PGEG S3 01

20th Century Novels

SEMESTER III

ENGLISH

BLOCK 3

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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SEMESTER 3
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 1: 20TH CENTURY NOVELS
BLOCK 3: METAFICTION

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BLOCK 3: INTRODUCTION

This Block contains total five units. The details of the unit are as follows:

Unit 11: This is the first unit of Block 3, which shall introduce you to Metafiction and its different practitioners. The term Metafiction originated in an essay by the American critic and novelist William H. Gass. Usually, a writer exploring a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction or constructing fiction is referred to as 'Metafictional'. According to Patricia Waugh, the term is given to "fictional writing" which "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality". Metafictional works were made popular by modernist writers such as Italo Calvino, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Clive Sinclair, Graham Swift, D. M. Thomas, John Fowles, John Irving and so on.

Unit 12: This unit introduces you to John Fowles and his highly acclaimed novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* Renowned for his erudition, his experimentation with literary form, and his exceptional storytelling abilities, John Fowles was unique in his generation of English authors for achieving (and maintaining) both popular success and critical acclaim. Though his work peaked in critical reputation by the early 1990s, Fowles remains one of the most popular and important authors of Post war British fiction.

Unit 13: This unit will introduce you to John Fowles' metafiction *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) which is considered a period novel. In its structure and contents *The French Lieutenant's Woman* very much resembles a Victorian novel, but Fowles with his dexterity, breaks the traditional rules of narration and presents the work as an interesting post-modern narrative. Finally, the readers of this novel find that the onus rests on them to ponder upon the possible future events with the novel's open-endedness, owing to its three probable endings.

Unit 14: This unit shall introduce you to Salman Rushdie, which is a leading Indo-Anglian writer whose novel *Midnight's Children* won the Booker Prize in 1981. Salman Rushdie as a writer, is well known for his keen interest in history, the novel in mentioned could be approached from this perspective. Denial of official version of history reiterates Rushdie's postcolonial position, which he carries out to the extent of historiographic metafiction as presented in the novel Midnight's Children.

Unit 15: This unit discusses Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* in terms of its various aspects. Be it the choice of subject matter or the distinctive narrative style or both, what comes up in this novel is the

sheer mastery Rushdie has materialised. Though the novel has heralded a new dawn in Indian English fiction, it is not simply bounded to the confines of the said category; rather it extends the horizon and turns out an exemplary rendition in respect of mapping the world fiction as well.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 11: INTRODUCING METAFICTION

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Idea of Metafiction

11.4 Idea of Historiographic Metafiction

11.5 Reception of Metafiction and Historiographic Metafiction

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- define the term metafiction in the context of experimental postmodern fiction
- identify the very characteristics of a metafiction with reference to certain Metafictional works
- discuss the idea of historiographic metafiction
- comment on the reception of metafiction as a way of writing fiction

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3, and this unit introduces you to Metafiction and its different practitioners. The term Metafiction originated in an essay by the American critic and novelist William H. Gass. Usually, a writer exploring a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction or constructing fiction is referred to as 'Metafictional'. According to Patricia Waugh, the term Metafiction is given to "fictional writing" which "pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" in a self-consciously and systematic way. She also states that Metafiction draws "on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in

the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory." Due to the increased plurality of socio-cultural self-consciousness, the postmodern novelists have continuously explored several 'meta' levels of discourses. Waugh further writes that Metafiction sets contradictory worlds against each other and places are swapped when an author enters into the texts and "characters appear to step into the 'real' worlds of their authors." Metafictional writing gave way to fantastic and fabulatory extravaganzas, magic realism in the works of Italo Calvino, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Clive Sinclair, Graham Swift, D. M. Thomas and John Irving. In this unit, discussion on metafiction and historiographic metafiction shall be made from Patricia Waugh's book *Metafiction*: *The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction,* Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Post Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction,* and *Blackwell Encyclopaedia*.

11.3 IDEA OF METAFICTION

Over the last decades of the 20th century, novelists have tended to become much more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fictions. Consequently, their novels came to embody dimensions of self-reflexivity and formal uncertainty. What connects the readers to a Metafiction is that they all explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction. According to Patricia Waugh *Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. Metafiction pursues such questions how human beings reflect, construct, and mediate their experience of the world, through its formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in the terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory. If, as individuals, we now occupy 'roles' rather than 'selves', then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside

novels. If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself.

The awareness of 'meta' levels of discourse and experience is partly a consequence of an increased social and cultural self-consciousness. However, it also reflects a greater awareness within contemporary culture of the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday 'reality'. The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable. Language is an independent, self-contained system, which generates its own 'meanings'. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. 'Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction, they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction.

It needs to be mentioned that metafictional practice has become particularly prominent in the fiction of the later part of the 20th century. However, although the *term* 'metafiction' might be new, the *practice* is as old as the novel itself. This form of fiction is worth studying not only because of its contemporary emergence but also because of the insights it offers into both the representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as genre. By studying metafiction, one studies what gives the novel its identity. Patricia Waugh states that metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension, which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'.

Although this oppositional process is to some extent present in all fiction, its prominence in the contemporary novel is unique. The modern period we are living through has been singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic. Contemporary fiction clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with, and breakdown of, traditional values. Previously, as in the case of 19th century realism, the forms of fiction derived from a firm belief in a commonly experienced, objectively existing world of history. Modernist fiction, written in the earlier part of this century, responded to the initial loss of belief in such a world. Novels like Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) or James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) signalled the first widespread, overt emergence in the novel of a sense of fictitiousness: 'a sense that any attempt to represent reality could only produce selective perspectives, fictions, that is, in an epistemological, not merely in the conventional literary, sense.'

Waugh also refers to some authors who intended to write metafiction through their fictional works. Some of them are as the following and they help us to have some ideas of how a metafiction is written.

a. B. S. Johnson starts *Albert Angelo* (1964) with the words, which preface this chapter, 'Fuck all this lying'. His comment serves in the novel as much to voice a paranoid fear that his audience will misinterpret his fiction by reading it according to expectations based on the tradition of the realistic novel, as to demonstrate the artificiality of fictional form through a controlled Metafictional discourse. At the end of the book, Johnson asserts: "…a page is an area on which I place my signs I consider to communicate most clearly what I have to convey… therefore I employ within the pocket of my publisher and the patience of my printer, typographical techniques beyond the arbitrary and constricting limits of the conventional novel. To dismiss such techniques as gimmicks or to refuse to take them seriously is crassly to miss the point."

b. Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) is written to express the sense of absurdity produced by its author's paradoxical realization that 'I have no culture', and that 'I can't live without a culture anymore'. Attempts at precise linguistic description continually break down. Crude

diagrams replace language in order to express the poverty of the 'culture' which is available through representations of 'assholes', 'underpants' and 'beef burgers'. The strategy of this novel is to invert the science-fiction convention whereby humans are depicted attempting to comprehend the processes of an alien world. Here, contemporary American society *is* the 'alien world'. Vonnegut defamiliarizes the world that his readers take for granted, through the technique of employing an ex-Earthling narrator who is now living on a different planet and has set out to 'explain' the Earth to his fellow inhabitants. The defamiliarisation has more than a satiric function, however. It reveals Vonnegut's own despairing recognition of the sheer impossibility of providing a critique of commonly accepted cultural forms of representation, from *within* those very modes of representation.

c. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969) are Metafictional novels in that they employ parody self-consciously. Both take as their 'object' languages the structures of 19th century realism and of historical romance or of fairy-tales. The parody of these 'languages' functions to defamiliarize such structures by setting up various counter techniques to undermine the authority of the omniscient author, of the closure of the 'final' ending, of the definitive interpretation. Although the reader is thereby distanced from the language, the literary conventions and, ultimately, from conventional ideologies, the defamiliarization proceeds from an extremely familiar base. Such novels can thus initially be comprehended through the old structures, and can therefore be enjoyed and remain in the consciousness of a wide readership which is given a far more active role in the construction of the 'meaning' of the text than is provided either in contemporary realist novels or in novels which convert their readers into frenetic human word-processors, and which 'last' only as long as it takes to read them.



LET US KNOW

According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement called post-modernism which further exhibits a sense of crisis and loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order as that which prompted modernism. Both affirm the constructive powers of the mind in the face of apparent phenomenal chaos. Modernist self-consciousness, however, though it may draw attention to the aesthetic construction of the text, does *not* 'systematically flaunt its own condition of artifice' in the manner of contemporary metafiction. Modernism only occasionally displays features typical of postmodernism, which are as the following:

- The over-obtrusive, visibly inventing narrator (as in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969));
- Ostentatious typographic experiment (B. S. Johnson's *Travelling People* (1963), Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971));
- Explicit dramatisation of the reader (Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979));
- Chinese-box structures (Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), John Barth's *Chimera* (1972));
- Incantatory and absurd lists (Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* (1967), Gabriel Josipovici's *The Inventory* (1968));
- Over-systematised or overtly arbitrarily arranged structural devices (Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa* (1974));
- Total breakdown of temporal and spatial organization of narrative (B. S. Johnson's 'A Few Selected Sentences' (1973));
- Infinite regress (Beckett's *Watt* (1953));
- Dehumanisation of character, parodic doubles, obtrusive proper names (Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973));
- Self-reflexive images (Nabokov's mirrors, acrostics, mazes);

- Critical discussions of the story within the story (Fowles' 'The Enigma' (1974), Barth's *Sabbatical* (1982));
- Continuous undermining of specific fictional conventions (Muriel Spark's quasi-omniscient author, Fowles' very un-Victorian ending in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969));
- Use of popular genres (Richard Brautigan's A *Confederate General from Big Sur* (1964), Vonnegut's *Slaughter-house-Five* (1969)); and
- Explicit parody of previous texts whether literary or non-literary (Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew* (1979), Alan Burns's *Babel* (1969)).

In these works, the writing of the text is the most fundamentally problematic aspect of that text. Although metafiction is just one form of Post-modernism, nearly all-contemporary experimental writing displays *some* explicitly metafictional strategies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is a Metafiction? Or Why is a Metafiction so called?

Q 2: How does language function in a Metafiction?

Q 3: Give an idea of how a Metafiction works in terms of the examples provided by Patricia Waugh.

11.4 IDEA OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

The term "historiographic metafiction" was coined by Linda Hutcheon in her essay "Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern" in 1987, and then she further developed the concept in her seminal study *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) to describe "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages." According to Hutcheon, novels such as E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975) or William Kennedy's *Legs* (1975) display "a theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human

constructs (historiographic metafiction) [that] is made the grounds for [a] rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past." Historiographic metafiction thus constitutes a specific form of metafiction, which Patricia Waugh, also defined as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." However, historiographic metafiction adds a further dimension to such reflections: texts that can be subsumed under the heading not only explore the workings of literature and lay bare its ontological status as fiction, they additionally engage and unveil the parallels between writing literature and historiography–the practice of writing history–suggesting that both are acts of construction that do not reflect or naively represent reality or the past, but (re)invent and shape them from necessarily subjective and ideologically laden perspectives.

