story of the *Katha* introduces the story of Shiva and Parvati and their *vidhadhara* (a celestial being who assisted the Gods) Pushpadanta. The events in this story lead to the second narrative told by Pushpadanta. Pushpadanta's narrative is "biographical and retrospective" (Sankaran 130). In *The Guide*, Narayan follows the same pattern. The frame story introduces two characters, Raju and Velan and the events in this story lead to the second narrative of Raju's life. Raju is at once the narrator and the protagonist of the

second story, which is biographical and retrospective.

There are allusions to some other mythological stories in *The Guide*. It thematizes the protagonist's journey from the material abyss to spiritual heights. The story of Valmiki, the narrator of the *Ramayana*³, solemnizes this very theme. In his past life, Valmiki happens to be a highwayman, but circumstances force him to feel guilty. Therefore, to expiate his guilt, he gives up all his material attachments and spends year after year in deep meditation. Eventually, he rises to great spiritual heights and becomes a sage, a *maharshi*. In *The Guide*, Raju similarly rises from a morally fallen state to forced sainthood. Initially, Velan and other villagers subtly compel the fast on Raju, but he gradually realizes that there is no retreat from the fast once it has begun. The realization makes him learn for the first time "the thrill of full application, outside money and love" and "for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt suddenly so enthusiastic that it gave him a new strength to go through the ordeal" (212). By thus tracing the upward journey of Raju, Narayan places him in line of "trickster-sages" celebrated in the Indian literary tradition (Sankaran 133). According to N. Ranganath, Raju is an admirable version of the Indian myth of a sinner becoming a saint, such as Valmiki, Pundarika, Vermana, and Bilvamangala (84). Pundarika, Vermana, and Bilvamangala are mythological characters who similarly rise from a morally fallen state to great spiritual heights. The storytelling in *The Guide* adheres to many patterns of traditional Indian storytelling.

A very distinct feature of Indian storytelling is its nonlinearity. According to Richard Larnoy, "Indian art emphasizes a cyclic rather than a linear approach" (qtd. in Hardin 137). The cyclical way of storytelling involves a frame story, which unfolds

many framed stories. And only when the stories within are complete, does the narration return to the frame story, which then can progress toward its conclusion. Drawing heavily on this tradition, *The Guide* employs a nonlinear or cyclical narrative structure. Like its beginning, the completion of Raju's storytelling is also clearly marked in the text, "Raju's narration concluded with the crowing of the cock." (207). It ends with the daybreak at the beginning of Chapter 11, suggesting the beginning of a new dawn, a new chapter in Raju's life. To mark it more explicitly, the novel returns the reader to the third person narration and, with it, to the frame story. In structuring stories this way, the narrative thus celebrates nonlinear storytelling of ancient India.

The Indian storytelling tradition commonly employs the narrator, to effect defamiliarization. In *The Guide*, Raju is at once the narrator and the protagonist of the story, involved both in the action of the story and also in the act of storytelling. His double involvement in the story at once achieves the effect of familiarity and "defamiliarization" (Waugh 8). The notion of defamiliarization implies a sense of distance or detachment from the main action. Indian mythology celebrates the narrator's involvement and detachment from the story. Pushpadanta, the narrator of the *Katha Sarith Sagara* and Vyasa, the narrator of the *Mahabharata* are some of the notable examples of this tradition. Raju's looking back upon his past creates a sense of temporal distance. In addition, the act of telling the story of one's own life is one way of detaching oneself from it. Moreover, Raju tells this story from the perspective of a supposed saint who is expected to have renounced the world. Thus Raju, as a narrator, tells his story from a fairly detached perspective. The self-reflexive novel similarly celebrates this perspective to represent our defamiliarization with the world (Waugh 8). Thus,

defamiliarization in *The Guide* is at once consistent with self-reflexive narrative, and with the Hindu mythic tradition.

Narayan further draws on Indian storytelling practices by creating a character who also functions as the narrator in the novel. The narrator of the *Mahabharata* and that of *Katha Sarith Sagara* are some notable examples of this convention of the character acting also as the narrator. The narrator of *The Guide* is particularly modelled on the oral storytelling tradition, as Narayan suggests in an interview:

I have even introduced a story teller as the narrator of my stories—as a commentator to introduce some ideas and to give to some background . . . the village storyteller has as his public a really Indian audience with Indian qualities. They look for a lot of entertainment and some morals . . . They all know the story. Everybody knows every inch of that story. But still they'll enjoy it because the narrator changes the story and the emphasis; it is very creative.

(qtd. in Hardin 130)

It is worth examining Raju's storytelling skills in the light of the village storyteller's art, as Narayan describes it. As a successor of village storytellers of India, Raju not only tells the story of his life to Velan but also many other stories to various audiences. These are mainly the stories of mythological origin of the Buddha or Devaka. Raju frequently tells one story to the villagers:

If you show me a person without a problem, then I will show you the perfect world. Do you know what the great Buddha said?" The other edged nearer. "A woman once went wailing to the great Buddha, clasping her dead baby to her bosom. The Buddha said, "Go into every home in this city and find one where

death is unknown; if you find such a place, fetch me a handful of mustard from there, and then I'll teach you how to conquer death."

The man clicked his tongue in appreciation and asked, "And what happened to the dead baby, sir?"

"She had to bury it of course," Raju said. "So also," he concluded, without doubting in his mind the relevance of the comparison, "if you show me a single home without a problem, I shall show you the way to attain a universal solution to all problems." (12)

The story contains both some entertainment and some domestic wisdom that the villagers love to hear over and over again, each time told with a little variation. So each time, like an actor, Raju gives a new performance before the same audience. But he also gives the same performance to other audiences as well. He tells many stories to tourists, the stories mainly related to various places in Malgudi. In jail, he tells stories to other prisoners: "homicides or cutthroats or highwaymen, they all listened to me . . . I told them stories and philosophies and what not" (201-2). Raju's storytelling is so skilful and he so wins the minds and hearts of his audiences that wherever he goes, he becomes popular. The source of his storytelling is basically his mother, who, he says, "told me a story every evening while we waited for Father to close the shop and come home" (15). Raju continues to practice his inherited art, in the fashion of oral transmission in ancient Indian literature. And thus the narrator upholds the convention of the oral school.

The Guide also remains true to many other conventions of the oral storytelling practice. Oral storytelling is conversational, and sometimes the storyteller performs the role of a listener to get to know his audience better. The more he knows their likes,

dislikes, and problems, the more he becomes successful in giving an appealing performance to them. In this regard, Patricia Waugh observes that “as a conversationalist, a storyteller is dependent on the reader for identity and sympathy” (26). Raju here is a conversationalist storyteller, who also listens to the stories of his listeners, as his attendance upon Velan’s narrative reveals: “‘I have not told you my name, sir. I am Velan. My father in his lifetime married thrice. I am the first son of his first wife. The youngest daughter of his last wife is also with us . . .’ Raju decided to let the other have the satisfaction of saying things himself, and Velan ended his story with . . .”(12-3). Raju’s patient listening not only helps him understand Velan better but also creates a bond of sympathy between the two. Raju also listens to the stories of his mother, tourists, Rosie, Marco, and prisoners as well. Thus the telling of and listening to stories continues throughout the novel. The outer frame accommodates all these stories which eventually fill the narrative space of *The Guide*.

An important feature of oral storytelling practice is the greater freedom that it gives to listeners, seeking their active participation in the story. In the *Katha* or oral tradition, the dialogue between the storyteller and his audience is often very lively. The storyteller usually builds a conversation with his/her listeners by addressing them directly, and then invites them to comment on the story. And the audience, in turn, to a great extent, influences the course of the story. In such a performance the storyteller, using these stories as occasions, comments on contemporary social and political events. And the audience very much appreciates this part of the performance. In *The Guide*, Raju, the narrator, establishes a lively interaction with various audiences. His listeners appear in multiple guises. Velan basically embodies Raju’s audience. But railway

tourists, prisoners, and villagers and finally the general readers of the novel also form his audience, with whom he successfully communicates. Following the oral storytelling convention, he directly addresses his listener: “You may want to ask why I became a guide or when. I was a guide for the same reason as someone else is a signaller, porter, or guard . . . Don’t laugh at my railway associations” (7-8). The use of the second person address serves as a storytelling strategy to involve the listener in the story. For example, Raju at one point strikes a contract with his audience: “now the husband—he shall be referred to as Marco henceforth—said . . .” (64). This strategy, commonly practised by oral storytellers, takes the listener into confidence. And then on this confidence is built the entire act of narration. Raju similarly takes Velan into his confidence to construct his oral text. Storytelling becomes a self-conscious act here and calls attention to the novel’s fictionality. Clearly, the active participation of the reader that the self-reflexive narrative seeks owes a great deal to oral narrative practices.

The listener, in turn, enjoys this freedom, and actively participates in the construction of the story. As Umberto Eco posits, “[t]he reader as an active principal of interpretation is part of the picture of the generative process of the text” (4). Arguably, in oral storytelling, the listener influences the course of the narrative to an even greater extent. Velan and other audiences are by no means passive. On the contrary, they actually participate in the action of storytelling. Thus the roles of the storyteller and listeners overlap, and each group of listeners makes its presence felt. For instance, we are told that Velan is a patient, passive person “of the stuff disciples are made of” (15). When Raju completes his story, his disciple does not give any reaction:

Velan kept still--so still that Raju feared that he had fallen asleep.

Raju asked, "Now you have heard me fully?" . . .

"Yes Swami."

Raju was taken aback at still being addressed as "Swami."

"What do you think of it?"

Velan looked quite pained at having to answer such a question. "I don't know why you tell me all this Swami. It is very kind of you to address at such length your humble servant." (207-8)

But this seeming passivity of Velan is deceptive. And Raju seems well aware of this when he says, "He will not leave me alone . . . This man will finish me before I know where I am" (208). Though Velan seems passive, he has a power to 'finish' the narrator. By subtly forcing the action of fasting on Raju, Velan and other villagers influence the course of his story.

Similarly, other groups such as tourists and prisoners have significant roles to play in shaping the little narratives of which they are integral parts. Raju acknowledges the listeners' share when he says that his tourist stories "depended upon my mood at that hour and the type of person. If he was the academic type I was careful to avoid all mention of facts and figures and to confine myself to general descriptions . . . On the other hand, if an innocent man happened to be at hand, I let myself go freely" (49-50). So the type of listener determines the material of Raju's tourist narratives. In addition, Raju as a listener to his mother's stories dominates the act by going to sleep and thereby refusing to listen, "I never learned fully what he did or why, sleep overcoming me before my mother was through even the preamble" (17). At all such events, Narayan clearly shows an awareness of the power that the reader/audience has over the narrative.

More importantly, Narayan does not forget to give the reader of *The Guide* greater power to exercise over the text. Consider, for instance, the end of the novel:

Raju could not walk, but he insisted upon pulling himself along all the same. He panted with the effort. He went down the steps of the river, halting for breath on each step, and finally reached the basin of water. He stepped into it . . . It was difficult to hold Raju on his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about and said, "Velan, it is raining in the hills. I can feel it coming under my feet, up my legs--" He sagged down. (220)

The end is enigmatic. It does not answer obvious questions. Did it really rain? And if it did was it a consequence of Raju's fast or just a natural happening? Similarly, it does not say anything about what happened to Raju in the end. Did he sag down because he died or just because he lost consciousness due to fatigue and lack of energy? Or was it, as Balaram Gupta suggests disdainfully, "a pathetic hallucination of a starving imposter" (135)? In short, in keeping the end of the novel unclear, the narrator rules out the possibility of closure. The narrative invites readers, each in their own way, to negotiate the closure of the text. The reader certainly enjoys the role of a collaborator in the story. *The Guide* thus displays many self-reflexive tendencies much before their widespread use and challenges conventions of the realistic novel tradition of the nineteenth century.

The novel also challenges the notions of time, place, and identity in a self-reflexive way. It questions the linearity of time. The constant interchange between first and third levels of narration, as we have already seen, challenges the temporal order. Not only that but the temporal order is further challenged by the novel's skilful suspension of

time. In the secluded temple, among the villagers, Raju is cut off from everyday life:

“Raju lost count of the time that passed in these activities—one day being like another and always crowded. Several months (or perhaps years) had passed . . . He kept a rough count of time . . . of three cycles and then lost count. He realized that it was unnecessary to maintain a calendar” (78). There is no change in Raju’s activities and the time does not seem to progress. With this seeming lack of progression, the narrative thus suspends time and counters the traditional notion of temporality.

The narrative calls attention to its construction of place. In fact, the construction of place is an important feature of all Narayan’s novels. *The Guide*, like almost all his other novels, is set in a small town called Malgudi. Malgudi is a fictional construct and much more than neutral background, on which Narayan inscribes a complex cultural experience. And then this “empty” space becomes a place “through the process of textuality” (Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts* 174). Many details of everyday reality, such as places like the railway station, the platform, the shops, the market place, the hotel Anand-Bhavan, the Albert Mission School, the Mempi hills, the ancient caves, the banks of the river Sarayu; the people, both citizens, and the travellers; their lifestyles; and the patterns of their inter-relationships not only construct a cultural experience of a typical Indian small town, but also give Malgudi an identity. The very name Malgudi is fictitious and is found nowhere on the map of India. And yet it represents major geographical features of the country such as the hills, the forests, the plains, the sacred river, and more importantly, it is a macrocosm of Indian society. Malgudi represents the entire country. Therefore, it is nowhere and, at the same time, is everywhere in India. And it is at once

fictitious and realistic. This very aspect of Malgudi calls the reader's attention to its construction and its representation.