Historiographic metafiction makes use of a broad variety of thematic and formal means. In such fictional works, plots usually revolve around characters openly concerned with making sense of the past—figures such as historians, detectives, or archivists who study documents, data, and tries to arrive at an understanding of what has happened. Therefore, the action of most historiographic metafictions takes place on two different levels; the texts are usually characterized by a dual time-frame, they are set in a fictional present where one or more characters–often, first-person narrators who address specific narratees–undertake explorations of the past and frequently reflect on their activities and the epistemological problems they face. Simultaneously, however, the novels are set in a fictional past where the events took place that these (amateur or professional) historians are interested in. Sometimes, the version of the past presented in the novel is quite obviously a (re)construction by one or several of the investigators in the fictional present, sometimes the novels incorporate various conflicting versions about what has happened that stem from one or more of these investigator figures, and sometimes the story of the investigator figure simply exists alongside the historical narrative with both being related by a more or less covert narrator. Invariably, however, such a

juxtaposition of past and present "problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge" (Hutcheon 1988, 106). Accordingly, historiographic metafiction implies that the past remains ultimately inaccessible, that historical narration is necessarily an act of the imagination, and that historiography, therefore, is not a neutral account of what happened but rather a biased story determined by the needs and convictions of those who tell it.

The Metafictional nature of this kind of historical fiction is visible in its fascination with texts, documents, and narratives as fictional constructs. Historiographic metafiction therefore places a great emphasis on the discursive practices intrinsic to the writing of history, often at the expense of more conventionally teleological historical approaches (where the expected outcome influences and shapes the organization of the sequence of events leading up to that outcome). As a result, "history" is shown to be just as discursively constructed, or constructed through writing, as any other type of historical narrative, thus challenging once again the gap between history and historical fiction.

Indeed, both history and historiography (the study of the writing of history) have become sites of predilection for postmodern interrogation, while historiographic metafiction has greatly contributed to destabilizing received notions about both history and fiction, according to Hutcheon. This is visible in such texts as John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), a precursor of the genre in British literature, which evokes the historical and social mores of the 19th century in a self-conscious effort to highlight the narrative devices and authorial bias underpinning the writing of any story, and therefore the impossibility of ever achieving "historical authenticity."

Historiographic metafiction, like postmodernist fiction more generally, relies extensively on intertextuality and parody, following its fascination both with its own status as a piece of fiction, and also with other texts and discourses, particularly those of a historical nature. Parody and irony thus become powerful narrative devices that allow the text simultaneously to return to, and to distance itself from, those traditional historical narratives it

attempts to question. The authority of the latter is therefore both acknowledged and subverted: irony enables historiographic metafiction to appear to be endorsing the historical approaches promoted in those narratives, while at the same time undermining them. Furthermore, as this subversion takes place from within the parodied text/discourse, historiographic metafiction can address the latter effectively but without losing its distance from it. Parody and ironic intertextuality are also representative of the paradoxical nature of postmodern historical fiction, which draws from the very thing it seeks to contest, all the while refusing to adopt a clear discursive position. Here again John Fowles' novel is a good example of such parodic intertextuality in its reliance on, and critical attitude toward, the narrative conventions of 19th century realist fiction; Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) also uses intertextuality and metafiction in its return to World War II, and raises similar questions regarding the role of novelistic writing and subjective memory in the rendering of any historical event.

As is apparent from the examples drawn on so far, historiographic metafiction is a predominantly postmodern phenomenon. As a form of metafiction, it was a welcome venue for artists struggling at least during the 1960s and 1970s with what John Barth has famously called "the usedupness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities" after high modernism. In the field of history, the epistemological skepticism of the past decades has led various theorists to arrive at the same conclusions that historiographic metafiction reaches by fictional means. Thus, scholars like Hayden White (1973, 1978) and Dominick LaCapra (1985) have also pointed out that historians do not simply describe the past but also create stories about it. Furthermore, White, LaCapra, and others have emphasized the crucial role that ideology and the narrative templates available to the historian play in this process.



LET US KNOW

In historical studies, Hayden White (1978) has emphasised the need for historians to recognize the literariness of their work, its dependence on principles of narration

and utterance, and therefore the ideological implications underpinning their representation of the past. In parallel to this, historical fiction has attempted to deviate from its tacit requirement to respect "historical authenticity": instead of abiding by the known facts about key historical events or figures, recent historical fiction has shown a keener interest in probing the very concept of "historical truth" and its mechanics of representation. This has given birth to the kind of fiction popularly known as historigraphic metafiction.

In an essay entitled "Postmodern Afterthoughts," Linda Hutcheon (2002) has acknowledged that the fiction of today differs considerably from the texts she labelled historiographic metafiction during the 1980s. In this piece, Hutcheon treats postmodernism "as a thing of the past" and defines it as "a twentieth-century phenomenon." Yet, regardless of the question whether or not literary historians of the future will follow Hutcheon in this periodization, contemporary novels such as *Everything Is Illuminated* can only be understood as responses to historiographic metafiction. They may explore new ways of writing, but in doing so they remain intimately indebted to the insights of earlier postmodernist fiction. Therefore, the concept of historiographic metafiction remains an indispensable and powerful tool in any attempt to describe and analyse postmodernist fiction. It is best understood, however, as referring to a postmodernist subgenre of the historical novel that had its heyday during the 1970s and 1980s and that continues to influence novels of the early 21st century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Define the term Historigraphic Metafiction.

Q 5: How is the 'past' viewed in Historigraphic Metafiction?

11.5 RECEPTION OF METAFICTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

Patricia Waugh has stated that Metafiction is a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to as post-modernism. The metafictional writer John Barth has expressed a common feeling about the term 'post-modernism' as 'awkward and faintly epigonic, suggestive less of a vigorous or even interesting new direction in the old art of storytelling than of something anticlimactic, feebly following a very hard act to follow.' Post-modernism can be seen to exhibit the same sense of crisis and loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order as that which prompted modernism. Both affirm the constructive powers of the mind in the face of apparent phenomenal chaos. Modernist self-consciousness, however, though it may draw attention to the aesthetic construction of the text, does *not* 'systematically flaunt its own condition of artifice' in the manner of contemporary metafiction. (Waugh, 21).

In turning away from 'reality', however, and back to a re-examination of fictional form, novelists have discovered a surprising way out of their dilemmas and paranoia. Metafictional deconstruction has not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems. The paranoia that permeates the Metafictional writing of the sixties and seventies is therefore slowly giving way to celebration, to the discovery of new forms of the fantastic, fabulatory extravaganzas, magic realism (Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Clive Sinclair, Graham Swift, D. M. Thomas, John Irving). Novelists and critics alike have come to realize that a moment of crisis can also be seen as a moment of recognition: recognition that, although the assumptions about the novel based on an extension of a 19th century realist view of the world may no longer be viable, the novel itself is positively flourishing.

Historiographic metafiction's concern with contesting accepted notions of "historical truth" and historical representation has also found a natural affinity with 20th century feminist, Marxist and Postcolonial literary theories. The rejection of definitions of absolute "truths," which is endemic to these theoretical approaches, is in keeping with the wish to challenge traditional narratives of the past and their patriarchal, capitalist, and Eurocentric constructions of history. Such fiction highlights the misogynistic, racist, and class bias within these historical discourses, and enables the views and perspectives of previously unheard minorities to be taken into consideration. Good examples of such fiction include Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), which merges the personal with the political in its attempt to encompass India's 20th century history through the unlikely perspective of, among others, an illegitimate child born on the night of India's independence in 1947; and Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), which returns to 17th century London to narrate the Civil War from the point of view of a fearsome, but ultimately forgotten, female character.



LET US KNOW

In the last decade of the 20th century, a new trend within historical fiction called 'neo Victorian' novels invited critical attention in connection with authors such as A. S. Byatt, Sarah Waters, Alasdair Gray, Peter Ackroyd, and Beryl Bainbridge. Typically, neo-Victorian fiction presents a fascination with reimagining the 19th century in its literary, artistic, socio-political, and historical contexts, often in a self-conscious attempt to play with the narrative conventions and social/cultural values prevalent at the time. Neo-Victorian novels that came to be perceived as particularly significant in the construction of the nation's sense of self and cultural identity, is exemplified by works like A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), which re-examines the politics of 19th century national cultural identity and canon formation.

Similarly, Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992) reconsiders the significance of 19th century Darwinian Theory in an attempt to question

its persisting cultural presence in the present. The Victorian ideological definitions of race, class, gender roles, etc. come under strict scrutiny in this work, and the same are opened to parody through ironic intertextuality, in neo-Victorian fiction. As with historiographic metafiction, therefore, the neo-Victorian novel returns to the past to adopt some familiar postmodern tropes, and is similarly informed by contemporary gender, queer, and postcolonial theoretical discourses. This is the case in Fred D'Aguiar's return to the legacies of slavery and 19th century imperial discourses on race in his novel *The Longest Memory* (1994); and in Sarah Waters's novels *Affinity* (2000) and *Fingersmith* (2002), which attempt to re-inscribe the lesbian experience into the 19th century, and to redefine accepted notions of female sexual identity.

Most critical approaches to 20th century historical fiction therefore emphasize its formal links with postmodernism, and draw from recent literary theory in the examination of its content. Recently, however, the postmodern tradition has been criticized for failing to deliver the expected social and political change it had at first seemed to promise. Historiographic metafiction has come under similar criticism for lacking the subversive edge it had primarily claimed to possess, and for ultimately reinscribing, rather than challenging, the resistance of historical discourses to both re-readings and change.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: In what way, is Historiographic Metafiction critically important?

Q 7: How have the novelists been benefitted by metafictional deconstruction?



11.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have come to learn about Metafiction and Historiographic Metafiction. According to Patricia Waugh *Metafiction* is the term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. In total contrast to the historical fiction produced in the earlier part of the 20th century, historiographic metafiction is a self-conscious, or self-reflexive, type of historical novel: the process of historical research and writing is often key to its concerns and centrally staged in the plot of the novel, but it rarely leads to any clear historical finding or conclusion. This is due in part to the nature of the historical documents under examination: typically, the novel reveals how some of these have been in some way "falsified" or tampered with, while others, often of a more personal nature (such as letters, diaries, testimonies), are visibly foregrounded as biased, and therefore unreliable sources of information.