As for the construction of individual identity, *The Guide* similarly displays both realistic and reflexive tendencies. Conforming to the realistic novel tradition, it traces the development of Raju's character from a rogue hero to a person making great sacrifices for the community's sake. However, the narrative also upholds a self-reflexive concept that as individuals we occupy 'roles' rather than 'selves' (Waugh 3). The character of Raju stands out both as an individual 'self' and as a 'role-player'. His basic role is that of a narrator. But along with it, he also plays various 'guide' roles in the novel. His first significant role is that of a tourist guide, and his identity is "Railway Raju" (64). He soon becomes a tourist guide for Rosie and Marco. He leads Marco to an important stage in his research career, shapes Rosie's dancing career, and gains the identity of her lover and stage manager. Later in prison, Raju proves to be a model to fellow prisoners, and becomes their "*Vadhyar*--that is, Teacher" (202). After his release from jail, in an attempt to start afresh, he comes to the ruined temple where he enacts his last role in the story as a spiritual guide of the villagers. This last role has been thrust upon him, as he reveals when he says, "I have to play the part expected of me; there is no escape" (43). Each role leads Raju to a new one, and he plays all these roles quite successfully like "a talented actor" (Mathur 89). He thus strikes as a person who frequently changes roles. And along with every change of role, his identity keeps shifting throughout the novel.

In interrogating the notions of time, place, and identity *The Guide* remains true to the mythic tradition of India. In this regard, Nancy Hardin observes, "[i]n [Narayan's] opinion the classical tales have the ability to alter the reader/listener's conventional

expectations and attitude toward time, place and personality [read identity].” To support her observation she quotes Narayan: “one has to get used to a narrative going backwards and forwards and sideways and that the characters manage their affairs in their own way” (131). Hence, the interrogation of the notions of time, space, and identity in the novel is consistent with the Indian mythic tradition and with self-reflexivity.

The altered notions of time, space, and identity throw a new light on the relationship between reality and narrative. *The Guide* both represents everyday reality, and also seems to share the goal of self-conscious fiction to explore “the problematic relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 4). Further, the realistic novel of modernism aims at depicting the individual’s relations with his/her environment, often the struggle between the two. *The Guide* similarly tells a story of an individual, Raju, and it represents the surrounding society only in its relation to him. Raju’s society consists of two circles, an inner and an outer circle. The inner circle is that of his family and close friends. At its centre are his nagging but loving mother, his father, maternal uncle, and his business relation and best friend, Gaffur. They all love him but separate from him when he falls in love with Rosie, because for them it is not socially acceptable to love a married woman. It is equally unacceptable to love a woman belonging to a lower caste. Therefore, a conflict arises between Raju and his inner circle of society. Indeed, at one point, his inner circle includes only one person and that is Rosie. Following the realistic novel tradition, the novel thus portrays the opposition between an individual and the surrounding society.

There is also an outer circle of society around Raju. This consists of his tourists, visitors and acquaintances when he becomes Rosie’s stage manager, prisoners and

villagers. His tourists love him. They tell each other, "If you are lucky enough to be guided by Raju . . . He will not only show you all worth-while places, but help you in every way" (6). Then there are those "three or four grade visitors" who visit him when Rosie becomes a star. He treats some of them "with the scantiest attention," while considers some others, such as judges, eminent politicians, big textile-mill owners, bankers, municipal councillors, and "the editor of *The Truth*," in short, socially important people—as "higher grade" visitors (166-7). Wherever he goes, including even the prison, he attracts a large circle of people around him. Finally, there is a circle of the illiterate and naïve villagers who mistake Raju for a holy man, their saviour. The circle of his devotees grows so big in the end as to include people from all corners of the country and an American filmmaker. Raju primarily communicates with all these outer social circles through his storytelling. He is quite popular with them and there is no opposition between him and these outer circles of society. Thus, *The Guide* certainly represents society but only in relation to Raju, only as his environment, and in so doing, it adheres to the representation of reality in the Eurocentric novel.

However, the novel also ingeniously interrogates the traditional notions of reality. According to the nineteenth century view, reality is given, ordered, unchanging, and static. While considering the modernist notion of reality, Georg Lukacs observes: "The only 'development' in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition. Man is now what he has always been and always will be. The narrator, the examining subject, is in motion: the examined reality is static" (21). Thus, according to these views, reality is static and the only changing factor is human being. A challenge to this view, the self-reflexive novel subjectively constructs changing reality, and suggests that

“it is impossible to describe an objective world because the observer always changes the observed” (Waugh 3). *The Guide* shows respect for the observer’s ability to change the representation of reality. This becomes evident when Raju tells his readers,

My old life, in which I was not in the least interested, was dogging my steps; my mother facing me with numerous problems: municipal tax, the kitchen tiles needing attention, the shop, accounts, letters from the village, my health, and so on and so forth; to me she was a figure out of a dream, mumbling vague sounds . . . I was in no mood for anything. My mind was on other matters. Even my finances were unreal to me . . . The only reality in my life and consciousness was Rosie. (103)

Drab everyday life, even practical things like his finances become unreal for Raju. The nagging figure of his mother appears to have emerged from a dream because Raju is no longer interested in this supposed reality; on the contrary, the illusory presence of Rosie turns out to be the only reality in his life and consciousness. The juxtaposition of the real and the unreal occurs because of Raju’s changed view of life, because the observer’s viewpoint is changed. Raju is in no mood for all those realities of life. He is only in a mood to live with what is ordinarily associated with the dream. The distinction between dream and reality thus blurs. In this regard, Nancy Hardin observes that “[t]he starting point for each of Narayan’s novels is always reality—people observed, situations recalled. Yet . . . time becomes important in order to gain a proper perspective for reassessing what initially appeared to be real” (134). Therefore, I would argue that although *The Guide* is consistent with the realistic novel of the eighteenth and the

nineteenth century, it represents the self-reflexive view that reality is not static but uncertain and is in a constant state of flux; moreover, it is subjectively constructed.

The Guide further punctures objective realism by myths and legends of India, constructing its own variety of realism or “mythic realism”, as Afzul Khan Fauzia terms it (28). Narayan himself has a clear stand on his use of mythic realism: “With the impact of modern literature we began to look at our gods, demons, sages, and kings, not as some remote concoctions but as types and symbols, possessing psychological validity even when seen against the contemporary background” (qtd. in Hardin 128). According to Narayan, myths placed in a contemporary setting, help explain, understand, and also construct reality better. This view exemplifies Roland Barthes’ theorization that myth is a form of communication, a ‘language’, a system of second-order meaning (Culler 36). This second order is by no means secondary for Narayan who sees myth as a form and a language in which to vocalize Indian cultural identity, serving a major postcolonial goal.

I would like to conclude this chapter by considering one final question: What does Narayan achieve by using the self-reflexive narrative form? A major concern of self-reflexive writing is to counter dominant, Eurocentric narrative practices by manipulating this narrative mode of the margins. By using the old storytelling narrative form in *The Guide*, Narayan certainly offers an alternative to the totalizing Eurocentric novel. But as Walsh points out, Narayan combines the two forms (Walsh 86). In *The Guide*, he remains influenced by the eighteenth and nineteenth century realistic novel. He does not problematize the colonialist assumptions in *The Guide* as strongly as other postcolonial writers—for instance, Raja Rao in India and Chinua Achebe in Nigeria. There is only one occasion where Narayan exposes the colonialist mind-set. There is a description of

an American who comes to observe the event of Raju's fast: "The busiest man here was an American . . . He arrived . . . on the tenth day of the fast and set himself to work immediately . . . "I'm James J. Malone. I'm from California. My business is production of films and TV shows. I have come to shoot this subject, take it back to our country, and show it to our people there" (215-6). Malone does not see Raju's fast as an act of sacrifice being carried out for the community's sake but only as a peculiar religious practice, taking place in a 'third world country'. He is completely indifferent to the human element involved in it. It is only a sensational subject for him to shoot and take to his country for his people to enjoy. Here, by way of irony, Narayan articulates bitterness towards the neocolonialist position. However, apart from this incident there is no overt problematization of colonialist attitude in the novel.

Indeed, *The Guide* seems to play on the stereotypical images of India propagated by the colonizers. There are references to stereotypical images of India, such as maharajas (6), snakes, a cobra charmer (52), elephants, tigers, reptiles (71), ancient caves (66), the caste of dancing women (73), superstitions (80-2), famine (84), endemic diseases like cholera (82). And there is also "a general sense that Indian people too readily escape from reality by creating false gods" (Sankaran 135). These images foster the stereotypical image of India instead of challenging it. P. S. Sundaram, also shares this view when he says that *The Guide* contains "the usual "properties" the Westerner associates with India—caves, cobras, dancing girls, swamis—are all present . . . to make a special appeal to a European or American" (90). Such stereotypical images were employed, Homi Bhabha posits, as "a major discursive strategy," fundamental "in the ideological construction of otherness." Bhabha further argues, that these images are "a

form of knowledge and identification,” which is always “‘in place’, already known.” On the part of the colonizers, these images are “something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.” Bhabha calls these stereotypes, “a process of ambivalence,” and argues that the construction of stereotypes was central to colonial discourse (*Other Question*, 18). The challenging of stereotypical images is a major concern for postcolonial writers because these images help construct the subjectivity of the colonized in the discourse of the colonizers.

A postcolonial text is expected to problematize these stereotypes. But *The Guide* reaffirms them, giving a boost to the colonialist representation of India. It thereby loses much of the textual resistance that it builds with its self-reflexive form. However, *The Guide* at the same time is a significant novel because it is one of the first few attempts in India’s postcolonial counter-canon at asserting the cultural identity of India. It is a hybrid narrative that uses both the English novel form and traditional Indian forms of storytelling. I would thus describe it as a precursor of self-reflexive narrative, the mode which is consciously developed further by Nasrin, and more particularly by Rushdie.

Chapter III

The Imitation of Non-literary Discourse An Analysis of Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi writer and poet, and also the only woman writer that I am dealing with, belongs to the second generation of Indian writers in English. Continuing the tradition of Narayan and other first generation writers, Nasrin writes with a view to asserting the cultural identity of the Indian subcontinent. Her controversial novel *Lajja* (1993), is translated into English, while the two other novels are written in English. It, therefore, has limitations that any translation might have. Strikingly, Nasrin uses a self-reflexive form for *Lajja*, similar to that Narayan uses for *The Guide*. However, the nature of self-reflexivity in *Lajja* is quite different from that in *The Guide*. It does not employ the embedded storytelling form of the ancient Indian literary tradition as *The Guide* does, nor does it use any “self-referential voice which systematically establishes” a focus for the novel (Waugh 25). Yet *Lajja* can definitely be called a self-reflexive narrative because it calls attention to its textuality.

The novel is known for its anti-religious, anti-dogmatic theme, and also as the cause for the issuance of a *fatwa* against Nasrin by the fundamentalist organizations for the views and sentiments it expresses. Very little has been written about *Lajja*, and the few articles written so far mainly speak about its feminist concerns. C. N. Srinath analyzes the portrayal of women in the novel and finds the use of newspaper reports in it “repetitive and monotonous” (53). While Bhanupriya Ghosh mentions that when Nasrin uses newspaper clippings in her fiction, she “breaks the rules of narrative realism” (151).

These articles thematically analyze the novel and do not give a serious consideration to Nasrin's distinctive narrative technique, as this chapter aims to do. K. T. Sunitha, in her analysis, makes one comment that "Taslima has made a thorough study of the disturbances recorded in leading national and international papers, journals and documents but the real question is how well has she integrated it into the canvas of her novel Is it merely docu-fiction . . . [sic]" (128). Sunitha herself thinks that the novel "is not well-woven," though she fails to justify this conclusion in any meaningful way (129). I intend to take up precisely this point in this chapter and to argue that Nasrin's use of newspaper clippings in *Lajja* is part of her narrative strategy, which fulfils a greater self-reflexive function. These clippings successfully call attention to the novel's fictionality as part of Nasrin's discursive strategy of resistance against the dominant culture.

A fairly recent novel, *Lajja* deals with the issues of peripheral interest, of 'local' rather than of 'universal' concern. The novel basically tells the story of, to use Nasrin's words, "religious extremism and man's inhumanity to man" (ix). She says that it thematizes "the persecution of Hindus, a religious minority in Bangladesh, by the Muslims who are in the majority" (ix). The particular occasion for writing the novel is to protest against the "frantic waves of religious hysteria" that broke out in Bangladesh soon after a mob of Hindu fundamentalists demolished the Babri Masjid, a four hundred and fifty year old mosque at Ayodhya, India, on 6 December 1992 (3). Nasrin finds this hunting of Hindus in Bangladesh a matter of *lajja* or shame, a disgrace "not only to those who commit the crime but also to those who love the beautiful country of Bangladesh" (ix). She is determined to battle against the "malignant influences of religious persecution, genocide and communalism," and she considers it her duty "to defend

human rights” (x). To this end, Nasrin writes *Lajja* and employs a very distinctive kind of self-reflexive technique of mixing fiction and nonfiction in a narrative. My particular aim in this chapter is to examine Nasrin’s use of the self-reflexive form, and to determine how far this form has been successful in articulating her postcolonial agenda of resistance to the totalizing system, and in representing otherness.

Lajja is a story of a Bangladeshi Hindu, Sudhamoy Dutta and his family: Kironmoyee, his wife; Suranjan, their son; and Maya, their daughter. But also through him, a story of his community, the Hindus in Bangladesh, who are terrorized by the ruling Muslims and fundamentalists. *Lajja* is thus an oppositional narrative that pleads the case of the marginalized other within Bangladesh. It also identifies the method of colonial dabbling in the domestic affairs of India. For this reconfiguration of the history of the subcontinent, Nasrin uses a narrative form that serves as an alternative to the totalizing practices of colonialist narrative.

As a self-reflexive narrative, *Lajja* systematically draws the reader’s attention to its narrative structure. Nasrin uses a very distinctive narrative structure here. She herself does not call this novel a story or fiction. Instead, she suggests that, “*Lajja* is a document of our collective defeat” (ix). For her it is a document rather than a story, and also a document that emphasizes collectivity rather than individuality. The distinctness of *Lajja*’s self-reflexivity, I would argue, lies in its use of documentary discourse, what Patricia Waugh calls, “the imitation of non-literary discourses” (25). The entire narrative is structured around the bulleted¹ lists reporting terrorist activities inflicted upon the Hindus in Bangladesh, presented in the form of newspaper cuttings. Nasrin notes these documentary intrusions in her preface: “I have also included in the text numerous

incidents, actual historical events, my sources of information include *Ekota*, *Azker Kagoz*, *Bhorer Kagaz*, *Glani* (The Disgrace), 'Communal Persecution in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents,' and 'Parishad Barta'" (x). The novel includes clippings from these newspapers and periodicals. In addition, it also includes other reports from other newspapers, excerpts from the Constitution, and those from a census report followed by discussions on them. In all, there are six bulleted lists (as in the Penguin edition of the novel) of varying length, inserted in the novel: a newspaper report, a statistical report on the minority, an excerpt from the Census Report, six excerpts from the Constitution of Bangladesh, and a Chronology of Events. Considerable in number, all these documents are offset from the story of the Duttas through formatting: by using bullets and by shrinking font size. The following is a part of a bulleted list which is introduced in the text as Suranjan's review, in his mind, of the events of that month:

- A mob had set fire to the Dhakeshwari temple. The police had not made the slightest attempt to stop them. The main temple where prayers were offered was burnt to ashes and the dance hall of the temple had been damaged as well.
- The image of the goddess Kali in Rai Bazaar was damaged beyond recognition.
- At the very entrance of Shankhari Bazaar a number of Hindu shops were looted and burnt. Sheila Bitaan, Surma Traders, saloons, tyre shops, laundries, Mita Marble, Saha Cabinet, restaurants...nothing Hindu was spared. As a matter of fact, from the entrance of the Shankhari Bazaar there were ruins as far as the eye could see. (4-5)

This formatting at once calls the reader's attention to the narrative structure of the novel. Readers who are not prepared for this kind of unexpected insertion of factual information in fiction are likely to get frustrated by them. Yet these lists successfully call readers' attention both to their content and to the textuality of the narrative.

Written in a matter-of-fact and journalistic style, lists, like the one above, repeatedly report the events of terrorization of the Hindu community: of the burning,

razing, and demolishing of Hindu temples, of the damaging and disfiguring of the images of Hindu gods, of the looting and destroying of Hindu properties, of the raping and abducting of Hindu women, and also of the forced conversion of Hindu men to Islam. This sense of destruction is constructed in the language. Consider also the choice of verbs—"set fire," "burnt," "damaged," "looted," and the phrase "ruins as far as the eye could see"—that reinforce the same tale of atrocities. This remarkable feature of the narrative serves many functions: it confers a sense of authenticity one usually associates with documentary writing on the whole saga of destruction; it underscores the fact that cruelty, oppression, and terrorism have become a feature of common, everyday life in Bangladesh; and more importantly, it resists readerly inclinations to treat the incidents portrayed in the narrative as fictitious.

By thus placing nonfiction contiguously with fiction, the narrator of the novel calls attention to the fictionality of fiction. Her mixing of fictional and nonfictional genres makes the reader aware that this fiction is constructed merely to illustrate the message of nonfiction. The interplay of fiction and nonfiction teaches the reader to negotiate between fact and fiction in reading. For instance, a "Chronology of Events" placed before the beginning of the narrative records nine significant events in the history of Bangladesh. The chronology begins with India's partition in 1947, with the history of the division of the land, and also with that of the two principal religious communities in the subcontinent. The first four events in the chronology are movements of struggle that Bangladesh goes through for asserting its linguistic, cultural, and national identity. They mark the rise of nationalism in Bangladesh, the height of which is reached at the time of the country's independence from Pakistan (event 5). And then comes the rapid decline of

nationalism, reaching its climax in the religious fanaticism of 1992. Issues of nationalism aside for the moment, I would suggest that the Chronology foregrounds the rapid journey of Bangladesh from secularism to Islamocentrism as depicted in the novel. The chronology represents the troubled voice of a sensible citizen, though written in a matter-of-fact manner. For example, in event 4, there is a statement about Pakistan's "dictatorial regime" or, in event 9, about the minority being "severely persecuted" (xi). Here, the adjective "dictatorial" suggests the narrator's resistant approach toward the Pakistani regime, while the description "severely persecuted" suggests her sympathy and concern for the oppressed. The objective and matter-of-fact chronology is thus "subjectively constructed" in the novel (Waugh 26). At such points facts cease to be mere facts and integrate with fiction. The chronology represents, to appropriate Sara Suleri's words, "the troubled chronology of nationalism in the Indian subcontinent" (3).

The use of other factual documents in *Lajja* similarly reinforces the narrative strategy of crossing fictional and nonfictional genres. The novel contains excerpts from the Constitution and the census report, followed by discussions on them. For example, it records that the Constitution guarantees that

27. All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

28. (1) The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" (125).

Here the excerpt outlines the promise of "equality of rights"—irrespective of religion, race, caste, and sex—given in the Constitution, but the surrounding fictional discussion out of which this information emerges indicates that this promise is only a façade and

points to the rift between the liberal policy and its implementation. For instance, the discussion following this excerpt shows how, according to “Enemy Property Act and Evacuee Property Act,” the properties of the person who is now a resident of India come “under the jurisdiction of the government” of Bangladesh, and also how this law protects “the properties of those Muslims . . . staying either in India or abroad,” not considering their properties Enemy Property at all (127-30). These laws are “clear violations of the Constitution, and . . . also [of] the fundamental, human and democratic rights of its citizens [that] devastated almost twenty million Hindus. They were practically uprooted from their homes” (124). Fiction here resembles nonfiction. Such discussions shift between fiction and nonfiction, and destabilize the truth claims made by the rulers about equal rights to all the citizens irrespective of their religious backgrounds.

In addition, the novel also discusses part of the Census Report: “In 1901, 33.1 per cent of the population of East Bengal was Hindu. In 1911, this figure went down to 31.5 per cent . . . By 1981, Hindus constituted 12.1 per cent of the country” (10-1). The figures from the census report indicate a considerable decrease in the Hindu population and contradict the Muslim claim that equal rights have been granted to all. On the basis of statistical evidence provided in the documents above, the novelist proves her hypothesis about how the persecution of the Hindus in Bangladesh resulted in their migration to India. Both the story and the documentary evidence are employed to serve the same function in the novel.

Lajja blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, mingles literary and non-literary/documentary/reportorial styles, and deconstructs the binaries of literary/journalistic and creative/informative. The poles of these oppositions compete

with each other for predominance but finally merge in the narrative. The informative supplements the creative and the creative illustrates the informative. Both reaffirm each other while contributing to the argument of the narrative. Clearly, there is a parallel between fiction and nonfiction and also between the author and the narrator. The roles of the real author and the implied author overlap in the novel. The real author, Taslima Nasrin, appears in the preface, which foregrounds the anti-totalitarian agenda of her novel. The preface strongly articulates Nasrin's political affiliation, pronounces her determination to fight for the oppressed, and also justifies her use of documents in fiction. However, during the actual act of narrative transmission, the implied author or the omniscient narrator takes over (O' Neill 71). The invisible narrator or the implied author of *Lajja* fills in the author position. Thus both the real and the implied author/narrator merge into one and create an "assimilated voice" (Waugh 16). And rather than a conflict of voices, the novel emphasizes the plurality of voices. This deconstruction of binary oppositions and merging them into one makes *Lajja* a truly hybrid narrative.

The hybridity of the novel also lies in its treatment of reality. It both represents everyday reality and subjectively constructs it. *Lajja* is a realistic novel that represents the historical, social, and political reality of the subcontinent. However, the representation of reality in the novel is not consistent with the tropes of traditional realism. It is different in several ways. Firstly, *Lajja* is not a story of an individual but the story of a family that represents collectivity, and the story of this family almost lacks individual colour. It is a story of every Hindu family in Bangladesh, and also that of all oppressed communities. Secondly, there is no struggle between this individual family unit and surrounding society, as the traditional realistic novel normally delineates

(Lukacs 28). *Lajja* is a story of silent suffering with no retaliation. More importantly, it does not represent reality as an organic whole, as the traditional realistic novel often does, but as a series of fragments and “impermanent structures” basically because it depicts a period of great political turmoil in the history of the subcontinent. The social, political unrest is reflected in the novel in multiple fragments of reality. The political situation in Bangladesh as well as in the subcontinent changes rapidly, and so does its representation in *Lajja*. For instance, one fragment is that of the former reality of Mymensingh, a small, quiet, beautiful town, full of communal harmony. In another fragment, this harmony changes into hatred and friends into foes. The Muslim neighbours of the Duttas start harassing them. Young men in the neighbourhood invade their orchards, pluck their fruit, trample their vegetable garden and flowers, stone their house, make false documents in order to seize their property, and finally kidnap Maya. At last, Sudhamoy is compelled to sell his ancestral house and property, and to move to Dhaka with his family.

Life in Dhaka presents another fragment of reality. Sudhamoy’s medical practice suffers a major setback and he has to apply for a government job only to suffer discrimination. One fragment presents the reality of religious equality before winning independence from Pakistan, when Hindus and Muslims fight together for the cause of their language and culture. Another fragment presents the country’s change from a secular state to a Muslim state. The final fragment of reality is that of religious extremism, violence, cruelty, and dehumanization after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. During these riots, a group of frenzied, savage young men enter Sudhamoy’s house and start “breaking up everything in the room.” They shatter everything in the house “tables, chairs, the television set, bookshelves . . . [a]nd at last they carry away

Maya with them” (147). Maya’s first kidnapping compels Sudhamoy to leave Mymensingh, his hometown, and now, by a strange coincidence, her second abduction compels him to leave Bangladesh, his motherland. All these fragments of reality are pieced together to construct the narrative, and they represent reality as a series of impermanent structures. All these fragments rapidly change and give a sense of instability to the representation of reality. Thus though the novel continues the tradition of high realism of the nineteenth century, the fragmentary nature of its representation is more consistent with the self-reflexive novel.

The fragmentary nature of the narrative is accentuated by the novel’s deviation from linear chronology. It begins on 7 December 1992, a day after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and apparently covers the events of the next thirteen days, continuously moving back and forth in time, and narrating many incidents in the history of the nation, particularly since India’s independence and partition in 1947. There is a lack of chronological order and also a lack of closure. It ends with Sudhamoy’s decision to migrate to India with an awareness that the move will not be the end of their problems, in fact the end of the novel suggests the endlessness of their problems. Thus *Lajja* does not leave readers with the choice of endings as *The Guide* does, but with “a sign of the impossibility of endings” (Waugh 29). The novel does not provide any comfort, but attempts to represent the instability of contemporary reality and the consequent unrest.

Multiple fragments of reality in *Lajja* epitomize this unrest, uncertainty, insecurity, and instability of contemporary political reality in Bangladesh. These fragments conflict with each other in the narrative denoting a sense of chaos and instability. Writing that represents a “sense of chaos” and “conditions of rapid social

change,” and “chaotic, frenetic and colliding surfaces of contemporary technological society” is called “aleatory writing” (Waugh 12). Though *Lajja* cannot be called aleatory in the strict sense of the term, it represents a similar chaotic reality of communal collision in Bangladesh during a period of great turmoil. The novel represents the chaotic reality of social and political life, of economic and professional situations, and also of human relationships and values. The Hindus have no significant role to play in the country’s economic, administrative, military, or socio-cultural advancement, and they become “second class citizens” (135). They do not have the security of employment, of property, and, more importantly, of life, and ultimately they realize that “their future in Bangladesh [is] . . . uncertain” (18). Even small Hindu children, Maya, for example, “had known from the time she was very young that the national religion was Islam and that she and her family belonged to the Hindu minority which often had to make compromises with the system” (13). None of the Duttas have a stable career, and, as a result, they have to live in chaotic and miserable conditions.

More miserable and unstable are their relationships. For the Duttas, friendship is more important than kinship. They have always been closer “in thought and in sentiment” to Muslim than to Hindu friends (25). But during the present riots their Muslim friends start turning a cold shoulder to them, and then the reality of their situation dawns on them: “You know . . . [t]hose whom we think of as non-communal deep down, or as our own people, and as our friends, are highly communal deep down” (107). In addition, Suranjan is in love with a Muslim girl, Parveen, and Maya loves a Muslim man, Jahangir. Unfortunately, these love relationships also suffer due to the chaotic state of religious affairs forcing them to realize that “this sort of inter-religious marriage in

Bangladesh [is] near impossible” (14). The altered pattern of relationships destabilizes their earlier beliefs in the friendship that crosses religious boundaries.