11.7 FURTHER READING

Butter, Michael. "Historiographic Metafiction" & Rousselot, Elodie. "Historical Fiction" in Shaffer, Brian W. (2001). *The Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century Fiction.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1988). "Historiographic metafiction: "the pastime of past time" in *A Poetics of Post Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London Routledge.

Waugh, Patricia. (1984).*Metafiction:* The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. *Methuen & Co. Ltd.*

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Metafiction is a kind of writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality… …it is so called because it provided a critique of their own methods of construction, examines the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, and also explores the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.

Ans to Q 2: Metafiction is concerned with the function of language in constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday 'reality'… …language is an independent, self-contained system, which generates its own 'meanings'… …the relationship of language to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention… …therefore, 'Meta' terms are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers.

Ans to Q 3: Reread Patricia Waugh's examples put in box in 11.3 Section.

Ans to Q 4: Linda Hutcheon defined historiographic metafiction as "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages."

Ans to Q 5: The version of the past is quite obviously a (re)construction by one or several of the investigators in the fictional present… …the novels incorporate various conflicting versions about what has happened that stem from one or more of these investigator figures… …the story of the investigator figure simply exists alongside the historical narrative with both being related by a more or less covert narrator.

Ans to Q 6: Such fiction contest accepted notions of "historical truth" informed by 20th century feminist, Marxist and Postcolonial literary theories… …the rejection of absolute "truths" which is endemic to these theoretical approaches, is in keeping with the wish to challenge

traditional narratives and their patriarchal, capitalist, and Eurocentric constructions of history… …such fiction highlights the misogynistic, racist, and class bias within these historical discourses, and enables the views and perspectives of previously unheard minorities to be taken into consideration.

Ans to Q 7: Metafictional deconstruction provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative… …contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems… …the paranoia that permeates the metafictional writing of the 60s and 70s slowly gave way to celebration, to the discovery of new forms of the fantastic, fabulatory extravaganzas, magic realism.



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Define the term metafiction and discuss its characteristics with reference to some of the important metafictional works.

Q 2: Discuss the causes that led to the emergence of Post-modern Metafiction in the later part of the 20th century.

Q 3: What is understood by the term Historiographic Metafiction? Discuss with suitable examples how the idea of 'history' is represented in such fiction.

Q 4: *Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. Discuss.

Q 5: Historigraphic Metafiction are "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages." Elaborate with examples.

Q 6: What are the causes of unprecedented popularity of Metafictional works in the context of the 20th century? Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 12 : JOHN FOWLES: *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANTS' WOMAN* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 John Fowles: Life and Works

12.4 Summary of the Novel *The French Lieutenants' Woman*

12.5 Critical Reception of Fowles

12.6 Let us Sum up

12.7 Further Reading

12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.9 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of John Fowles
- identify the important characteristics of Fowles as a fiction writer of the 20th century
- narrate the story of the novel in your own words
- read and appreciate the period novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in its different contexts
- critically analyse the worth of John Fowles as a post-modernist writer

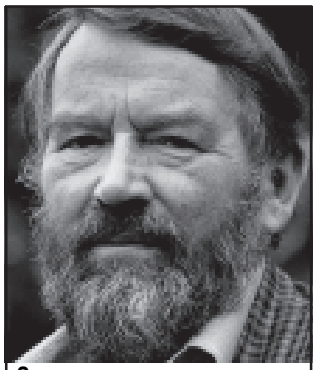
12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to John Fowles and his highly acclaimed novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* Renowned for his erudition, his experimentation with literary form, and his exceptional storytelling abilities, John Fowles was unique in his generation of English authors for achieving (and maintaining) both popular success and critical acclaim. Though his work peaked in critical reputation by the early 1990s, Fowles remains one of the most popular and important authors of Post war British fiction. You

should note that although Fowles secured his literary reputation as a novelist, he worked in a number of forms, and his non-fiction and occasional writings provide important insights into his popular and influential fiction. The most significant of these writings include *The Aristos* (1964), a philosophical treatise inspired by Heraclitus; *Wormholes* (1998), a collection of essays; *The Tree* (1979), a reflection on nature; and his critically acclaimed *Journals* (2003, 2006). He also published a number of shorter works, often accompanied by photography, and a collection of poetry. His voluminous papers are housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin. By the time you finish reading this unit, you will not only be able to discuss the life and works of Fowles, but you will also be able to address the experiments Fowles rendered into the making of his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman.*

12.3 JOHN FOWLES: LIFE AND WORKS

The following subsections are about the life and works of John Fowles the writer of the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman.*



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

His Life:

John Fowles (31 March 1926- Nov 2005) was born in Leigh-on-Sea, a small town in Essex, located 40 miles from London, in a conventional family, to Gladys May Richards and Robert John Fowles. He was the only child until he was 16 years of age. His mother originally belonged to a family based in London that moved to Westcliff-on-sea, Essex in the year 1918, when Europe was affected with Spanish Flu and a place like Essex was believed to have a healthy climate. Robert Fowles' father belonged to a family of middle-class merchants in London and after having received his legal training, he was enlisted in the Honourable Artillery Company and spent three years in service, in the trenches of Flanders during World War I. Eventually, he fell under the obligatory duties, to take over his family trade of tobacco business in order to raise his extended family. The war had left him in bad health and Richard

married Gladys after a chance meeting at a tennis club in 1924 and John Fowles was born two years later.

John Fowles was close to his mother and his cousin Peggy Fowles who also acted as his nursemaid. The conformist culture of the 1930s in his childhood made him want to "escape ever since". Fowles first attended Alleyn Count Preparatory School. He was also a student of the Bedford School, a large boarding school that prepared boys for the University. From 1939 till 1944 his time there coincided with the Second World War. He enrolled in a naval short course at Edinburgh University and completed his training in 1945 after which he was assigned military service to Okehampton Camp in the countryside near Devon for two years. The World War II ended by the end of his training, due to which he didn't have to combat in the war. After the completion of his service in 1947, he declared that the military life was not for him and subsequently he entered New College, Oxford, where he studied French for his bachelor degree and also took interest in Greek. While at Oxford, his own thoughts and his reading of the French existentialists Sartre and Camus convinced him into thinking that the world was indeed absurd, he came to believe in the will of the individual and also it was a time when a lot of his political opinions had undergone change. After his time at Oxford, he spent his first year at the University of Poitiers and by the end of the year, received two offers at once. One of the offers came from the French department at Winchester to teach French and the other was from a dilapidated school in Greece. He chose the second offer which according to him, must have looked like the most unlikely thing to do.

But, Fowles was happy to be in Greece and the year 1951 was a turning point in his life. He became an English teacher in a school called Anargyrios and Korgalenios School of Spetses located on the Peloponnesian Island of Spetsai, where he met his fellow teacher, Roy Christy's wife, Elizabeth. There he became close to his fellow exiles and wrote poems which he published later on. In 1953, when he and his colleagues tried to lodge reforms in the school, they were dismissed, as a result of which he had to return to England. The return to their home and the closeness that Elizabeth and Fowles shared in the island of Spetsai, culminated in their

marriage in 1954. Fowles took up a teaching job St. Godric's College in Hampstead, London where he taught English as a foreign language to students from other countries for nearly ten years. He took into his fold Elizabeth's child Anna, from her first marriage with Roy Christy and settled down into his family life. Fowles was never swept away with the fame and recognition that he achieved and his inclination towards rural isolation strained the relation with Elizabeth. He was much a recluse and had no taste for an increasingly materialist society.And following his desire, Fowles began to live in a remote sea side home on the southern coast of England in the small harbor town of Lyme Regis, from 1968 and due to his interest in the town's local history he was appointed as the Curator of the Lyme Regis Museum from 1979 to 1989. Despite this involvement, he was generally considered reclusive. Fowles died 5 miles from Lyme Regis in Axminster Hospital on 5 November 2005.

His Works:

After, Fowles had earned a degree in French from New College, Oxford, he had begun seriously to consider being a writer and it was the unexpected success of his debut novel *The Collector* that secured his position into professionally being one. While on the island of Spetsai, he had started to pen down poetry and to overcome a long-time repression about writing. And although he wrote several novels between 1952 and 1960 he offered none to a publisher, feeling they were lengthy and incomplete to be published. After having drafted *The Magus,*on his return to England, he completed the first draft of ***The Collector*** in just four weeks, by late 1960, and continued to revise it until the summer of 1962. The book had an intriguing story in which the character Clegg kidnaps and keeps a girl named Miranda as his captive, like his butterfly collections, all in the hope that she would eventually fall for him but the story takes an unexpected turn. Fowles then submitted the manuscript to a publisher Michael S. Howard at Jonathan Cape. The book was published and circulated in the spring of 1963 and it turned out to be an immediate best-seller, and had brought a huge amount of money for a first novel. Having earned critical acclaim and popularity for this book, Fowles started his writing career in right ernest.

The idea for his book ***The Collector*** (1963) comes from the thinking of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, according to whom mankind was, divided into two groups namely the "***aristoi***" or the good, represented by the moral and intellectual elite and the second was "***hoi polloi***" or the many, represented by the unthinking or confirming mass. It is in his ***The Aristos*** where he makes a point that the reader should try to understand that "the dividing line should run through each individual, not between individuals." In reference to the novel he stated "I tried to establish the virtual innocence of the many. Miranda, the girl he imprisoned, had very little more control than Clegg over what she was: she had well-to-do parents, a good educational opportunity, inherited aptitude and intelligence. That does not mean that she was perfect. Far from it - she was arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist slob, like so many university students. Yet if she had not died she might have become something better, the kind of being humanity so desperately need." (quoted from: John Fowles's *The Aristos,* from "Preface" to the 1968 edn)

Against the advice of his publisher, Fowles had decided that ***The Aristos*** (1964) would be the second publication, which was a collection of philosophical reflections and thoughts on art, human nature and other subjects. In 1965, in what was set to be the most studied among his work was the publication of ***The Magus***, a story of a poet Nicholas Urfe, who takes the job of a teacher on a small Greek island and is carried away by the psychological illusions of a master trickster. Fowles had worked on the draft of this novel for over a decade and among the seven novels he wrote, ***The Magus*** had achieved the state of **a cult novel** in the United States. ***The Magus*** is a traditional quest story with a teasing storyline which Fowles compared to a detective story saying: "You mislead them ideally to lead them into a greater truth…it's a trap which I hope will hook the reader." Both ***The Collector*** and ***The Magus*** were made into films in 1965 and 1968 respectively.

In 1965, Fowles moved from London to a remote farm in Dorset but due to the monotony of the isolated farmhouse, moved to Lyme Regis in Dorset with his wife, where he stayed at the Belmont House. It was here that he wrote his next novel ***The French Lieutenant's Woman*** (1969) which was very successful and well received. It was adapted into a film version in

1981 with the screenplay by Harold Pinter, a British playwright and was even nominated for Oscar. Fowles lived in Lyme Regis for the rest of his life and wrote several other works, during his time there. He also wrote a series of essays on nature as he found much solace in observing the flora and fauna of the surrounding countryside and published his book of poetry *Poems*in 1973.The books ***The Ebony Tower*** (1974), ***Daniel Martin*** (1977), ***Mantissa*** (1981), ***A Maggot*** (1985) were all written during the years at Belmont House in Lyme.

Also, he worked on translations of Marie de France's *Elidic* which inspired *The Ebony Tower*, a novella and four short stories, the protagonist of which is David Williams, an English art critic and painter. Fowles' next work *Daniel Martin*, is a lengthy bildungsroman and somewhat an autobiographical novel about a Hollywood screenwriter Danny Martin and his trysts with his love life, followed by *Mantissa*, a fable about an imaginary dialogue in the mind of an amnesiac writer Miles Green with his Muse Erato. Fowles' next work *A Maggot* can be classified as a historical fiction, mystery or as science fiction. He also wrote a range of essays, reviews and published several photographic compilations like ***Shipwreck*** (1975), ***Islands*** (1798) and ***The Tree*** (1979). His other works include ***The Enigma of Stonehenge*** (1980), ***A Short History of Lyme Regis*** (1982), ***Land*** (with Fay Godwin) (1985), ***Lyme Regis Camera*** (1990) ***Wormholes-Essays and Occasional Writings*** (1998), a collection of essays. The first biography on Fowles, ***John Fowles—A Life in Two Worlds***, and the **first volume of hisjournals** came out in 2004. Also, the **second volume of his journal** was published in 2006.For most of his life, Fowles kept a diary and today, his complete **unedited diaries** are kept at the **University Library at Exeter**.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did French Existentialism influence John Fowles?

Q 2: Do you find any connection between Fowles's novel *The Collector* and the philosophy of Heraclitus?

Q 3: Why, according to you, is Fowles's novel *The Aristos* important?

12.4 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANTS' WOMAN*

The novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* which consists of 61 chapters has been divided into three sections covering twenty chapters each in order to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of the content and the storyline. It is a must to read the text for better understanding, after going through the summaries provided, by also keeping in mind the important themes and aspects of the novel that are discussed in the unit.

Chapter 1-20

John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* opens with a quote from Thomas Hardy's poem "The Riddle" and with the description of a small English town, Lyme Regis "simply the most beautiful sea rampart on the south coast of England" Lyme Regis with its Cobb, which is a harbour quay by the seaside, forms the backdrop of the novel. Due to the healthy climate and several mineral springs, the region Lyme Regis by the sea was considered a health resort and an ideal place for vacations, the beauty of which remained unchanged for "seven hundred years of English history". Hardy's "The Riddle" is quoted in an apt way, to describe an enigmatic figure in black, who standing "solely out there, Did her gaze rest, Never elsewhere" looking intently at the sea waiting for her French lover.

The figure in black is first noticed from a distance by a curious Charles Smithson, an amateur paleontologist who happens to be in the company of his fiancée Ernestina Freeman, who brings him to the town to meet her aunt, Mrs. Tranter. On approaching closer to alarm the mysterious figure into safety, at the dangerous edge of the Cobb, by the lashing sea, Charles finds himself locked in a moment of fascination, staring at the "unforgettable" and "tragic" face of the woman. He learns that her name is Sarah Woodruff later, from Ernestina who refers to her as "poor Tragedy", revealing to him that she reputed as the "French Lieutenant's…Woman" was considered some kind of an outcast in their society and was believed to be driven into a little madness, grief and suffering "grave attacks of melancholia" in waiting for her lover the French Lieutenant, who had jilted her in love.

This brings to light the stereotypical attitudes and prejudices in1867, which the voice of the narrator compares with the mindset of 1967. Interestingly, the narrator compares and contrasts both the Victorian and the Modern period in narrating the story, while also providing enough space to the characters to play themselves. The narrator also introduces some of the important characters like Sarah Woodruff, Ernestina, Charles Smithson, Mrs. Poulteney, Mrs. Tranter, Mrs. Fairley, Sam Weller among others in the subsequent chapters and contrasts the modern century's condition of "**destructive neurosis**" with that of the "**tranquil boredom**" of the Victorian century. Charles in certain idle hours reflects on his life and the times, being rather bored with the favoured position that he finds himself in and he even reflects on his first meeting with the mysterious Sarah, which turns gradually into some sort of fascination.

On the advice of the Vicar, Mr. Forsythe, Sarah who had to do "little needle work" and live on the savings from her previous employers is taken in by the widow Mrs. Poulteney into the "large Regency house", in an act of charity, to the poor but refined governess Sarah Woodruff. But, it is more out of Mrs Poulteney's concern to save her own soul, with an inconvenient good deed rather than her sense of charity. She suspects that Sarah accepts the offer to stay in that house because of the view it provided of Lyme Bay. The Vicar in an attempt to help save Mrs. Poulteney's soul suggests Sarah's name and discloses all that he knows of her, including her family, her education and how Sarah first met the shipwrecked Lieutenant, "the Frenchman who had managed to engage Miss Woodruff's affections" during the "dreadful gale" of the previous December, while she was a governess of the Talbot's children.

A description of the "**servant class**" is provided by the narrator like the "**snob**" Sam, Charles' man-servant and the snobbish house keeper Mrs. Fairley, who acts as Mrs. Poulteney's spy and delights in reporting about Sarah's movements to her "**thwarted mistress**". But, somehow it is after meeting Sarah that for the first time Mrs. Poulteney" saw her servants with genuinely attentive "and "positively religious faces" It was at this Marlborough House ruled by Mrs. Poulteney where Sarah brought changes

by her presence and in one instance even dared to take care of Millie, the rebuked servant girl who in her weak health had forgotten her duties to water Mrs. Poulteney's ferns.

Lyme situated in the "centre of one of the rare outcrops of a stone known as blue lias" and its highly "**fossiliferous nature**" proves to be the "**Mecca for the British paleontologist**" which is why Charles who calls "**himself a Darwinist**" finds himself well-equipped and over-dressed for his scientific sojourns at the Cobb. Along the wooded Undercliff**,** Charles looks for fossilsand by chance comes across a woman's figure lying deep asleep on "a broad sloping ledge of grass, some five feet beneath the level of the plateau" realizing that it is Sarah that he intrudes upon. And he offers a "**thousand apologies**" when she wakes up in "**shock**" and "**bewilderment**". On his return to Lyme, he inquires a taciturn dairyman outside his Dairy about her, who tells him that it is the "**French Loot'n'nts Hoer**" (the term which angers Charles) frequents that path. But following that "**woodland meeting**" Charles is courteous to her when she approaches the same way, taking his hat off and addressing her as "**Madam**" with a smile.

When a distressed Mrs. Poulteney receives information of Sarah's whereabouts during daytime, she confines her outdoor strolls to places **"where it is seemly"** as Ware Commons and those wooded parts were infamous as a "**de factoLover's Lane**". That night Sarah stands at her window of her unlit bedroom, with "silent tears" and contemplates "**jumping from it**" Interestingly, the narrator brings up two central questions to the text as to"**Who is Sarah? Out of what shadows does she come?**" as she carries an aura of mystery in her persona.

The following chapters describe Charles visit to the Marlborough House accompanying the ladies, his conversation with his valet Sam and a concert at the Lyme Assembly rooms with Aunt Tranter and Ernestina. After the visit to the Marlborough House even as he knew that "**no gentleman who cares for his good name can be seen with the scarletwoman of Lyme**", Charles follows Sarah in his "**wretched grubbing among the stones**". So, in his second meeting in the Undercliff he makes conversation with her, he even suggests her to leave Lyme instead of suffering her tragedy

in waiting for the French gentleman and is baffled when he finds that she knows that her love would never return, that she had even received a letter that he was already married. After the abrupt meeting, Charles introspects and realizes he has become "**a little obsessed with Sarah…or at any rate with the enigma she presented.**" Two days after when Ernestina suffers migraine, he enjoys a "**free afternoon**" with "**the old travel-lust**" of his and finds Sarah above him, where "**a tunnel of ivy ended**" in the Undercliff. It is in this meeting that she opens up and expresses her wish to share what had happened "**eighteen months**" before, asking him for just one more visit on any afternoon. And this is when he realizes that he is about to engage in the forbidden.

This is when Charles decides to visit Dr. Grogan, an Irish elderly bachelor to talk and seek advice. Both of them bond over discussions about Sarah, several types of melancholia, women psychology, sexuality and Darwin among other things. On the next meeting in Sarah's "**secluded place**" surrounded by dense thickets, she shares the truths of her relation with Varguennes, her French lover while he was recovering from his injuries at the Talbot's home, where Sarah was a governess, her French lover. As he had wished her to go with him to France, she had even secretly lodged in an inn at Weymouth to elope with him until she realized that he was "**insincere…a liar**" and how her life had "**steeped into loneliness**" when she realized that circumstances had caused her to be the victim of his amusements. Although, he did not "**violate her against her will**", she in her double dishonor of circumstances and choice, "**married shame**" and committed a kind of personal "**suicide**" by giving herself to his "**transient gratification**". She takes it upon herself to be seen as the **French Lieutenant's Whore"** to be seen as an "**outcast**" for it set her apart from the society which was unjust in her eyes. But in his heart Charles forgave her "**unchastity**".

Chapter 21-40

The two young lovers Sam and Mary had come up seeking cover in the same thicket but luckily they didn't see Charles and Sarah there. And

this is when Charles in his fear of being discovered tells her that they "**must nevermeet alone again**". On his return to Lyme, he finds an "**orange envelope**", a telegram from his uncle Robert at Winsyatt, who "**for most important reasons**" summoned him to the family estate. That following afternoon after the secret meeting, Sarah walked back through the woods and took the path where she was easily seen by the dairyman's wife and Mrs. Fairley.

It is at Aunt Tranter's rear parlour that Charles after his return discusses with Ernestina about Uncle Robert's sudden decision to marry a certain Mrs. Bella Tomkins, a young widow. This meant that his chances to inherit the estate would be spoilt because if the two had a son in future, he would then be the heir to the estate. And to add to his despair, Ernestina lets him know about Sarah's dismissal the previous evening from the services of Marlborough House, for having violated the previously issued warning of walking in the forbidden Undercliff. And finally comes the "third shock" of the day, when in his hotel room he finds a note sealed with black wax, addressed to him that read:

"I beg you to see me one last time. I will wait this afternoon and tomorrow morning. If you do not come, I shall never trouble you again."