The altered values and ideals of society have the most chaotic and destabilizing effect upon the sensible minds in the country. Upheld as steadfast, something to live by and also to die for, the values of equality, honesty, justice, and tolerance begin to shake. This sense of instability is most aptly symbolized by the chaotic condition of the Dutta household. Maya’s abduction, Sudhamoy’s paralytic condition, Suranjan’s hysterical behaviour, and Kironmoyee’s lifelessness serve as images of chaos and instability. The Suranjan who wants to destroy mosques, mandirs and other places of worship, and who wants to build on those places new places to worship such as universities and libraries, still wants to destroy at least a few mosques, but this time for vengeful reasons: “Didn’t they go and piss on the ruins of a mandir in old Dhaka? I also want to piss on their mosques!” (164). But Sudhamoy’s reaction is scarier than Suranjan’s. He finally decides to ‘migrate’ to India, knowing that life is not secure in Calcutta either. *Lajja* thus represents their journey from instability to more instability, a fate they share with other Hindus. The exodus to India becomes a quest for security and stability of the oppressed communities. In *Lajja* the representation of migration has a negative connotation because traditionally the Hindus believe that the person who lives on his/her own soil is the happiest (190-91). Thus leaving one’s own land is a misery. In addition, migration is non-affirmative because it arises out of panic, because they “flee like rats!” (12). And even in India, the supposed land of the Hindus, these migrants know they are going to live a life of refugees. Their future is dangling for they are beaten from both ends, and they feel that their very “being [is] uprooted” (18). This uprootedness is thus ontological,

and it destabilizes the entire community. Further, chaos and destabilization is represented through powerful images in the narrative such as the demolition of the Hindu temples, empty streets of Dhaka, the destruction of the Dutta household, their crippled conditions, Suranjan's brutal rape of a Muslim prostitute, the decision of the Duttas to migrate to India, and the metaphor of the crumbling mountain, to name just a few. All these images mark the completion of chaos and destabilization of life and being in the narrative. But these images also represent chaos and destabilization in contemporary times in Bangladesh, in the Indian subcontinent, and in the world, which aleatory writing aims at representing. By its representation of chaos, *Lajja*, as a self-reflexive narrative, destabilizes the notion of stable and unchanging reality, celebrated in the realistic novel of eighteenth and nineteenth century traditions. The rest of the chapter deals with the novel's self-reflexive treatment of Eurocentric discourse.

More importantly, *Lajja* has set out to destabilize all kinds of power hierarchies and thus it is a gesture of resistance to the totalizing power of local ruling culture, and to that of the colonizers and their discourse. This complex nature of resistance makes it a truly oppositional narrative that seeks disempowerment of the dominant. The dominant oppresses its other to perpetuate its own power. *Lajja* subverts this domination by using discursive power for its oppositional agenda, for an oppositional narrative or critic has to speak for the silenced. In this regard, Frank Lentricchia posits that "[r]uling culture does not define the whole of culture, though it tries to and it is the task of the oppositional critic to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalized voices of the ruled, exploited, oppressed and excluded" (15). *Lajja* not only vocalizes but also

amplifies the voices of the silent and employs the narrative as a strategy for the representation of marginality.

Lajja illustrates how the colonizer-colonized binary is replicated in the form of the ruling-ruled binary in Bangladesh, and how the ruling self systematically and absolutely marginalizes the other. For instance, when under the domination of Pakistan, the language, culture, and very identity of Bangladesh are subordinated. Hindus and Muslims fight together for their national culture and political self-rule. However, after independence, yet another 'self/other' binary takes shape: the Muslims develop into the dominant 'self' of Bangladesh; the Hindus, its 'other.' The narrative represents the process of re-formation of this binary in the changed context. Already existing antagonism between these two religious communities further increases during the riots that follow the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Suranjan's Muslim friend Belal, who used to share similar views with Suranjan on nationality and the place of religion in national life, now contradicts his own earlier thought, when he says,

"Meanwhile in India, they are continuously killing us."

"What do you mean 'us'?" Birupaksha asked.

"Muslims" (171)

Here "they" are all Hindus and they are differentiated from the Muslim "us", as Belal clarifies. This is how the self/other binary forms in the nation. This ruling self's effort to oppress the other is supported by all the sections of dominant society. The wave of Islamization in the country is a big move in the subordination of every 'other' religious group, and since then, the "management of the country's affairs" is "gradually taken over by fundamentalist elements" (123). The government of Bangladesh, the apex of the

society, with the help of “cleverly planned and renamed” acts, succeeds “in turning out innumerable Hindus from their ancestral homesteads” (124, 129). All minorities including Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians are excluded. They cannot enter the business without having a Muslim partner, and while sending students abroad for higher studies “Hindus are selectively avoided” (137). Not only are they excluded from top-ranking positions, but they are also dominated ideologically and morally, being forced to change schools into “Madrasas” (182); to recite the Quran in schools and colleges, on TV, in public places as “*the* holy text” (138); to tolerate the Islamizing the names of schools, roads, public buildings (173); and to accept the allocation of a large portion of the country’s budget to “Islamic activities” (185), rather than to the maintenance of “temples, churches, pagodas” (138). On all such occasions the text highlights the exclusion and eradication of minorities from the mainstream.

The narrative further shows how other segments of Muslim society have their share in silencing the other. It reveals the hypocrisy of middle class Muslim intellectuals such as Kamal, Belal, and Haider, who make a great show friendship toward Hindus, but actually support fundamentalist activities. The intellectuals encourage terrorism by not protesting against it and by denying Muslim responsibility for it. Another group of the ruling community is that of fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are mainly illiterate and brutish boys in the neighbourhood, manipulated by politicians. Their terrorist activities complete the physical and moral subjugation of the minority. The novel is so closely focussed on the issue of the oppression of Hindus that even love relationships, such as those between Suranjan and Parveen, and Maya and Jahangir seem to be situated only for illustrating the impossibility of the marriage between the powerful and the powerless.

Parveen wants Suranjan to convert to Islam so that they might marry, while Jahangir ultimately abandons Maya, marries a rich Muslim girl, and goes to the U. S. *Lajja* thus strategically reveals multiple power-hierarchies that exist beneath one, and illustrates that the specificities of the self/other binary might change, but the pattern of domination and subordination continues to run on the same lines.

Lajja identifies the origin of this pervasive opposition between the Hindus and the Muslims in the British imperial policy of 'divide and rule'.¹ Primarily designed to sustain the British rule in India, this policy is outlined in the novel in clear and direct terms. While analyzing the causes of the present state of affairs, Sudhamoy reflects on the fact that "[t]he British had understood all too well, that if they wanted to perpetuate their presence in the subcontinent, it would be necessary to further enflame the existing feeling of ill-will between Hindus and Muslims. It was from this shrewd perception that the policy of divide and rule was born" (180). To perpetuate their in the subcontinent, the British made a very strategic use of existing ill-will between Hindus and Muslims, and set one group against the other. Sudhamoy rightly conjectures that all political and social unrest in the region has resulted from this very policy, and that the partition of India on the basis of religion is its sad offspring. To support his reflections, the narrator of *Lajja* strategically quotes (according to the Penguin edition of *Lajja*) the designer of this policy, Lord Mountbatten. She says, "When Mountbatten was planning the divisions of Punjab and Bengal, he had himself said, 'A man is Punjabi or Bengali before he is Hindu or Muslim. They share a common history, language, culture and economy. You will cause endless bloodshed and trouble.'" (8). The author apparently confirms Mountbatten's humanitarian concern for Indians and his familiarity and authority on local issues, but

actually ironically points to the pretentiousness of the last official representative of the British empire in the country, who on the one hand plans the division of India, and on the other hypocritically warns her people of impending bloodshed and trouble on that account. She seems to suggest that Mountbatten's warning is part of a "Western style" of "dealing with the Orient . . . by making statements about it, authorizing views about it," and of "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said: *Orientalism* 3).

Eurocentric discourse played a powerful role in this process of dominating and restructuring the Orient. *Lajja* unmask the hegemonic nature of that discourse. The British sought not only the economic and geopolitical but also ideological domination of India. Gauri Viswanathan spells out this colonialist intention and in her support quotes J. Farish from "a minute issued in the Bombay Presidency: 'The natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have'" (2). With the arrogant imperial mission of making the natives thus willingly submit, the power of Eurocentric discourse was employed. This discourse was institutionalized in the educational system of British India as a serious study of English literary culture, and it eventually served to strengthen the hegemony of their culture (Viswanathan 2). Certain humanistic functions that are traditionally associated with literature, such as "the shaping of the character" or "the development of the aesthetic sense" or "the disciplines of ethical thinking" were used for the ideological control (Viswanathan 3). The rationale provided for the imposition of this study was in fact a claim that English literary culture was unique and that it revealed "the

universal human condition” (Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 55). However, the real imperial intention behind institutionalizing English literary education in the Indian education system was outlined by Macaulay: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”² (430). This style of dominating the elite of India and of restructuring native value-systems was so far-reaching that even after the political independence of the subcontinent, its imprint could not fully be erased.

Lajja tries to erase this imprint by explicating the outlandishness of Eurocentric ideals in the Indian social and cultural context and thereby interrogating the validity of the claim of their universality. Sudhamoy Dutta in the novel represents this very class of ‘native’ intellectual that still continues to be nurtured on these ideals, particularly those of humanism, secularism, and nationalism. These were mainly picked up from “the humanistic ideals of enlightenment” and were used for “social and political control” of India (Viswanathan 3). The undivided Bengal came under British domination long before the rest of India; therefore, Bengalis were influenced first by Eurocentric thought and its embedded ideals. Sudhamoy is no exception. A doctor by profession and an idealist by nature, he is well-read not only in medicine but also in sociology, politics, and literature. He internalizes the ideals picked up from his reading and inculcates them in his children. They read books on the lives of Einstein, Newton and Galileo; books on the French Revolution and the Second World War; the novels of Gorky and Tolstoy; and the political and philosophical treaties of Lenin, Engels, Marx, Morgan, Sartre, Pavlov, Rabindranath, Nehru, and Azad (61, 209). On this body of knowledge, the Duttas model

their philosophy of life, which places humanitarianism and secularism in the prime position and treats religion as a personal matter.

Lajja depicts how the ideals of secularism, humanitarianism, and nationalism primarily determine the course of life for the Indian middle class, represented by the Duttas. Though branded as Hindus, the Duttas are secular in thought and practice. When in school, Suranjan one day picks a quarrel with his classmate who calls him a “Hindu” and Suranjan at once realizes that “the word Hindu is derogatory as swine or dog” (25). On a similar occasion, Sudhamoy says to Maya, “Who said you are Hindu? You are a human being. There is nothing superior to that” (122). One after another, the incidents in the novel reinforce the secular and humanitarian mind-set of the Duttas.

Nationalism is yet another ideal, Eurocentric in its present form, that guides their lives. In fact, the entire narrative represents the rise and fall of nationalism in Bangladesh, in particular, and in the subcontinent, in general. Young Sudhamoy is seen participating in and risking his life for various movements of national interest such as the Language Movement of 1952 launched to declare Bengali as the official language of Bangladesh or the Freedom Movement of 1971 launched to win independence from Pakistan. Many incidents in the novel illustrate his dedication to the ideal of nationalism. For example, during the freedom movement, Sudhamoy is put in an internment camp. When he is thirsty and asks for water, Pakistani soldiers urinate in a jar and force him to drink, while some other soldiers watch this spectacle sadistically. They ask him to read the “kalma”³ and become a Muslim, and, on his refusal, they forcibly make him one by “mutilat[ing] his penis” (65-6). Both Sudhamoy and his wife, Kironmoyee, suffer these atrocities for the sake of their nation, without letting cynicism enter their minds. They

also express love for their motherland by refusing to desert her under any circumstances, while other Hindus are continuously migrating to India in the fear for their lives. For them, migration is treachery, as they suggest to friends who migrate to India: “you want to earn money here and spend it in that country . . . you should be condemned as a traitor” (18). They trust that “religion could not be the basis of a national identity” and that only language and culture “create the foundation on which to build a sense of nationality” (8). However, *Lajja* epitomizes the opposition between Sudhamoy’s cherished ideals and their viability in the present state of affairs.

By thus locating these ideals in the value-system of native intellectuals like Sudhamoy and Suranjan, the narrative sets out to illustrate the disintegration and mythical nature of those very ideals. For instance, at the time of independence, “the state of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles: nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism” (42). But what follows is “[t]he gradual disappearance of logic, sensibility and [the spirit of] humanity” (20), and the appearance of cruelty, bloodshed, violence, silent victimization, and inhumanity in the name of religion, mocking the principle of secularism. Secularism, Gauri Viswanathan asserts, was implanted on the Indian soil “in a spirit of experimentation . . . for testing the non-religion theory of education” (8). So it was a policy and not a grand humanitarian ideal, which did not take firm roots in a land of religious heterogeneity. The novel epitomizes the failure of secularism by focussing on religious extremism.

The narrative also records the rise and fall of the principle and practice of nationalism. This rise and fall of nationalism is situated in the narrative structure of *Lajja*, as we have already seen, by the Chronology of Events. It shows that some years

before and after the independence of Bangladesh were filled with the spirit of nationalism. Nationalism, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, “enabled postcolonial societies to invent a self-image” through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression (*PSR* 151). Bangladesh also organizes its freedom movement on this rationale. In the novel this rationale is provided by quoting Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the Freedom Movement leaders of undivided India, who happened to be Muslim himself. Azad says, “religious affinity cannot unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different . . .