When an ostler rushes to deliver another note in French from Sarah, in Charles' room in Sam's presence, he under his "**mask of manservitude**" finds out what his master is up to and this is when Charles asks Sam to keep the matter from Mrs. Tranter. Charles meets Dr. Grogan and lets him know that Sarah didn't want her "**whereabouts disclosed**" and requests him to call off the search for Sarah. Dr. Grogan discusses Charles' problem making him realize that he is "**half inlove with her**". They discuss about psychology, Malthus among other things and he offers the young man a volume of medical evidence brought out by the defence about some cases of women. Charles later wonders "**why had he allowed Grogan to judge her for him**" and irresistibly takes it in his stride, to risk meeting Sarah again. Once again he finds himself entering "**the lane to the Undercliff**" and entering a barn in a little closed building to find "**hanging from a nail in an oldstall post: a black bonnet**", that indicated Sarah's presence.

And, when he comes across her in the barn, the "**tiger was in him, not in her**". Here, she confesses that she had purposely let Mrs. Fairley see her return from the Undercliff that day, knowing she would inform the same to Mrs. Poulteney. An irresistible passion takes over Charles and he takes Sarah into his embrace and kisses her in his bewilderment. To his shock and surprise, the lovers Sam and Mary discover him rush out of the barn door and in his embarrassment swears them into secrecy. He then returns to the barn and suggests her to leave for Exeter, gives her money for the same. He leaves telling her "**I shall never forget you**."

In his undecided state of mind about his marriage, he decides to go to London to see his solicitor Montague and also with the intention to inform Ernestina's father of what had transpired with his uncle. In the meantime, Sarah dismissed from the services to Mrs. Poulteney finds her modest lodgings at Exeter, where she purchases a few expensive amenities for herself in what felt like her "**first holiday of her adult life**." Charles in London has a second "**formal interview**" with Ernestina's father during which Mr. Freeman expresses his "**principal consideration**" as his "**daughter's happiness**" who in her letter to him writes:

"If you listen to Charles's nonsense for one moment, I shall make him elope with me."

And Mr. Freeman reminds him of the "**great commerce**" that Charles would "**inherit throughErnestina**" and so the marriage stands. Hence, Charles felt more trapped and discontent with "**this feeling that he was now the bought husband, his in-law's puppet**". In his dismay he visits a club and drinks champagne and punch with his acquaintances Sir Tom and a bishop's son and later visits a brothel in a narrow alley, a little away from Haymarket with them. But repelled by the exhibition of naked white bodies and the lechery of the men present there, he leaves the place in a cab. And, then in a quieter street, he notices a solitary girl who was "**not really like Sarah**", but was a vulnerable Cockney streetwalker who's name was "**Sarah**" and he asks her, to take him to her place. There he discovers that she had an illegitimate baby, who's father was a soldier in India and it is the hock that he is served that deadens his senses and no sooner he takes her in his arms and learns her name that he vomits in a spasm.

Chapter 41-61

The woman nurses him with her kindness and he leaves her place to return to Kensington where he receives two letters, one of which is from Dr. Grogan and a note from Sarah. Sam who mentions to Charles his intention to marry Mary, talks about playing one's "**cards right**", meaning that Charles had to go through marriage with Ernestina because only from the dowry that would follow, "**could he hope for his two hundred and fifty pounds**".

Charles then arrives at Aunt Tranter's house, in Lyme and reunites with his Ernestina taking her into confidence and also confessing his incident with poor Tragedy. They marry, live together although not as happily, have seven children and Charles surviving Ernestina by a decade, mourns her into the twentieth century. And "**so ends the story**" in the form of a traditional ending by the narrator. But this is only one of the possible endings as the narrator offers two other endings to the novel in the chapters starting from

Chapter 45.

In these subsequent chapters, the first ending has Charles recognize his freedom of choice and while on his way back from London decides to pass through the town of Exeter, the train station of which was nearest to Lyme Regis, where Sarah was lodging.

The proprietress Mrs. Endicott tells him on his enquiry about Sarah that she had slipped and injured her ankle in the stairs. Later when shown into her room, he finds Sarah again and his passion to possess her is reignited. It was his "**hunger of a long frustration-not merely sexual, for a whole ungovernable torrent of things banned, romance, adventure, sin, madness, animality, all these coursed wildly through him**," and he takes her into his arms. Charles confesses his real love for her and his wish to marry her and not Ernestina. It is in these moments that he realizes that "**he had forced a virgin**" and that she had lied about having given of herself to Varguennes. This is when he realizes to his disbelief that all her conducts and motives at Lyme Regis were only a lie and some sort of blackmail. She confesses to him that when she had been to Weymouth to

meet her lover, he had seen her with another woman, the kind that one couldn't mistake and after they had gone, she had walked away. The only thing that she hadn't deceived him was of her love for him, from the moment she saw him. And now she had asked him to leave.

Shaken by the entire experience, Charles in his despair finds himself alone in a Church. But in place "**of Christ's face, he saw only Sarah's**" and slowly begins to "**understand her deceit**", and writes an epistle to Sarah. He realizes that Sarah had used her "**stratagems to unblind him**" so that he would realize that he was free to make choices of his own, it had prompted him to search his conscience. In his letter he writes that his "**first necessity is therefore to terminate**" his engagement with Ernestina and that in looking forward to "**our future**", he would know "**no peace, no happiness**" till he held his "**sweet enigma**", Sarah in his arms again. But, Sam who is ordered to deliver the letter finds it addressed to '***Miss Woodruff at Endicott's family Hotel'***, and decides not to deliver the letter.

Charles arrives in Lyme and meets Ernestina, confessing his considerations of their ties and how unworthy he is of her. Ernestina is heartbroken at the change of his mind and more so when she finds out that it is due to another woman. Sam, who has his own marriage and future prospects to consider, quits his services to Charles, in the hope that he will be received by Aunt Tranter and Ernestina's father would help him. And indeed, Mrs. Tranter does consider the marriage of Sam and Mary. Charles writes to Ernestina's father and meets Dr. Grogan before he returns to Exeter, to find Sarah not expecting him but rather gone away to London. When he inquires with Mrs. Endicott he finds out that Sam had not delivered the letter as was ordered to him and that in all probability he had opened the sealed letter to read its contents.

That was the night when after many years, he knelt in prayer to find Sarah again and the next morning takes the train in search of her. A bearded man who sits opposite him, who in all probability is hinted as the narrator himself, extracts a florin from his frock pocket and spins it in order to determine the probable ending for his story.

In London, Charles receives letters from Mr. Freeman's solicitors Aubrey and Baggott and attends the hearing at the Inns of Court, to answer for his "**abominable breach of engagement**" and reads a humiliating admission of guilt from the injured party. And Charles once again resumes his search for Sarah and searches agencies for governesses, patrols Haymarket area in fear that Sarah might have submitted to prostitution, he even checks the Register of Deaths fearing her death and then abruptly decides to visit the United States.

By this time, Sam and Mary were happily married and had a baby girl. Charles' uncle was married too and had a son, thereby sealing any chances of Charles's future prospects. It was after two years since his self-exile that Charles receives a cable in his Hotel in New Orleans from Montague, his solicitor which said: "**SHE IS FOUND. LONDON. MONTAGUE.**"

Immediately, in his emotional state of joy, he enquires for the next ship to Europe. It was not Montague who had found Sarah's whereabouts but he had received the same information through the post with a sheet of paper containing the name and address and so, he had informed Charles about it, who hoped that Sarah would answer the advertisement. Mary had seen Sarah entering a house in Chelsea and it was a guilt ridden Sam, who had earlier intercepted the letter at Lyme, who had responded to the advertisement. He arrives at the address to find it is indeed Sarah's who had now blossomed into the New Woman with an "**intellectual equality in her**" and when the two met, they are at an utter loss for words. She gradually reveals that she was an **Amanuensis** or assistant and lived in quite an unconventional company in the house of her employer Dante Gabriel Rossetti and several other artists and models of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Charles finds out that inspite of her knowing about the notices and the monthly advertisements that he had published she had remained anonymous, and that she even changed her lodgings and her name to Mrs. Roughwood to avoid being discovered.

Despite all that had happened, "**behind all the rage stood the knowledge that he loved her still**" and Sarah decides not to let Charles

leave without meeting her employer's sister Miss Christina Rossetti, who holds in her arms a small child, a baby girl with a Greek name Lalage, bestowed by Mr. Dante who acted as the Godfather to Sarah and Charles' very love child. As the lilting piano takes over this moment of reunion, Sarah is in Charles' embrace and receives the child, ending on a promising note of a future together.

Chapter 61

This chapter begins with the bearded narrator in front of Mr. Gabriel Dante's residence and the reader is given the impression that "**he can hardly contain his amusement**", he takes out a Breguet, his watch, which he sets back fifteen minutes and drives off in his coach. The narrative resumes with the same piece of 'dialogue' from Chapter 60, about Charles feeling as if Sarah had victimized him in her love and her delighting in not only planting but twisting a dagger in his heart. In this version of the conversation, Sarah tells an already sufficiently injured Charles that if he insists on marrying her, it would be in knowing that she can never love him as a wife or in other words a platonic love. Sarah confesses of not wanting anyone else but Charles if she had a choice but she also clearly expresses her choice, to never share her life with anyone. Thus on his way out, he leaves the hallway in his disbelief without realizing that the child he notices in the arms of the girl, who had shown him in, is his own child. The novel ends with Charles finding himself "**reborn**" in his self realizations and a "**celibacy of the heart as total as hers**" which indicated a return to America. How Sarah emotionally takes this parting of ways is not clearly stated by the narrator but ends on the note that "**Sarah may in some ways seem to fit the role of Sphinx**". The story ends with a mysterious note with the forked endings provided by the narrator in the novel.



ACTIVITY:

Read the text of the novel. Besides using narrative shifts in many of his novels, such as in The French Lieutenant's Woman, Fowles offers multiple endings.

Based on what you discovered about the roles of Victorian men and women, which ending would be most accepted by readers during Victorian times? Which ending do you think would be best received by audiences today? Can you think of an even more updated ending?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Write briefly about the plot of the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman.*

12.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF FOWLES

Patricia Waugh in her *Metafiction* wrote: "Novels like John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969)…are in the long run to be more successful." Both are works of metafiction that employ a self-conscious parody at various levels. You will note that among the authors of post war British fiction, the works of John Fowles' received critical acclaim and popular success by the 1990s. Because his works explored questions of human existence, existential awareness and complexities in relationships, inspired by the works of the French existentialists Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung, he created characters who were placed in certain situations that would test their personal and cultural values. This can be noticed in his creation of the mysterious woman in characters like the kidnapped art student Miranda Grey in *The Collector* or the social outcast Sarah Woodruff in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Though he cuts a much smaller figure on the international stage today, John Fowles was a much-celebrated novelist in the 1970s, and his 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* anticipates in many ways the traits of the new historical fiction. Winning both the Silver Pen Award and the W. H. Smith Literary Award, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* appeared in a film adaptation in 1981 (screenplay by Harold Pinter), just in time to add a historiographical look at the Victorians to the mix of influences.