History, however, has proved that after the first few decades...Islam was not able to unite all the Muslim countries on the basis of Islam alone” (8). The early history of East and West Pakistan, depicted in the novel, proves that not religion but national culture binds the people of Bangladesh together. While observing the first phase of nationalism in Europe, Benedict Anderson says that the new “imagined community” of nation superseded the existing “cultural systems of religious community” (28). The first generation after the independence of Bangladesh, the generation of Sudhamoy, is similarly filled with the spirit of nationalism, for he whole-heartedly believes that “[l]ove for one’s country does not vary in degree from person to person nor is it distinguished by caste or religion. Loving one’s country is a universal feeling” (135). This phase of Bangladeshi nationalism can rightly be described by Benedict Anderson’s description of the early phase of European nationalism, when he says, that “nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love” (129). Sudhamoy’s love for his nation is similarly self-sacrificing. Further, the nature of nationalism in Bangladesh is different from that in India; it is “linguistic nationalism” (Chatterjee 3). The Bangla language is a major

constituent in the construction of Bangladeshi nationalism.

The period 1947-71 is marked by the rise of nationalism in the country. However, further incidents record its gradual decline. The Bangla language and culture that unite different religious groups in their struggle for an independent identity, are soon replaced by religion and communalism. Religion rather than nation or language gradually becomes the factor determining the inclusion or exclusion of people in this imagined community. The Constitution of Bangladesh changes from “the high ideals of nationalism, socialism” to “high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy” (182-3). In 1978, after only seven years of independence, Islam is declared the national religion of Bangladesh (xi). And the pattern, described above by Anderson, reverses itself as Suranjan questions himself in the present state of religious extremism: “Did religion supersede nation and nationality?” (176). The narrative represents scepticism about the whole concept of nationalism and its validity: “If you pick and choose the religion of one particular community and declare it the religion of the nation, then that State ceases to be nationalistic in nature” (135). In emotional terms, the same bitterness is repeated in Suranjan’s voice: “And wasn’t this country as much his as it was Kamal’s? Then why was he seemingly deprived of his rights, and why was his motherland turning her back on him?” (1). The novel thus epitomizes the loss of significance of the ideal of nationalism.

Not only nationalism but also most Eurocentric ideals upheld by native elite so far begin to lose their spell. By internalizing those ideals, perhaps, Sudhamoy, as a member of a marginalized group, tries to liberate himself from his otherness and seeks legitimation in the larger non-marginalized self. But his efforts fail and, defeated, he

decides to “migrate” to India. Sudhamoy’s defeat is metaphorically described by the narrator in these words: “the strong mountain he had built within himself was crumbling . . . Sudhamoy said: ‘Come, let us go away’” (216). This passage reveals that it is the defeat of Sudhamoy’s Eurocentric ideals. *Lajja* thus illustrates how these ideals, in their present form, turn out to be alien, incapable of taking viable roots in India.

The ideal of national consciousness thus turns out to be an “empty shell” and as Fanon further acknowledges, it “develops as a function of this control, a monocular and sometimes xenophobic view of identity” (qtd in Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 151). In *Lajja* the decline of secular nationalism coincides with the rise of religious fundamentalism.

Regarding this coincidence in the erstwhile colonies of Europe, Edward Said theorizes:

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them” almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent “returns” to culture and tradition. These “returns” accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. In the formerly colonized world, these “returns” have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism.

(*Culture and Imperialism* xiii)

Lajja exactly exemplifies Said’s theorization that when culture becomes a combative source of identity, as represented in the narrative, it becomes intolerant of the other, of the liberal ideas of multiculturalism and hybridity, and results, in this case, in religious

fundamentalism. The novel thus traces the journey of nationalism in Bangladesh from tolerance to intolerance.

Thus, *Lajja* serves as an oppositional narrative and pleads the case of the 'silent.' It vocalizes the process of their marginalization, terrorization, and silencing. By using the self-reflexive form, it points out the large-scale destruction of the minority. It also employs a story and characters to demonstrate the oppression of the other. The narrative amplifies the voice of marginality. Fiction and nonfiction here join together for a single cause. Through its representation of otherness, the narrative argues that for the fuller understanding of the notion of culture, the existence of both the centre and the margin is necessary. The self-reflexive form, which itself resists the totalizing Eurocentric narrative, proves to be most suitable for her purpose of resisting domination and speaking for the silent, a purpose shared by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*.

Chapter IV

The Chutnification of Narrative Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

"A significant cultural development of recent decades, the new internationalism within British literature is closely related to the worldwide emergence of post-colonial and multi-ethnic literatures," says Bruce King (193). Salman Rushdie contributes significantly to this development and continues the tradition of R. K. Narayan and his contemporaries. Rushdie and other "Third-World cosmopolitans" write with a conscious and clear goal of resisting "Raj fiction," the fiction of the empire, and of making a "fuss" about it "as loudly and as embarrassingly as possible" (Brennan viii, *Imaginary* 101). Rushdie's fiction serves as an alternative to Raj fiction, and restores the cultural identity of the non-European subject of the Indian subcontinent. *Midnight's Children* is considered as Rushdie's "masterpiece" (Pathak 115). Published in 1980, awarded the Booker prize in 1981, and named the "Booker of Bookers" in 1993, this novel has gained a great deal of critical attention.

Most critical works on *Midnight's Children* are centred on the wide range of issues that this novel addresses, such as identity, history, and nationalism. Indira Karamcheti deals with the issue of identity when she speaks about how Rushdie uses (and abuses) the biblical genesis as one his subtexts (81). R. S. Pathak approaches the issue of identity crisis from a psychological perspective, while Kathleen Flanagan, M. K. Naik, and S. P. Swain analyze the fragmented nature of self. Aruna Srivastava and Luis de J Hanchard focus on the issues of history. Timothy Brennan, in his celebrated work on

Rushdie, concentrates on the representation of nationalism in the latter's works, calling them a "metafictional extravaganza" (27). K. J. Phillips, David Gurewich and Kelly Hewson study the nature of storytelling. Most of the critics have paid attention to Rushdie's handling of narrative in *Midnight's Children*. However, the construction of fictionality is a very significant and striking aspect of this novel, one that needs more critical attention. I propose to give it that attention in this chapter. Fictionality is significant because it serves as an alternative to, and a major instrument for resisting Raj fiction, fiction that subordinated indigenous literary traditions. My goal, therefore, is to study the nature of self-reflexive fictionality in *Midnight's Children*, and show how self-reflexivity addresses Rushdie's postcolonial agenda.

When compared to *The Guide* and *Lajja*, *Midnight's Children* seems much broader in scope, in terms of both self-reflexivity and the interrogation of Eurocentrism. *Midnight's Children* is a blend of history and fiction, a "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon xiv). It is a story of a boy called Saleem Sinai, who was born at the stroke of midnight on August 15th, 1947, at the precise moment of India's independence. Saleem tells his own story to a character called Padma. From the beginning, the narration of *Midnight's Children* calls the reader's attention to its linguistic and narrative structure and to its fictionality. The linguistic structure of the novel can be described as a collage of registers and varieties of English, and it makes the reader aware that language constructs "our sense of everyday 'reality,'" and does not "passively reflect" it (Waugh 3). Here the language constructs realities of contemporary life in the Indian subcontinent, and to do so it uses many registers, such as everyday speech and folkloric idiom. The narrative is full of parody, allegory metaphors, intertextual references, and self-reflexive

images like mirrors. More importantly, the novel is mainly written using Indian English, the most suitable expression to construct Indian reality for the English-educated Indians and for the Western readership. The novel uses many varieties of Indian English, for example, the English of children, like Saleem, educated in a mission school, and that of a Goan servant, like Mary Perreira. Furthermore, there are English translations of typical idiomatic expressions from Indian languages, such as “two birds with one stone,” and even swearwords, such as “the son of a pig” (313, 147). The language of *Midnight's Children* is playful, making fun of many established notions of morality, character, truth, judgement; of Hindu gods, goddesses, and myths; and of the Muslim purdah system. The novel uses erotic images and phallic symbols, but they are used in a very mundane fashion so as to place the sacred on par with the profane, blurring the boundaries between the two. The language of *Midnight's Children* is so striking that Agnes Scott Langeland created a new term, “Rushdiesque,” to describe it (16). The language manufactures its own reality, or rather, realities, and calls attention to its linguistic structure.

The novel further makes the reader aware that fiction is an illusion and that the characters are only linguistically constructed. A good example is the narrator's announcement of his own birth. Much before its actual depiction, the narrator keeps informing the reader that “[i]t is almost time for the public announcement. I won't deny I'm excited: I've been hanging around in the background of my own story for too long” (83). The reader at once realizes that Saleem, like all other characters, is linguistic construction controlled by his linguistic creator, and that the novel itself is a constructed in language, and is, therefore, illusory. Saleem, the narrator, creates this ‘fictional

illusion,' and then, lays it bare by making fun of it. The narrative is full of such self-consciousness about its own status as an artefact.

Midnight's Children also calls attention to its narrative structure of embedded storytelling. There is a frame story of Saleem and Padma that tells another story of Saleem Sinai, and many other stories along with it. Moreover, the narration shows extreme self-consciousness about the act of writing fiction or telling stories. For instance, Saleem says to his readers, "Now, however, time (having no further use for me) is running out. I will soon be thirty-one years old . . . But I have no hopes of saving my life, nor can I count on having even a thousand nights and a night. I must work faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning—yes meaning—meaning something" (3-4). Saleem's confession thus creates a storytelling occasion. He is quite conscious here about his act of storytelling, about his role as the storyteller, and also about his connection with Scheherazade, the storyteller in *The Arabian Nights*, a classic collection of stories. Placed at the beginning of *Midnight's Children*, this intertextual reference to Scheherazade's one thousand and one tales is highly significant. The reference connects *Midnight's Children* with that archetype of self-reflexive narrative. Like Scheherazade, Saleem also has "so many stories to tell, too many," those of "intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so many dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane!" (4). And he confesses that he is "a swallower of lives; and to know [him], just the one of [him]," the reader will have to "swallow the lot as well" (4). These remarks foreground the embedded narrative structure of *Midnight's Children*, which is similar to that of *The Arabian Nights*.

Midnight's Children is an inclusive tale that needs an inclusive form. It is a "narrative of a narrative," the phrase that Tzvetan Todorov uses to describe the narrative structure of *The Arabian Nights*. Todorov argues that "[t]he act of narrating is never, in the *Arabian Nights*, a transparent act; it is the mainspring of the action" (72-3).

Scheherazade's act of storytelling is more important than the tales she tells. Similarly, the act of storytelling in *Midnight's Children* is also the mainspring of action. In this regard, I would like to quote Todorov again: "Narrative equals life; absence of narrative, death. If Scheherazade finds no more tales to tell, she will be beheaded" (74).

Scheherazade's narrative springs from her urge to escape death. For Saleem, too, there is a similar urge and urgency to tell stories because his time is running out, and because he has no hopes of saving his life. For him too, narrative is life, and as soon as it ends, death is waiting to grab him, so he must hurry to tell his story. This relationship between narrative and life connects both these narratives. The act of storytelling forms the main action for both *Midnight's Children* and *The Arabian Nights*, and both use similar narrative forms.

Midnight's Children is extremely self-conscious about its narrative form. The form here becomes content, just as the act becomes action. The traditional dichotomy between form and content breaks down when Saleem acknowledges the importance of form: "Everything has shape, if you look for it. There is no escape from form" (271). This remark also best provides a justification for the novel's narcissistic involvement in its narrative form. At many times the novel shows such self-consciousness, for example, Saleem's obsession with his own image. He says, "my picture of myself was heavily distorted by my own self-consciousness about my appearance" (262). Saleem's

narcissism is a metaphor for the novel's turning inwards to its fictionality, to its method of construction.

Although in *Midnight's Children* the construction of narrative, on the one hand, becomes a life-affirming act, on the other, it turns out to be quite trivial. Saleem juxtaposes the serious and the trivial in his narrative, and also provides a criticism of the same narrative. He compares the act of creating fiction to the process of cooking pickles or chutnification as he calls it. He uses this process as a metaphor for writing fiction:

Symbolic value of the pickling process: all the six hundred million eggs which gave birth to the population of India could fit inside a single, standard-sized pickle-jar . . . Every pickle jar . . . contains . . . the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I, however, have pickled chapters. Tonight by screwing the lid firmly on to a jar bearing the legend Special formula No. 30: "Abracadabra," I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and in pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection. (548)

Words and pickles, as well as the methods of both writing and of cooking, blend in Saleem's narrative. By comparing writing to chutnification, the narrator undermines the importance, and divine qualities associated with the power of creative imagination, celebrated in earlier critical thinking. Cooking pickles and writing fiction both are similar processes, after all, as Saleem asks: "What is required for chutnification? [for writing?] Raw materials, obviously, fruit, vegetables, fish, vinegar, spices," and recipes or formulas (548). The acts of chutnification and narrativization are thus synonymous.

Saleem here compares the serious with the mundane and relativizes the seriousness usually associated with narrativization. Narrativization, too, he suggests, suffers from the “shadows of imperfection.” Thus Saleem creates his fiction, provides a critique of its method of construction, and thereby calls attention to its fictionality.

Midnight's Children employs several narrative strategies to explore the nature of fiction. One of them is the contrivance of a two-level narration. The novel mixes the first person narration with the third in a very complex way. For example, it begins in the first person, with Saleem's depiction of his moment of tumbling forth into the world; then the third person takes over, telling the story of Dr. Aziz, Saleem's grandfather. The third person narrative returns to the first intermittently. Sometimes adopting the role of an omniscient narrator, the narrator mentions the grandfather as Dr. Aadam Aziz, while at other times, in the voice of Saleem, the narrator calls the same man ‘my grandfather.’ Frequent changes in narrative voices violate narrative levels. Gerard Genette terms such violation of narrative levels “metalepsis” (qtd. in Ommundsen 8). Patricia Waugh calls it “metafictional dislocation,” by which she means that the autonomy of one level of narration is broken by another (132). This dislocation becomes more and more complex as the novel progresses, when Saleem adopts a third person perspective of himself and says, “Saleem Sinai came to terms with himself. I will not say he was not sad; refusing to censor my past, I admit he was as sullen as . . . ” (378). Metalepsis becomes extremely complicated when he says, “I must doggedly insist that I, he, had begun again . . . he (or I) had been cleansed of . . . I (or he) accepted the fate” (419). The two levels of narration, of authorial and narratorial, and the two levels of subjectivity, of the narrator and the protagonist, conflict here with each other but none gets complete autonomy over the text.