12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about the life and works of John Fowles—an English novelist of international stature critically positioned between modernism and postmodernism. His works reflect the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, among others. Often called a historiographic metafiction, his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), is a Victorian-era romance with a postmodern twist and is set in Lyme Regis, Dorset, where Fowles lived for much of his life. You have also learnt that the novel explores the fraught relationship of gentleman and amateur naturalist Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff, the former governess and independent woman with whom he falls in love. The novel builds on Fowles' authority in Victorian literature, both following and critiquing many of the conventions of period novels. Part of the novel's reputation is based on its expression of postmodern literary concerns through thematic focus on metafiction, historiography, metahistory, Marxist criticism and feminism. Stylistically and thematically, Linda Hutcheon describes the novel as an exemplar of a particular postmodern genre: historiographic metafiction. Because of the contrast between the independent Sarah Woodruff and the more stereotypical male characters, the novel often receives attention for its treatment of gender issues.



12.7 FURTHER READING

Fowles, John. (2009). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Random House Group.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1988). "Historiographic Metafiction: "The pastime of past time" in *A Poetics of Post Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London Routledge.

Shaffer, Brian W. (2001). *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Fiction.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Waugh, Patricia.(1984).*Metafiction:* The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. *Methuen & Co. Ltd.*

12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The French existentialists Sartre and Camus convinced him into thinking that the world was indeed absurd… …Fowles came to believe in the will of the individual… …

Ans to Q 2: The main idea for *The Collector* (1963) is borrowed from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus… …Heraclitus divided mankind into two groups namely the "*aristoi*" or the good, represented by the moral and intellectual elite and the second was "*hoi polloi*" or the many, represented by the unthinking or confirming mass… …

Ans to Q 3: In *The Aristos* Fowles makes a point that the reader should try to understand that "the dividing line should run through each individual, not between individuals."… …this novel is also a collection of philosophical reflections and thoughts on art, human nature and other subjects.

Ans to Q 4: The enigmatic Sarah is the central figure of the novel whom the young gentleman Charles is fascinated with… …but Charles is also engaged to be married to the rich Miss Ernestina Freeman… …thus arises the complexity and tension in their relation…. … Sarah who seemingly waits for her lover, the French Lieutenant already knows that he would never return and that he had well cheated her in love and was already married… …but what remains a speculation is her innocence about the way things take turn and the possibility of clever manipulation of the future events.



12.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is Historigraphic Metafiction? In what way, can we call *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a historiographic metafiction? Discuss.

Q 2: Read the text of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. What are the gender role expectations for Victorian women? What are the gender role expectations for Victorian men?

Q 3: Do you consider *French Lieutenant's Woman* a Metafiction? What, according to you, is Fowles's opinion regarding the novel as an art form?

Q 4: Write a note on the works of John Fowles.

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UNIT 13: JOHN FOWLES: *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANTS' WOMAN* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Reading the Novel *The French Lieutenants' Woman*

13.3.1 Major Themes

13.3.2 Fowles' Art of Characterisation

13.3.3 Fowles' Narrative Style

13.4 Let us Sum up

13.5 Further Reading

13.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.7 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain an insight into the enigmatic protagonist Sarah Woodruff, the "French Lieutenant's Woman" who is central to the entire plot of the story
- explain the themes related to the background and other significant aspects of the novel
- appreciate the novel as an excellent example of narrative, which remains mysterious to the reader with its unusual turn of events and endings.
- analyse the novel as a post modern work.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to John Fowles' metafiction *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) which is considered a period novel. The main protagonist Sarah Woodruff who is also the "French Lieutenant's woman" in the novel, is likened to Thomas Hardy's protagonist Tess in ***Tess of***

D'Urbervilles (1891), in that both are seen as "fallen women", a notion that was prevalent in the Victorian society. In its structure and contents *The French Lieutenant's Woman* very much resembles a Victorian novel, but Fowles with his dexterity, breaks the traditional rules of narration and presents the work as an interesting post-modern narrative. The locales of the small harbour town of Lyme Regis located in the southern coast of England, forms the background of the novel. Also towards the end of the novel, a figure suggesting John Fowles himself playfully appears in the narration. And, finally you will find that the onus rests on the readers to ponder upon the possible future events with the novel's open-endedness, owing to its three probable endings.

13.3 READING THE NOVEL *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANTS' WOMAN*

The central figure of the novel is the enigmatic and alluring Miss Sarah Woodruff who is the French Lieutenant's Woman herself, whom the young gentleman Charles Smithson is fascinated with, from the time he first sees her alone by the sea, at the Cobb in Lyme. But, he is also engaged to be married to the rich Miss Ernestina Freeman who brings with her a good fortune and who loves him, wanting to settle down into domesticity with him. It is out of these compulsive ties that the complexity and tension in these relationships occur. Sarah who seemingly waits in vigilance for her lover, the French Lieutenant already knows that he is never going to return and that the man was already married, cheating her in love. It is this aura of mystery around Sarah that seduces Charles to deeply fall in love with her, only to be jolted out of his certain conventional existence and realize that she is more of the incomprehensible mirage who leads him into a self-awakening. But what remains a speculation is her innocence about the way things change and the possibility of her clever manipulation of the future events. The onus is on the reader to interpret the alternative endings, constructed by the narrator of the novel. You are advised to make a thorough reading of the following subsections to have a comprehensive idea of the text. However, just to make a reference to the intellectual contexts of the

novel you should also have a quick glance at the ideas of Modernism and Postmodernism which render direct influence on the writing of this novel.

Modernism and Postmodernism:

As you are already informed, the term modernism is referred to the new and distinct kind of literature and the arts of the twentieth century from that of the nineteenth century high Victorian high culture. The period after the World War I (1914-1918) saw a radical break from the traditional modes of thinking and ways of conceiving the 'self' or the 'individual'. The major changes were brought in by the easy access to communication and technology, materialism and luxury, scientific developments and contested faith, avant-garde movements and cross-fertilisation of ideas, nuclear families and the loner in the modern world. Hence, the modern individual was subject to luxury, boredom, loneliness, doubt, newer avenues of knowledge, quest and a turn of an inward eye into the self. The year 1922 came to be located as the period of high modernism by literary historians with exemplary modernist works like T.S Eliot's*The Wasteland*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. These works subverted the earlier practices in literature by introducing the literary techniques of the stream of consciousness, use of epiphany, departure from the earlier characterisation or creation of types, violation of the traditional syntax and fragmentation in the narration. The intellectual world was redefined by certain works that introduced new ideas like Einstein's 'Special Theory of Relativity', Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Edmund Husserl's introduction of 'Phenomenology' and William James' ideas of time in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Some of the representatives among the European and the American writers are novelists like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, William Faulkner, Thomas Mann; poets like T.S Eliot, W.B Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, Marianne Moore; and the dramatists Eugene O' Neill, Bertolt Brecht, Luigi Pirandello, August Strindberg. The cultural 'avant-garde' movements challenged and broke away from the traditions of the past, and asserted the phrase "make it new" coined by Ezra Pound, in constantly creating and reinventing newer forms of art and culture.

The term postmodernism is often applied to the literature and the arts and was first used by Arnold Toynbee in 1939 in his *A Study of History.* The 'deconstruction' theories of Jacques Derrida had a major influence in opening up the process of democratisation in the postmodern world of literature, art and culture. Thus the movement was influenced by the intellectual thinkers like Derrida and Michel Foucalt who questioned the foundations of traditional beliefs or Nietzsche who had famously talked about the impossibility of 'certainty' in the nineteenth century. In questioning the ideas of a structured reality, the postmodernists did away with the ideas of the 'grand narrative' and considered 'fragments' in its place, to be more important than the 'whole'. This led to the idea that 'reality' could be only provisional, that there could be multiple realities, thereby opening up a variety of perspectives in place of a dominant one or a privileged perspective. Derrida's theories explored the same aspects and talked about the impossibility of arriving at one singular meaning, due to the playful nature of language itself, which led to a plurality of meanings, instead of a structured one. The Postmodernist thought debunked the binaries of high and low culture and instead popularised contemporary 'mass culture' like television, films, cartoons, popular music among others, thereby opening up new avenues for cultural theory. Three basic features of the postmodern thought are thus that rational assumptions were not the only limited agency of knowledge, the loss of certainty and debunking cultural elitism in which only the elite in society dominated and determined the representations of culture itself. The strand of the 'absurd' in revealing the meaninglessness of existence influenced works of dramatists like Samuel Beckett and some of the names in the postmodern literature are Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nobokov, Thomas Pynchon, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida among others. Postmodern literature saw a resistance to traditional classification and blended a variety of literary genres, incorporating metafiction and the play of meaning.

13.3.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes that you find while reading this novel.

Victorian Society and Ethos:

In his description of the period the narrator characterizes the Victorian as such: "This-the fact that every Victorian has two minds-is the one piece of equipment we must always take with us on our travels back to the nineteenth century." The Victorian society was rather a conventional one with its own prejudices, strong sense of religion, class and social hierarchy. During this time, the 'Darwin debate' had shaken the Victorian world and even though they were not easily accepted, there were several takers of these scientific evolutionary theories of man, which clashed with the religious ideas of the Genesis. For example, in the novel Charles calls himself a Darwinist but the conventional Mr. Freeman "would not let his daughter marry a man who considered his grandfather to be an ape." Charles was influenced by Darwinism which explained the principle of genetic determinism and social influence as proposed by Darwin. Perhaps, this is why he didn't blame Sarah for who she reveals herself to be. He understands after all that it is the society and circumstances that had shaped her. Thus, the narrator describes the Lyme society as rather the "two faced citizens of Lyme", where "Lyme was a town of sharp eyes" and it was the "city of the blind."

There is also a mention in the text about the prevalent social hierarchies and social revolution in the "**snobs' struggle**", the Aristocrats who inherited titles like Charles' uncle, about the Nouveau Riche or the newly rich classes flaunting their recently acquired status, very often rising to fortune from being the children of servants climbing up the social ladder, like the valet Sam Weller who plays his cards right to attain the same to some degree. Those like him who aped their masters blindly were called 'snobs', by the upper class gentlemen brigade who were known as the 'swells'. The

narration talks of how London had seen the beginnings of a "**plutocratic stratification of society**", in which "**good money**" and "**good brains**" came to be socially accepted, even though "**good blood**" was privileged. To the privileged English gentleman, "dowry-hunting was as honourable a pursuit as fox-hunting or gaming" itself.

The Victorian ethos also gets reflected in the way the insulated Victorian society is shown to have its own moral and sexual prejudices which can be reflected in the instance where young gentlemen Charles Smithson in having caused himself a "**tarnished virginity**" with a Cockney girl in London is still perceived as a sought after bachelor in his society but Sarah Woodruff who seeks to marry her French lover, who jilts her is perceived as the French Lieutenant's Whore, although she is a virgin. Thus, this reflects how there was a bias in gender in the conventional Victorian world, where it was proper for a woman to be in her domesticity, the 'angel in the house' and the upper class dandy, a gentleman exploring the world outside the confines of the four walls, was much more privileged in the social and patriarchal hierarchy.

Condition of being a Victorian Woman:

During the Victorian period, which was symbolized by Queen Victoria's rule, the women of the time were denied the suffrage, the right to sue and the right to own property. It was only during the last years of the era, that women came to be educated and associated with feminist ideas to give momentum to the woman's suffrage and cause the repeal of the discriminatory laws. In the patriarchal families and common households where usually the husband was the head, the wife's place was secondary. Fowles' narrator in the novel says that '**duty**' was a "**key concept in our understanding of the Victorian age**". A woman was to be subservient or submissive to her husband and to be the '**angel in the house**'. Thus the "**rich husband-seekers in London society**" had such a "**market for brides**" and which had no place for a woman who was considered

a "**social resentment**". If a woman was assumed to have morally or sexually erred she was condemned as "**fallen**" and if the Victorian gentleman did the same he was perceived as notoriously masculine, as "**Casanova**".

Unlike a man if any woman flouted the Victorian conventions or fell short of the society's moral expectations, they were subjected to be ostracized as the '**fallen women**'. This was because a woman was expected to be modest and maintain propriety and also restrict her sexual experience absolutely to marriage, for her to be morally and socially accepted. Such were the double standards that subjugated the Victorian woman. If a woman broke conventions or the accepted social norms or standards, she would be condemned to 'spinsterhood' and lifelong social ostracism. Such examples were replete in Victorian art and literature. In 19th century Britain, the fallen woman was the one who had surrendered her chastity. Also, there were certain cultural taboos surrounding the female body as reflected in the novel where Ernestina evolves a "**private commandment**" to suppress her self-consciousness of her own body, even as she has an innocent longing in her for the same. This conditioning came from the moral authority in the traditional Victorian family and the society. Mrs. Poulteney is also described as one such "**inhabitant of the Victorian valley of dolls.**"

Those who flouted the Victorian conventions or were different from what was considered the norm were considered as outcasts in their society. The novel is repletewith such outcasts such as the sex-workers in the brothels of London's Haymarket, institutions like the private asylums, the encampments of the gipsies, set up homes for fallen women etc.It was only gradually, that the Victorian women with education and an awakened, intellectual self-consciousness, took to the ideas of refashioning themselves as the 'liberal' woman or the New Woman like Mrs. Caroline Norton "**an ardent feminist-what we would call today a liberal**" or Sarah as an amanuensis to the radical Pre-Raphaelites Brotherhood.

Realist Fiction versus Metafiction:

The narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* comments that "fiction is woven into all…I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid" in the text. If language is what mediates our understanding of the world, then 'literary fiction', which are "worlds constructed entirely of language" facilitates in our comprehending the 'construction' of reality itself. Realistic fiction is often considered the classic, traditional mode of representation of reality and the nineteenth century realism saw fiction derive from the "commonly experienced, objectively existing world of history" (pg, 6) or from "ordered reality" (pg, 7). In the representative mode of realism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the 'individual' was integrated into the social structures but in the modernist fiction the individual opposed these set structures. Modernist fiction of the twentieth century, like the one you are reading, opposed and broke away from that traditional world view and "a sense of fictitiousness" came to influence their mode of writing as exemplified by the works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in the novels *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Ulysses* (1922) respectively. Contemporary metafiction on the other hand, not only explores the creation of fiction but also the very process of creation itself. Metafiction "does not abandon 'the real world'" (pg, 18)…….. According to this form, reality and history are subject to multiplicity. Instead of just a singular mode, there are plural ways of interpreting reality, history and to decipher meaning. Metafiction opposes "'objective' facts in the 'real' world" along with, the 'language' representing the realistic mode that sustains such a structured view of reality.



LET US KNOW

The French Lieutenant's Woman was published in 1969, it met with critical and popular success. James Aronson, in the Antioch Review, stated that with this novel, Fowles showed

himself to be "a novelist as great as Joyce Carey and E. M. Forster." Paul Edward Gray of the Yale Review called it "a modishly-framed imitation of Victorian fiction" that was nonetheless "remarkably satisfying." Not all reviewers were as pleased. Jonathan Keates of *The New Review*, after reading the work, felt "irritated at having to endure a drenching from a mixture of archly self-conscious detachment, toe-curling patronage, and a set of opinions, stated or implied, on the Victorians which I didn't share." Some critics saw the virtues of the book in comparison to his later works. Denis Donoghue, in a negative review of Daniel Martin for the New York Review of Books, notes that "The French Lieutenant's Woman is Fowles's best work because he found for that occasion a major theme of great historical and personal importance, and he commanded a language at least adequate."

While John Fowles' reputation was based mainly on his novels and their film versions, he demonstrated expertise in the fields of nature, art, science, and natural history as reflected in a body of non-fictional writings. Throughout his career, Fowles committed himself to a scholarly exploration of the place of the artist in contemporary society and sought the personal isolation and exile that he felt essential to such a search.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How, according to you, is the Victorian ethos presented in this novel?

Q 2: What would be the status of women in the Victorian society?

Q 3: What is Metafiction? In what ways, can the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* be read as a Metafiction.

13.3.2 Fowles' Art of Characterisation

The French Lieutenant's Woman was inspired by Fowles' vision of a woman staring out at the sea. Fowles' narrator in the text

admits that "it is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live." According to Fowles, the author still is God and he uses the 'omniscient author' in the narration who engages in the very process of metafiction.His narrator in the novel is of the idea that "the novelist is still a god, since he creates" even the avantgarde modern novel cannot do away with its narrator completely, only the difference is that such a god's position is one of "freedom our first principle, not authority". He says that "there is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist." The narrator stresses that in order to be free himself he has to give "their (the characters) freedoms as well."Though, he as an author can choose when to reveal and when to mystify, his characters do not have the same choice. But according to Patricia Waugh, in almost all of Fowles' novels, "the characters who deny the possibility of freedom (in existential terms) are those who compulsively label, fix, categorize and define" (page, 124). Similar to the freedom of the existential human being, fictional characters are pre-determined or written into the script and in a way they can never be free. Fowles agrees that there is a problem of freedom and yet they are 'free' in the sense that they can be recreated in people's imagination. Although history or life provides endless possible endings, he has to stick to offering limited endings, hence the three probable endings to his novel.

Sarah Woodruff:

She is the central figure of the text and the title also indicates the same, it is the same infamous term of the French Lieutenant's Woman that is referred to in the town of Lyme. She is introduced to us as a mysterious figure, a dark shape standing motionless staring out to the sea, "like a living memorial to the drowned, a figure of myth" around whom the plot of the novel revolves. In the novel there are several references and comparisons of her to the painter Grunewald's 'Mater Dolorosa', to the Virgin Mary, to Christ's face and also referred to with vulgar appellation's such as the 'French

Lieutenant's whore', 'poor Tragedy', 'loathsome succubi', 'wicked Jezebel' or 'the scarlet woman'. She is even likened to Eve who mostly escapes to the outdoors and later meets Charles in the forbidden Undercliff. She is the focus of everyone's gaze and is as much a subject of fascination as censor. When she is first looked upon by Charles, she is an almost unforgettable face, a tragic face. Sarah's father, a tenant of Lord Meriton's near Beaminster, was a farmer and a man of **"excellent principles and highly respected in the society"**. Most wisely he had chosen to provide Sarah with a good education. After he passed away, she was employed at Captain John Talbot's family at Charmouth. This is where she met with the three rescued sailors, one of whom had become her lover. She was well conversant in French, as all governesses were trained to be. The sailor was a French man and had later jilted her after engaging her affections. She in her tragic circumstances performed all work and duties well but suffered "grave attacks of melancholia". She even charms Mrs. Poulteney by her demeanour before she is taken in as a company to her. Sarah was constant at her attendance at divine services. She had a mind captured by the **"romantic literature of her adolescence"**. It is difficult to establish why she chooses to 'marry shame' or what leads her to make certain unpredictable moves. These remain an unexplained mystery in the novel. In one instance she seems to even internalize the shame that society heaps on her by uttering the words**" I am nothing, I am hardly human anymore. I am the French Lieutenant's Whore"** to Charles. But, there is a change in her in the later part of the novel she is much transformed into the New Woman with an **"intellectual equality in her"** to that of Charles. When Charles had made her know how remarkable she was to him, she even acknowledges the same saying **"Yes, I am a remarkable person."** It is rather the **"swarm of mysteries"** surrounding her that makes her such an unforgettable character in English literature.

Charles Smithson:

Charles in the novel is a 32 year old gentleman who is engaged to marry Miss Ernestina Freeman. His grandfather was a baronet who had interests in collecting books and pursuing trophies of excavation in his large acres in Wiltshire. It is from his grandfather that Charles inherited the same temperament, as he was fond of spending afternoons at Winsyatt Library with books and realizing in himself the interests of palaeontology. Charles's father was left well provided for and having lost his mother when he was a year old, he is brought up in the company of tutors and "**drill-sergeants**". Charles who was educated at Cambridge had a mind of his own, who unlike an English gentleman preferred to "**adamantly refuse to hunt the fox**", abhorred hunter's cruelty, liked to take walks instead of walking, subscribed to the 39 Articles and Darwin's ideas. In his second year at Cambridge when he sins with a Cockney girl, he in his own disbelief desires to take Holy Orders. Dispatched to Paris by his father, his intention of marriage with the Church dies. He turns an agnostic and "**what God he managed to derive from existence he foundin Nature**." After his return from the "**City of Sin**", his father passes away and he settles in a well provided home in Kensington with man-servants and staff to look after his needs. Thus, he spent a great deal of time travelling. But laziness was also Charles' distinguishing trait. He was a sought after young man "**ogled by the mamas, clapped on the back by the papas and simpered at by the girls.**" He is led into self realizations at several stages in the novel, with the way things take turns after he chooses to acknowledge his love for Sarah. He even expresses his want to be 'unFreemanish', to be out of that shadow and not to be compulsorily married into the Freeman family. But also by the end of the novel, he finds that in his unrequited love for Sarah, "**he was one of life's victims….a potential turned into fossil**."