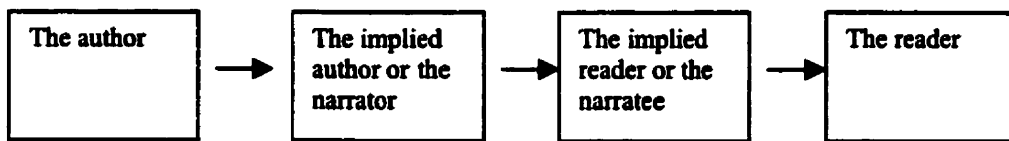
The employment of metalepsis thus dislocates the authority of the omniscient author over the text, which self-reflexive narrative has set out to do. The omniscient author does not enjoy a god-like position in *Midnight's Children*. Saleem, the narrator questions the authority of the omniscient author. When telling the story of his grandfather, Saleem asks: "Why have I invaded my grandfather's privacy?" (56). His question is addressed to omniscient authors, who claim to have access to the most private thoughts and moments of their characters. For instance, the narrator says that Saleem receives a gift by the virtue of his very special moment of birth, which allows him to enter the minds and dreams of other people. He describes Saleem's experience of getting into the dreams of Mary Pereira when he says, "there is a mystery here but because the secret is not in the front of her mind I can't find it out" (203). Here he ironically interrogates the ultimate power of the omniscient author to make judgements about his/her characters, and to know the secrets of their minds. He also suggests that such authors can only know the fronts of their characters' minds. Metalepsis thus helps interrogate the omniscient author's authority over the text.

Another important narrative strategy, employed for exploring fictionality, is the device of the narrator. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem functions as a narrator, a storyteller, and an author. As a narrator, his chief responsibility is to coordinate his narration in a cohesive manner so as to sustain the reader's interest. Saleem performs this duty successfully. He intrigues his audience/reader by his narration, and establishes a lively dialogue with his listeners. The narrator tells his story to many listeners, such as Ayooba, Shaheed, and Pictureji Singh, but Padma represents his main audience. The Saleem-Padma relationship is very intimate and interdependent. The narrator here again

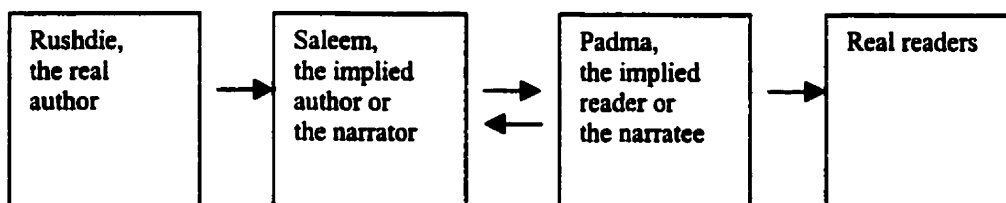
rightly alludes to Scheherazade, the prototype of the storytellers, and her husband and the principal listener, Shah Shahryar (38). In both these stories, their intimacy signifies that between a storyteller and an audience, which results in construction of narrative.

Padma's role as a reader/listener is by no means passive. She shapes and guides the course of Saleem's narrative by making suggestions and demands. Sometimes she gets frustrated and even cries when some unhappy incident occurs. In Saleem's long narration about his family history, Padma, who is more interested in the account of Saleem's birth, gets bored and complains that "[a]t this rate . . . you'll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth" (38). Saleem is aware that "Padma gets irritated whenever [his] narration becomes self-conscious" (72). Once, frustrated with Saleem's narration, she leaves him. Saleem's narration is paralyzed without her, his audience, for he says, "[b]ut if only our Padma was here," and calls those days "Padmaless days" (198-9). But Padma is so much intrigued by the narrative, of which she is a vital component, that she returns to Saleem's story. She, at times, acts as Saleem's scribe and helps perpetuate the narrative act. In short, Padma actively participates in the storytelling event, becomes a collaborator of the story, and shows awareness of the complexity and significance of the reader's response in the creation of narrative. Thus the narrator-narratee relationship is very complementary in *Midnight's Children*, and it makes the process of narrative transmission lively.

Since narrative is a communication, its transmission involves the participation of both the author and the reader. There are roughly three types of authors and readers in narrative, the implied, constructed and the real. Patrick O'Neill's offers a model of narrative transmission that can be represented as follows:



O'Neill combines the positions of the implied author with the narrator, and that of the implied reader with the narratee. The implied author is the position that the real author adopts to create a text. But the implied author may/may not be involved in the text as a character, like some narrators. The narrator, as in ancient storytelling traditions, is normally a character who tells the story. So the implied author and the narrator are two separate positions that may/may not merge. Similarly, O'Neill combines the implied reader with the narratee. The implied reader fills the gaps, draws conclusions, anticipates and reflects on the text (Thompson 182). The narratee is also a character created in the story. So the implied reader and the narratee may/may not merge. This model would explain narrative transmission in *Midnight's Children*:



Narrative transmission in this novel is thus more consistent with that of an oral tradition. There are two kinds of narrators often involved in oral traditions, actual human beings who kept texts alive by narrating them over and over again, and characters who act as narrators. The characters of the narrator and the narratee are constructed in narrative, particularly in the frame narrative. *Midnight's Children* continues this tradition, and prolific references to Scheherazade and her one thousand and one tales clearly indicate

the narrator's goal to revive it. I would, however, argue that along with *The Arabian Nights*, ancient Indian epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are also the intertexts of *Midnight's Children*. Of course here I would consider the reference to the *Mahabharata* only from the point of narrative transmission. Veda Vyasa narrates the story of the *Mahabharata*, while Valmiki, that of the *Ramayana*. Both Vyasa and Valmiki are narrators and participant observers of the stories they tell, and both their epics are addressed to narratees that are the descendants of the protagonists. In the *Mahabharata*, the *Maharshi* tells the story and Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of arts and learning, writes it down acting as Vyasa's scribe. Following this tradition, *Midnight's Children* also constructs the characters of the narrator and the narratee in the text. Similar to the *Mahabharata*, this novel tells the history of a family, and the stories of "multitudes" (4). Thus *Midnight's Children* rejuvenates ancient literary traditions of India and Persia by continuing some of their conventions.

Midnight's Children further follows the ancient literary practice of cyclical and nonlinear storytelling structure. There is a frame story that contains framed stories, which eventually turn into sub-frames themselves containing more stories. For example, the frame story of Saleem-Padma leads to the framed story of Saleem Sinai, Saleem Sinai's story leads to that of Aadam Aziz, Aadam's story leads to the story of the Hummingbird, and so on. Thus the circle of stories continues till the end. This adherence to the nonlinear narrative structure is a subversive act in *Midnight's Children* rejecting the totalizing, linear novel tradition of the nineteenth century. Saleem's rejection of narrative linearity becomes evident from his complaint: "Padma was bullying me back into the world of linear narrative, the universe of what-happened-next" (38). At

this point Padma represents the reader who is “in desperate need for meaning,” while Saleem tries to escape from “what-happened-nextism” (198, 39). And ignoring those bullying expectations, the narrator begins his cyclical narrative and starts telling the story of the Hummingbird. Strikingly, Padma here represents the reader who has conventional expectations of the closure of meaning, and who is frustrated with Saleem’s nonlinear narrative.

This what-happened-nextism is also challenged by the novel’s lack of definite closure. The novel ends on a seemingly pessimistic note. It suggests Saleem’s and his nation’s death. From the beginning, the narrator keeps informing the reader about the crumbling body of Saleem, which serves as a metaphor for that of the modern nation-state of India. In the end, Saleem reaffirms that the “pieces of [his] body are falling off” (551). He creates a picture of the explosion of his body like “the bomb in Bombay” (552). The pun is quite significant here because it suggests the geo-political explosion of the city (or its nation) which is splitting itself. However, there are no definite signs of these approaching deaths for both Saleem and his nation in the end. In fact, the final image in the novel is that of the crowd, and the crowd is a sign of life. Saleem also speaks about thousand and one such midnights whose children are “unable to live or die”, whose future remains dangling (552). The reference to the number thousand and one further suggests the continuation of life like that of Scheherazade, a narrator who manages to survive by telling stories, at the end of her narrative. Thus in the end there are references to approaching deaths, and at the same time, suggestions about the continuation of life. These images of death and life conflict with each other and cancel each other out, suggesting that both Saleem and his nation are also unable to live or die.

By not giving any definite suggestion about their end, the narrative is in a way “closing closing” here (552). However, it can be said that *Midnight's Children* does not open up many possibilities of closure, similar to *The Guide*, though it certainly challenges the linear notion of the end. *Midnight's Children* rejects the linear end of the traditional novel and also the typical end of the fairy tale—‘they lived happily ever after.’

However, the opening of *Midnight's Children* uses the popular form of the fairy tale, both Indian and English, as exemplified by the opening sentence: “I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time” (3). The phrase ‘once upon a time,’ resembles the typical beginning of a fairy tale, and it foregrounds the transgression of genres in the novel. The novel makes an ample use of the folkloric register. Thus by hybridizing the two traditions—nonlinear oral storytelling and the linear English novel, and the two genres—high and popular literatures, the narrator makes his own conjoining, the self-reflexive form.

Midnight's Children also treats time in a nonlinear and self-reflexive way. It does not adhere to a chronological sequence. There is a gap between “actual temporal progression” and “the linear verbal representation of temporality” (Toolan 49). The novel begins at three different points in time: when Saleem is thirty-one and starts telling the story, when he is born, and when his known family line begins with the youthful days of his grandfather (4). Thus actual temporal progression and the linear narrative representation of temporality are inconsistent with each other. Time certainly is not a progressive concept here, as Saleem reveals when he says: “Today I went to visit tomorrow” (272). In one small statement he invokes the past, present, and future. By thus conflating the three temporal states, he implies the need to discard the notion of time

as a linear, progressive phenomenon. And when Saleem speaks about “disappearing for long periods into the spidery labyrinths of Time,” he takes a step further to suspend time in a self-conscious way (306).

The novel’s backward and forward movement in time is both analeptic and proleptic (Toolan 50). According to Genette, analepsis means moving back from the real present in the story. The entire story of *Midnight’s Children* is exemplifies of analepsis or “analepsis within analepsis” (Toolan 51). Once again, the opening of the novel best shows this tendency. The real action of the story is set 30 years after India’s independence when Saleem is thirty and is narrating the story of his life. The story then ‘jumps back’ into the past to narrate the event of his nationally celebrated birth, and from there, further back into Aadam Aziz’s young days, and from there, occasionally, back into Aziz’s days in Germany. It is indeed analepsis within analepsis, growing “illogically backwards in time” (101). There are many analeptical incidents both in *The Guide* and in *Lajja* but no proleptical ones. Prolepsis means, “an achronological movement forward in time, so that a future event is related textually ‘before its time’, before the presentation of chronologically intermediate events” (Genette qtd. in Toolan 50). *Midnight’s Children* is also full of prolepses. For example, before describing the events of his own life, Saleem makes a brief statement about it. He states that “[f]or the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicians ratified my authenticity . . . I, Saleem Sinai . . . had become heavily embroiled in Fate” (3). By often telling about his fate and forthcoming death, he makes a proleptic movement. The ample use of analepses and prolepses sustains the reader’s interest in the narration, and moreover, problematizes the traditional notions of time, associated with

progression. The nonlinear narration of *Midnight's Children* thus disregards the totalizing concepts of progression and linearity.

Like time, *Midnight's Children* also problematizes the totalizing concepts of space and identity, and deals with them in a reflexive fashion. The novel is situated in many different geographical locations—Bombay, Kashmir, Agra, Delhi, Rawalpindi, and Sunderban—and mainly in three countries of the Indian subcontinent—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The shifting of geographical location also poses a question about Saleem's identity. *Midnight's Children* seems to celebrate the idea of multiple identities. Saleem's multiple belonging constructs his multiple subjectivity. He and his family move to Pakistan. Saleem describes the entire experience in these words: "It was not 'my' country—or not then. Not my country, although I stayed in it—as refugee, not citizen; entered on my mother's Indian passport, I would have come in for a good deal of suspicion . . . for four long years . . . Four years of nothing . . ." (350). He misses Bombay, the city of his birth: "Four years away from midnight's children; four years without Warden Road and Breach Candy . . . and Cathedral School equestrian statue of Shivaji and the melon-sellers at the Gateway of India; away from Diwali and Ganesh Chaturthi and Coconut Day." (350-1). Probably, Saleem's cultural identity is "Bombayite" however, due to his multiple belonging, the issue of his identity remains unsettled, and he remains a hyphenated identity.

The construction of subjectivity is a major issue in self-reflexive narrative. This issue interrogates the "rational connection between what characters 'do' and what they 'are,' the connection celebrated in the realistic tradition. Characters in self-reflexive narrative are more role-players than individuals (Waugh 7, 3). Saleem is a role-player,

playing the role of an Indian Muslim boy though he is not born to that family. Mary Perreira, the midwife, swaps the two babies, Saleem and Shiva, born in Doctor Naralika Nursing Home at the same moment, and their identities change. Saleem is actually the son of Vanita and Methwold, the Englishman. Similarly, young Aadam is Shiva's son but Saleem fathers him. Aadam, therefore, is, "the child of a father who was not his father...but...[h]e was the true great-grandson of his great-grandfather" (500). The confusing account represents the commingled nature of identity, not only of young Aadam or Saleem or Shiva, but also of post-independence generations of India. The post-independence generations of Indians, like Saleem, also remain "illegitimate children" of the Englishman, their former colonizer, and they still seek legitimation of their identity, history, and culture in their colonizing self. (Pathak 117).

As part of his postcolonial agenda, Rushdie asserts the identity and the history of India and the post-independence generations of Indians. The novel is an instance of historiographic metafiction. *Midnight's Children* links most significant events in the national history of modern India with those in the family history of Saleem. Saleem's birth "on the stroke of midnight . . . at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence" serves as a narrative arrangement for situating the narrative in history. The connection between narrative self-referentiality and history becomes evident from the very opening of the novel when Saleem comments on his own birth "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks. I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was no escape" (3). This chain actually begins before Saleem's and his nation's births when Saleem's grandfather gets embroiled in the nation-wide struggle for

independence along with his friends, Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, and the Rani of Cooch Naheen. The narrative also represents the sad history of India's partition and Hindu-Muslim rivalry. A small incident after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948 exemplifies the widening rift between the two communities. Saleem's family panics thinking that "if a Muslim did this thing there will be hell to pay," and they are relieved when Saleem says that "finally the radio gave us a name. Nathuram Godse. Thank God," Amina bursts out on hearing Godse's name, "[i]t's not a Muslim name! . . . By being Godse he has saved our lives!" (169). The incident significantly comments on the feelings of antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims; as rather than grieving over the national loss, the family ironically feels relieved.

The nation's life and Saleem's life continue to run on parallel lines. Jawaharlal Nehru's death coincides with that of Aadam Aziz in 1964, while the commencement of the war between India and China in 1962 marks the armistice between Ahmed and Amina, Saleem's parents. The chain of coincidences continues until Indira Gandhi declares a civil emergency in India, on June 25, 1975. Once again, "on the stroke of stroke of midnight . . . at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency" Aadam, Saleem's son arrives in the world, and he too, is "mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destinies indissolubly chained to those of his country" (500). History thus repeats itself in Saleem's narrative.

Hutcheon calls *Midnight's Children* a "historically mediated form" and clarifies that the traditional historical fiction "is meant to authenticate fiction on a product, or representation level," and in historiographic metafiction the reader becomes a "link between history and fiction" (xiv). Historiographic metafiction gives a very significant

role to the reader, to serve as a link between history and fiction. In *Midnight's Children*, history clearly does not authenticate fiction because the narrator is inaccurate in his historical account. (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 22). The novel rather invites the reader to connect history with fiction. The narrator describes his rationale behind thus situating the narrative in history as "my first attempt at rearranging history—on to a sheet of paper," in other words, to rewrite a history of his nation, which is a major postcolonial goal (312).

The reconfiguration of the Eurocentric representation of Indian history, and that of the Eurocentric mediation of Indian reality are two major postcolonial preoccupations in *Midnight's Children*. Similarly, self-reflexive narrative is a response to a "thoroughgoing sense that reality and history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices" (Waugh 7). Both history and reality are constructs. Therefore, the uniform, ordered view of reality is no longer valid. Saleem calls such effort "to encapsulate the whole of reality" an Indian disease (84). Rejecting the essentializing notion of reality, the novel constructs its reality through various images and metaphors, emphasizing the fragmentary nature of self, society, and life. The narrator employs a metaphor of the perforated sheet to epitomize this fragmentary reality. Dr. Aziz examines his future wife Naseem through a perforated sheet for her supposed ailments. He comes "to have a picture of Naseem in his mind, a badly-fitting collage of her severally-inspected parts . . . Glued together by his imagination, she accompanie[s] him on all his rounds" (23). Naseem becomes a narrative perceived in fragments and constructed into one single whole by Aziz's imagination. Saleem himself exemplifies the fragmentary nature of human self (Pathak 112, Swain 33). Another metaphor in the novel, Lifafa Das's peepshow, appropriately describes the disjointed nature of reality. A

peepshow is a popular, boxed street-show displaying picture postcards. Lifafa Das's show contains pictures of Indian sites such as the Taj Mahal, Meenakshi Temple, and the holy Ganges, and also some more contemporary images such as "Stafford Cripps leaving Nehru's residence; untouchables being touched . . . a publicity still of a European actress" (84). Together in a Chinese-box like structure, these pictures represent the past and the present and the North and the South of India. They epitomize the multiple fragments of Indian reality, and the inevitable chaos, resulting from such multiplicity.

Using the plurality of Indian culture as a springboard, the narrator makes a statement on "unprecedented cultural pluralism" of contemporary reality (Waugh 10). This pluralism implies the impossibility of holding any totalizing notions, because many fragments relativize them. Reality is fragmentary and pluralistic mainly because it is contingent upon the perspective of the viewer. *Midnight's Children* emphasizes this relativity of reality in the following words of Saleem:

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. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually moving up, row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the stars' faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality . . . (197)

Saleem thus reaffirms that reality is not absolute but relative, and not static but fluid. The proportions observed earlier dissolve and take new shapes, depending upon the distance and the viewpoint. Paradoxical as it seems, to define reality, Saleem compares it to the

illusory world of cinema, a world of make-belief where illusion itself forms reality.

Many such images and narrative devices pose questions about the relationship between fictional illusion and reality. For example, Saleem's uncle Hanif, a realistic writer in the Bombay film industry—to use Saleem's words, “high priest of reality” in “the temple of illusions”—is “fond of railing against princes and demons, gods and heroes, against, in fact, the entire iconography of the Bombay films” (292). The narrator here makes an accurate use of the world of Bombay “masala” films, popular movies to embody the dichotomy between the illusion and reality popularly thematized by traditional (particularly modernist) literature. *Midnight's Children* sets out to dissolve this dichotomy. To achieve this dissolution, the narrator fuses apparently dissimilar elements of fantasy and realism into narrative. Out of this fusion develops a different literary mode called magic realism.

The oxymoronic term “magic realism” originated first in art and was coined by Franz Roh in 1925. Wendy Faris defines it as a literary mode that combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed, and she uses Julian Barnes's term “propinquity”¹ to explain the central structuring principle of magic realism (Zamora and Faris 1). The term suggests juxtaposition and contiguity of magic and reality, which aims at portraying the uncanny side of life, treats the supernatural as an ordinary matter, and problematizes the conventional ideas of time, space, and identity (Zamora and Faris 4). *Midnight's Children* represents the social and political reality of postcolonial India, but also punctuates this reality with magical intervention. Thus readers' expectations are challenged when they see Dr. Aziz's kissing the ground for his morning prayer: “Aadam

Aziz hit his nose against a . . . tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and . . . transformed into rubies" (4). Here quite suddenly, blood is transformed into rubies. On other occasions, Aadam's mother is turned into a lizard. All this seems to happen naturally. Magical elements suddenly intervene in reality. The most fantastic element in the novel is the miraculous gift that Saleem receives for being born at the special moment of India's independence. This gift enables him to enter the minds of people and travel across the country to know what is happening. Not only Saleem, but also all one thousand and one other children born in India within an hour of her independence receive magical powers, "every one of whom [is] . . . endowed with features, talents or faculties which can only be . . . described as miraculous" (234). With the help of his magical power, Saleem forms their organization, the Midnight's Children's Conference or MCC. The entire account of the activities of midnight's children, of Shiva and Parvati, juxtapose the fantastic with the real and validate the presence of the imaginary.

The hybridization of magic and realism opens up, to use Saleem's words here, a "new and fabulously transmogrified world" for narrative practices (309). In *Midnight's Children*, the source of magical elements is Indian mythology, as Saleem clearly mentions when he says that his "miraculous nature . . . involved [him] in the . . . myth life of India" (292). He narrates many Indian myths popularly associated with gods, demons, evil spirits, archangels, and ghosts. By alluding to these myths, his narrative continues the literary tradition of India. This tradition, beginning from the *Jatak Tales* (about 300 BC) or the *Panchatantra* (about the 4th century A. D.), celebrates the personification of animals. Human and animal live here together and interact with each other amicably

(Ghosh 219-20). Saleem similarly mentions his great grandfather's and his sister's gift of talking to birds. Further Joseph—Mary's boyfriend—comes in the form of a wolf (203). Saleem's gift of travelling invisibly anywhere in the country resembles Narada, the mythological time-traveller (305). Further, Ahmed Sinai speaks about rubbing his "jolly old lamp" and about the popping out of "the genie bringing fame and fortune" (373). The obvious source of this magical element here is Scheherazade's famous tale of Aladdin and his lamp-genie. The co-existence of magic and reality, the rational and the irrational, and the human and the non-human in the same narrative acknowledges the presence of the uncanny in life, and it places the uncanny on par with the canny. The insightful use of these ancient Indian and Persian traditions in *Midnight's Children* resist the nineteenth century, Eurocentric, realistic novel that ignores the uncanny side of life.

Developed from regional literary forms of marginalized cultures, magic realism has been used by many contemporary writers as an international literary mode because it creates "a complex of comparative connections, avoiding separatism while at the same time respecting cultural diversity" (Zamora and Faris 4). Postcolonial writers, such as Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, have recently developed this literary form as a counter-discursive strategy employed for resisting colonialist discourse, and for re-establishing a link with their obscured histories (Slemon, 408). By blurring the distinction between the real and the imaginary, *Midnight's Children* rejuvenates the literary past of India, for the narrator Saleem says, "the hegemony of superstition, mumbo-jumbo and all things magical would never be broken in India" (74). The use of words "hegemony" and "superstition" is very ironic. The phrase 'hegemony of magic' counters that of colonialist discourse. The colonial hegemony marginalized and obscured

the literary heritage of India. But the narrator posits that the link with the literary past will not be broken. The counter-hegemony of mumbo-jumbo sets out to revitalize the broken link and, at the same time, establishes cross-cultural connections. And literary modes such as self-reflexivity and magic realism help create this two-fold connection.

By invigorating a connection with his obscured history and the literary past, Rushdie makes a political gesture. Every aspect of *Midnight's Children*—its language, form, and the treatment of reality, history, and identity—contributes to the formation of alternative textuality that destabilizes Eurocentric discourse. The use of the self-reflexive narrative form is strong and so is its postcolonial agenda. The narrator outlines his postcolonial concerns in the following words: “Numbers, too, have significance...1001, the number of the night, of magic, of alternative realities—a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians, for whom alternative versions of the world are threats” (259). Alternative and pluralizing narratives are threats to totalizing discourses, and also to colonial power. By asserting an alternative and a positive self-image, postcolonial writers challenge the ideological authority of Eurocentric discourse, the authority and strength that the colonizers gained by “setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even the underground self” (Said 5). *Midnight's Children* exposes this European sense of authority when describing Aadam Aziz’s experience in Germany: “Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India—like radium—had been ‘discovered’ by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco da Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors” (6). Oskar, a European, sets himself off against Aadam by making statements about his country and

underrating it as Vasco da Gama's "discovery" or "almost a European invention" (Said, *Orientalism* 1). Oskar's statement thus becomes a supercilious colonialist assumption about India. The ancient civilization of India was thus discovered, orientalized, and marginalized. *Midnight's Children* identifies this process of marginalization.

In this construction of otherness, argues Homi Bhabha, stereotypical images served as a major "discursive strategy," a point I have discussed in Chapter II (*Other Question*, 18). And therefore, challenging those stereotypes is an important objective of postcolonial writers. *Midnight's Children* problematizes stereotypical colonial images of India as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences," (Said, *Orientalism* 1). The narrative identifies these images as "an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power" (Bhabha, *Other Question* 18). It counters these images, first by making fun of typical Eurocentric assumptions of superiority, and second by constructing a positive self-image of India. By making fun of those typical Eurocentric notions of superiority, the narrative relativizes superiority associated with them. So we see in the narrative that in a place called Buckingham Villa, natives and "exotic beings" live or a "blonde European" nurse has her face "frozen into a smile of terrifying insincerity" (162, 286). Not only this but the narrator also makes fun of canonical literature. In so doing, he interrogates these Eurocentric images and notions of superiority.

But moreover, to counter the stereotypical image, *Midnight's Children* builds a positive image of India as a land of cultural plurality, and of Bombay, as a hybrid place that includes everything from the underworld and the cinema world to the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi. It represents the collage of India's multilingual, multireligious,

multicultural, and its heterogeneous culture, similar to the crowd of Bombay². Rushdie writes elsewhere, “I come from Bombay . . . My India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity . . . To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once” (*Imaginary* 32). Rushdie extends this sense of plurality and hybridity, inherited from the heterogeneous crowds of his homeland to his narrative, so as to make it more suitable to represent contemporary cultural hybridity. The image of the crowd similarly imparts a sense of vitality, the vitality that the narrative practices of the margin have, and that of the centre lacks (Rushdie, *Defence* 47). Thus by projecting a positive image of India, *Midnight's Children* challenges colonialist stereotypes.

In inventing this substantive self-image, the idea of national culture played a foundational role, and on it postcolonial societies built their liberation movements. As Frantz Fanon observes, the idea of a “national culture” has enabled “a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify praise, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (155). The imaginary constructs called nations, to quote Timothy Brennan, “depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (8). In Saleem’s words, such cultural fiction is a “national longing for form” (359). *Midnight's Children* gives a form to national and cultural experience of India, and it also provides a critique of Indian nationalism. This critique of nationalism is accurately situated in the narrative. The modern nation-state of India and Saleem are born at exactly the same moment. This moment of birth is not a coincidence but the narrator’s strategy to make Saleem’s narrative a national allegory. *Midnight's Children* represents the early phase of Indian

nationalism, the early spirit of enthusiasm, reflected in Jawaharlal Nehru's, the first Prime Minister's, words in his letter to Saleem when he calls the latter "the newest bearer . . . of . . . ancient India" and a "the mirror of [their]own" (143). The nation's birth is celebrated with similar enthusiasm:

there was . . . a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which' although it had five thousand years of history although it had invented the game of chess and . . . was nevertheless quite imaginary . . . a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will—except in a dream . . . (129-30)

The nation, like Saleem did not exist before. As Partha Chatterjee points out, Indian nationalism is a relatively new and alien term in its modern sense (22). Saleem similarly terms it "the new myth—a collective fiction" (130). So nation and fiction are synonymous here. There is striking similarity between Nasrin's description of *Lajja* as a collective document and Rushdie's description of *Midnight's Children* as a collective fiction. Whether document or fiction both are collective in nature.

However, the collective enthusiasm of the initial phase of nationalism, both *Lajja* and *Midnight's Children* illustrate, soon become an "empty shell" (Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 151). In *Midnight's Children*, this decline of nationalism or "pitfalls of national consciousness" mainly comes through the images of mutilation (Ashcroft et al., *PSR* 151). The mutilation of Saleem's body becomes a metaphor for that of the nation and it is brought upon Saleem by Ahmed, his father or guardian, and his friends. The mutilation is similarly brought upon the nation by her guardians, the politicians, and their

power struggles, violence and corruption. Saleem's attack on Indira Gandhi, 'the Widow', her son Sanjay, and his birth control campaign during the Emergency; and on "Mishra, the railway minister" or "also the officially appointed minister for bribery" shows that in the oppression of India not only the British but also the "internal colonizers" have participated (477, Phillips 206). Saleem further forcefully attacks Pakistani rulers like General Ayub Khan for their cruelty and for using religion in playing power games. Due to over-mutilation, the death approaches Saleem and the nation. However, rather than calling it the death of the nation, I would choose to call it that of nationalism, the concept which, like Saleem, turns out to be the Englishman's illegitimate child in India.

Thus *Midnight's Children* has a strong postcolonial concern of destabilizing colonialist discourse, in particular, the Eurocentric master narrative. To do so, it celebrates ancient narrative forms of India and Persia. The novel also expresses a faith in the common postcolonial platform, for the narrator says, "Different and similar, we are joined by heat" (199). This remark basically refers to the heterogeneity as well as homogeneity of Indian cultural life, but also suggests those of the postcolonial platform. Rushdie articulates the common goal of the postcolonial platform, which is to exercise its "claim to a place at the centre of things" (285). Postcolonial writers have to rise from their marginalized positions and have to fight for a place at the centre. They have to create a space for meaning for their cultures. By his use of the self-reflexive narrative form for *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has been successful in challenging Eurocentric discursive practices, in asserting the literary identity of Indian culture, and finally in claiming his place 'at the centre of things.'

Chapter V

Conclusion

The goals of this research project were to study the complex narrative mode of self-reflexive fiction, and, more importantly, to determine the role it plays in serving the postcolonial agenda of destabilizing the power of Eurocentric literary discourse and of asserting the marginalized narrative practices as a counter-discursive strategy. My special frames of reference for this study were three self-reflexive novels from the Indian subcontinent: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. By closely examining these texts, I have explored the nature of self-reflexivity in each of them, and have identified how self-reflexivity helps these texts function as oppositional narratives.

Functioning as an alternative narrative form, the contemporary self-reflexive novel calls attention to its linguistic and narrative structure, and also to its fictionality, in order to examine the problematic relationship between fiction and reality. This mode of narrativization has been inspired by the ancient narrative practices of marginalized cultures such as those of India. Self-reflexive narrative mainly problematizes the traditional notion of objective, knowable reality, one that can be accurately reflected through the power of language. This narrative treats reality as a construct and language as an independent signifying system rather than a medium for communicating a given reality. Fictionality, rather than fiction itself, forms the main action in these narratives. In other words, the act of storytelling predominates the story itself, and this construction

of fiction “provides a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity [and also of reality] in the world outside novels” (Waugh 3).

The thesis tries to identify the principles underlying self-reflexive narratives, and also the goals that the postcolonial Indian novel is trying to achieve through the use of this special form. This narrative of a narrative resists the colonialist representation of India, and offers alternative representations. Challenging the unitary view of reality in the Eurocentric novel tradition, the self-reflexive novel treats reality as a construct and a set of fragments. An acknowledgement of the impossibility of representing the world in fiction, the self-reflexive novel shows that fiction is an illusion and not a slice of life. The self-reflexive form, therefore, becomes a model for understanding the pluralistic nature of contemporary life. This form celebrates plurality by telling many stories-- stories within stories; by employing many languages and nonliterary discourses; by upholding the ancient notion of multiple authorship, readership, and plural interpretations; and by its open-ended, nonlinear structure. Thus this form challenges and subverts the world-view presented in the English literary tradition in the hands of postcolonial writers such as Narayan, Nasrin, and Rushdie.

This study finds that all the three novels discussed here draw attention to their linguistic and narrative structure, implicitly or explicitly. All three resist the totalizing, Eurocentric, novel tradition, and validate cultural and national experiences of the Indian subcontinent. All three of them are nonlinear and hybrid narratives that use the self-reflexive narrative form as a political gesture to subvert power hierarchies in literary writing. All three novelists are engaged in representing various issues of cultural,

political, and national significance through their writing¹. And studied together, they throw a light on the development in self-reflexive narration in the subcontinent.

However, the self-reflexive techniques employed in each of these narratives vary a great deal. Their use of the self-reflexive mode shows a clear progression. Narayan's *The Guide* makes an effective use of various ancient patterns of storytelling. Nasrin's *Lajja* does not use such ancient storytelling techniques. It, on the other hand, makes remarkable use of non-literary registers in its fictional account, and has a strong postcolonial agenda: to resist the ruling culture in Bangladesh, and to represent the ruled. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* seems to combine the strengths of the other two narratives in the service of its decolonizing agenda. Like *The Guide*, it makes ample use of ancient storytelling techniques to validate indigenous discourses. And like *Lajja*, it makes ample use of historical and cultural events in India's history to interrogate many colonialist assumptions in discursive practices.

The Guide and *Midnight's Children* use the tradition of Indian storytelling while *Lajja* does not. The nature of storytelling in both these texts is derived from ancient Indian sources, and both use embedded narrative structures. But *The Guide* uses a framing story and a framed story, while *Midnight's Children* uses an inclusive form of self-reflexivity, similar to those of *The Arabian Nights* and the *Mahabharata*, which makes room for telling many stories within the frame of one story. *The Guide* is modelled on the *katha* tradition. A *katha* is usually a short story. *Midnight's Children*, on the other hand, is modelled on epics and voluminous works. Following the *katha* or the oral storytelling tradition, the narrator in *The Guide* retells short mythological stories, while *Midnight's Children* uses Hindu myths but more as intertextual references than as

retelling stories. So though both these narratives use ancient Indian storytelling practices, they differ from each other in their techniques.

Both *The Guide* and *Midnight's Children* use a two-level narration. But that in *Midnight's Children* is more complex since it switches between levels and sometimes there are shifts in narrational levels in a single sentence. However, all three texts draw attention to their fictionality: *The Guide* by its storytelling, told as a recollection and confession, *Lajja* by its insertion of nonfiction in fiction, and *Midnight's Children* by its self-conscious remarks about fiction as a construct and by its situating the narrative in the modern history of the nation. Like *Lajja*, it employs many registers such as classical and folkloric, oral and written, and Indian and Western. Further all three texts use the narrator's voice to tell stories. *The Guide* employs the narrator who is also the protagonist, similar to an ancient narrative convention. The narrator Raju focuses only on his own story. Like *The Guide*, *Midnight's Children* also derives its narrator device from ancient Indian convention, but its narrator does not focus only on his own story. He tells the stories of his family and friends as well. In so doing, the narrator, Saleem becomes more as a participant observer. Raju listens to the stories of others, while Saleem hardly does so. So Saleem strikes as an empowering narrator. Unlike these two narratives, the positions of the narrator or the implied author and the author overlap in *Lajja* because this narrative serves as a vindication of marginality, which is the author's main goal in writing this novel.

These three novels also vary in their reader participation. *The Guide* and *Midnight's Children* both celebrate the active role of the reader, like the oral school. In *Midnight's Children*, a reader like Padma also enjoys the role of a critic, and provides a

critique of the narrative in the same narrative, while Velan in *The Guide* does not do so. *Lajja* appeals to readers' conscience by its humanitarian message. So, in a way, readers occupy a central position in this novel as well, but in an indirect way, and they do not participate in the action of the story. Thus by employing the narrative voice, and by invoking the active participation of readers in the act of storytelling (except in *Lajja*) all three novels relativize the authority of the omniscient author over the text.

All three novels treat reality as an impermanent structure, a set of fragments, and construct realities subjectively. *The Guide* creates its variety of realism—mythic realism. Myths and legends punctuate everyday reality and also help understand reality in a better way. The realism in *Lajja* is social or documentary, in which fiction is constantly interrupted by fact. *Midnight's Children* is known for its use of magic realism, in which magical elements intruded upon reality, and this mode is derived from ancient Indian and Persian narrative practices that validate the presence of the uncanny side of life. Thus these novels interrogate traditional realism, though *The Guide* adheres more to it than the two other novels. All three novels question the conventional ideas of time, space, and identity. *The Guide* questions these notions in following Indian mythical tradition; *Midnight's Children*, in a more complex self-reflexive way. When compared with these two narratives, *Lajja* is less self-reflexive in its engagement with myth and magic.

Finally, *Lajja* and *Midnight's Children* are stronger than *The Guide* in their articulation of their postcolonial concerns. Both these texts deal with serious issues such as history, identity, and nationalism in India. There is a consciousness in both these narratives about rewriting the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent. Both *Lajja* and *Midnight's Children* provide critiques of nationalism, representing the rise and fall of

nationalism, as well as illustrating the outlandishness of the concept in its modern sense. *Lajja* is more direct in its resistance to dominant discourses, while *Midnight's Children* employs an ironic but playful style to do so.

Furthermore, in their approaches to stereotypical images of India, these novels differ greatly. *The Guide* unknowingly plays on them rather than questioning them, while *Midnight's Children* interrogates them by making fun of them and by building a positive self-image of India. *Lajja* does not either represent or question such images at all. Compared to these two narratives, *The Guide* problematizes colonialist tendencies rarely, which is understandable given the novel's date of publication. However, this novel is remarkable because it displays self-reflexive tendencies much before this literary mode gained currency. Thus all these novels use the self-reflexive narrative form but differ in their use of the form. All of them resist the Eurocentric assumptions in literary writing and validate those of their literary past.

Notes

Chapter I

¹ The region is also known as South Asia. But the term Indian subcontinent is more commonly used.

² What is commonly known as Indian culture comprises many cultural traditions. But as Jawaharlal Nehru puts it, there is “a cultural unity amidst diversity” and that India is “a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads.” From the Epilogue to *The Discovery of India*. (New York: The John Day Company, 1946.) 576

³ Various cultural, governmental, and voluntary organizations in India today are making conscious efforts to keep this tradition alive. They are setting up academies to encourage and train young people to master this art.

⁴ *Lajja* is originally written in Bengali and translated into English, published by Penguin (India) and also by Prometheus Books. The Prometheus edition is translated by Kankabati Roy. And there are some significant differences between the two editions, for example, the Prometheus edition does not have bulleted lists as the Penguin edition has.

Chapter II

¹ The *Mahabharata* (Great Tale of the Bharatas) is a celebrated ancient Indian epic, written by Veda Vyasa around 1400 BC. But there are many additions and interpolations to the main tale. Ghosh, Oroon. *The Dance of Shiva and other tales from India*. (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1965) 123.

² The *Katha Saritha Sagara* (Ocean of stories), an ancient collection of stories of Somadeva was written in the 11th century A. D. Ghosh, Oroon.. *The Dance of Shiva and other tales from India*. (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1965) 280.

³ The *Ramayana* (Life of Rama), written by Valmiki is another equally celebrated Indian epic dating back to the first century B. C. Ghosh, Oroon.. *The Dance of Shiva and other tales from India*. (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada, 1965) 123.

Chapter III

¹ In the Penguin (India) edition.

This policy is also known as “divide and conquer.”

² In introducing English education in India, Macaulay and others were primarily interested in creating a class a clerks and schoolteachers to help them run the government.

³ Also known as “shahadda.”

Chapter IV

¹ For Barnes, says Wendy Faris, propinquity is the central principle of magic realist narration. Here “[c]ontradictions stand Face to face, oxymorons march in locked step—too predictably, Barnes insists—and politics collide with fantasy” (1). In short, contradictory elements stand face to face, collide, but finally mingle with each other in magic realist narrations.

² Bombay, recently re-named “Mumbai,” is a place of hybrid origin. Originally known as Mumbadevi, this natural harbour of India was developed by the Portuguese.

Chapter V

¹ Both Rushdie and Nasrin have “fatwas” placed on their heads by Muslim fundamentalist organizations for their anti-dogmatic thoughts and sentiments, and both of them are in exile. However, Rushdie’s fatwa has been revoked recently.

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