Ernestina Freeman:

Ernestina is the only child of Mr. Freeman and niece to Mrs. Tranter, whom she visits at her home in Lyme. Growing up with much parental concern by her doting parents, she was brought up very delicately and "**she liked every luxury….but she had a very sound bourgeois sense of proportion.**" She had a proper respect for conventions, with a sense of humour, "**self-irony**", and innocent narcissistic self-contemplation in front of the mirror, having come of age. She is pretty by the standards of her period and is even likened to a "**sugar Aphrodite**" in the novel. When Charles confesses that he cannot marry her, after having given his commitment, she is left shattered. Because all she wanted was the love and protection of "**a husband, wanted children**" and a home to herself, like most women of her time. She had her own fears like "**the matter of whether he** (Charles) **had slept with other women worried her less than it might a modern girl**." Perhaps, this was because of the insulated world that she was brought up in.She has a somewhat childlike innocence that suffers a 'delusion' considering Charles more experienced and hence more mature to be her partner. Because no matter how educated or well travelled he was, when it came to taking the right measures or decisions regarding his life, he didn't know any better. Ernestina comes across as the more docile woman whose concerns are limited to the indoors or the four walls of her home, who is not worldly-wise unlike Sarah who is seen outdoors most of the time and with a head-strong persona by the end of the novel.

Some instances can be read symbolically for example the possible future of the relationof Ernestina and Charles. For instance, Ernestina orders a bunch of 'flowers' that Charles sends her, to be placed at a distance from her, disliking them up close and in contrast her easy acceptance of the piece of 'fossil' picked by him. When Sam presents a bouquet of yellow crocuses, it can be read symbolically as the flowering of Sam and Mary's love leading into marriage.

The Minor Characters in the Novel

Mrs. Poulteney: A rich elderly widow, who is stern and a strict disciplinarian at her Marlborough house.

Mr. Freeman: Ernestina's prosperous father, who had a new mansion in the Surrey pinewoods.

Mrs. Fairley: The housekeeper of Mrs. Poulteney who delights in spying on Sarah and informing her mistress of the same.

Mrs. Tranter: The aunt of Ernestina who resided at Lyme and was sufficiently kind by nature.

Sir Robert: Charles' uncle who lived at Winsyatt who had "**sufficient generations of squirearchy**"

Mrs. Tomkins: The wife of Sir Robert who gives birth to a son thereby disinheriting Charles from the property.

Dr. Grogan: An Irishman and a Doctor, who is a rational man and advises Charles with whom he shares a close bond.

Mr. Forsyth: The Vicar who advises Mrs. Poulteney to perform charity at home in order to save her soul by taking in Sarah in her household as a companion.

Miss Timble: She kept a ladies' trinket shop at the bottom of Broad Street that served as the "**information centre of the town**".

Varguennes: The French sailor who is Sarah's lover, who plays with her affections and jilts her.

Captain John Talbot: The previous employer of Sarah as a governess to look after his children.

Mrs. Talbot: The wife of Captain Talbot and the mother of two children, Paul and Virginia.

Miss Mary: The pretty maid to Mrs. Tranter, the wife of Sam and mother to a girl child.

Sam Weller: Charles' valet who remains with his master only as long as his own future prospects are secured.

Lady Cotton: She presided over a missionary society and set up a home for fallen woman.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How, according to you, is the idea of the narrator conceived by Fowles in this novel?

Q 5: Present a character sketch of Sarah Woodruff.

13.3.3 Fowles' Narrative Style

John Fowles' narrator journeys through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, back and forth in time by setting both the Victorian and the modern times against each other. But Fowles also calls the novel a 'science fiction journey back in time'. Due to such dislocations in time and constant shifts in historical contexts, his novels have also been read as historical fictions, a new trend in British fiction. In order to shake the reader's moral, conventional or aesthetic ideas, he lays open the Victorian prejudices and sexual hypocrisy. His novel draws from or "rehearses" certain elements from various authors like George Eliot's "intrusive moralizing", characterization of Charles Dickens, "the suspension between two worlds" of Arnold, the "mysterious heroine" of Hardy and by weaving the ideas of Marx, Linnaeus and Darwin as a subtext to the narration. But this is all in keeping the ideas of Roland Barthes or the French New Novelists intact in the novel. According to them, history just like fiction is under continuous re-construction, hence being only provisional and open ended. Therefore, only when one is self-consciously aware of the same, can one exercise some form of freedom in making "responsible choices".

Each of the chapters in his novel interestingly, begins with epigraphs which act like commentaries on the contents of the chapter and hence act as points of entry in some ways into the chapters. It is important to note that the narrator with his twentieth century perspective in quoting the epigraphs can only 'recount' and have a 'hindsight' in turning back time to the history of the Victorian

age, in which he locates his characters.In several instances the narrator is seen to be precocious for example, in simultaneously revealing Ernestina's death in the future "on the day that Hitler invaded Poland" while narrating her into the present context.

Narratorial invasions like, "my story", "my opinion", "I do not mean", "I believe", "I risk making Sarah sound like a bigot", "our understanding", "before you think I am" among countless other examples indicates the narrator's on and off presence. The narrator is also precocious while narrating the events, by displaying a knowledge of the future events or happenings and sometimes also foreshadowing certain events to the reader, for an instance the moment when Charles first treads into the pathway that leads to the Undercliff, it is foreshadowed by the narrator as a choice that would turn his world into a different direction altogether. In another instance the narrator is also seen to suddenly shift his perspective of time and context, while narrating from that of the Victorian to the preceding "Edwardian Age" while making comparisons of the standards of beauty of both the periods at the same time.

In the end, Fowles offers three possible endings to the novel-which are "alternatives to both Victorian morality and historical-romance conventions" (page, 123). The intriguing story is presented with a narration in a typical Victorian manner and a true picture of the Victorian England. Fowles shows how from a modern point of view, a novel should be written while also criticizing the noveau roman school and the drawbacks of literary techniques practised during this period.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How did Fowles' predecessors or contemporaries influence the narrative of this novel?

Q 7: Comment on the narrative strategies presented in this novel.



13.4 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading the unit on the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles. The text through its play of narration and the use of metafiction brings into reference the significant contexts of a post modern work. It presents an interesting take on the meta-levels of reality and problem it presents. The characters situated in the novel are created by the narrator as well as represented to be developing on their own, thereby investing them with a certain form of freedom that makes them interesting. The enigmatic Sarah Woodruff, the open endings, the play of fiction and reality make the novel an interesting read. Therefore, it is necessary for the learner to invest time in reading this monumental work, to unearth its meta-levels of significance and at the same time to struggle in being closer to the eluding enigma that makes the novel a search in itself. The background of the Victorian society in which the novel is situated in and the other significant themes related to the text have been provided for a better perspective of the text. The character sketches give an insight into the main characters and the minor characters are briefly enlisted for the learner's easy reference.



13.5 FURTHER READING

Fowles, John. (2009). *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Random House Group.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1988). "Historiographic metafiction: "The pastime of past time" in *A Poetics of Post Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London Routledge.

Shaffer, Brian W. (2001). *The Encyclopaedia of Twentieth Century Fiction.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Waugh, Patricia. (1984).*Metafiction:* The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction. *Methuen & Co. Ltd.*

13.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Representation of conventional Victorian society… …Reference to Charles' Darwin's theories and the resultant Victorian dilemma… ...reflection on the insulated Victorian society and the moral and sexual prejudices against women.

Ans to Q 2: A woman was to be subservient or submissive to her husband and the 'angel in the house'… …the "rich husband-seekers in London society" had such a "market for brides" and which had no place for woman considered as a "social resentment". If a woman was assumed to have morally or sexually erred she was condemned as "fallen" and if the Victorian gentleman did the same he was perceived in a notoriously masculine as "Casanova".

Ans to Q 3: According to Patricia Waugh, 'metafiction' as a "fictional writing" poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality in a self consciously and systematic way… …the novel is a metafiction as the narrator comments that "fiction is woven into all…I find this new reality (or unreality) more valid"… …If language is what mediates our understanding of the world, then 'literary fiction' facilitates in our comprehending the 'construction' of reality itself.

Ans to Q 4: His narrator in the novel is of the idea that "the novelist is still a god, since he creates" even the avant garde modern novel cannot do away with its narrator completely, only the difference is that such a god's position is one of "freedom our first principle, not authority".

Ans to Q 5: She is the central figure of the novel… …she is a mysterious figure, a dark shape standing motionless staring out to the sea… …she is even likened to Eve… …she is the focus of everyone's gaze… …she internalizes the shame that society heaps on her as the French Lieutenant's Whore… …but in the later part of the novel she is transformed into the New Woman with an "intellectual equality in her".

Ans to Q 6: George Eliot's "intrusive moralizing"… …characterization of Charles Dickens… … "the suspension between two worlds" of

Arnold… …the "mysterious heroine" of Hardy… …and also influence of Marx, Linnaeus and Darwin as a subtext to the narration.

Ans to Q No 7: John Fowles' narrator journeys back and forth through the nineteenth and the twentieth century… …in order to shake the reader's moral, conventional or aesthetic ideas, he lays open the Victorian prejudices and sexual hypocrisy… …Fowles begins each chapter with epigraphs which act like commentaries on the contents of the chapter… …narratorial invasions like, "my story", "my opinion", "I do not mean", "I believe", etc. indicates the narrator's constant presence…. …the narrator is also precocious while narrating the events, by displaying a knowledge of the future events or happenings and sometimes also foreshadowing certain events to the reader… …In the end, Fowles offers three possible endings



13.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Why does John Fowles provide multiple endings for the novel? Do you consider them to be equally viable? Illustrate.

Q 2: How does the novel help in understanding the Victorian attitudes towards life?

Q 3: Read the novel carefully and compare it with a novel by Thomas Hardy or Charles Dickens.

Q 4: Compare the characters of Sarah and Ernestina. In what ways are they affected by Victorian attitudes towards women?

Q 5: Discuss the character of Charles. How is Charles changed by his romance with Sarah?

Q 6: Why does Sarah allow herself to be called "the French lieutenant's whore" when in fact she never had a sexual affair with him?

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UNIT 14: SALMAN RUSHDIE: *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Salman Rushdie: Life and Works

14.4 Story of the Novel *Midnight's Children*

14.5 Critical Reception of Rushdie

14.6 Let us Sum up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.9 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

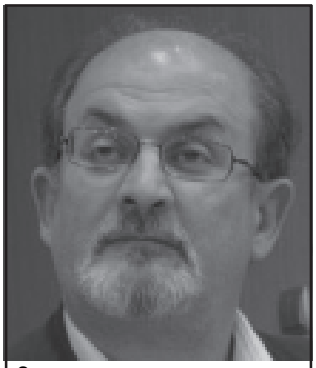
- discuss Rushdie's life and works with particular reference to his fictional and non-fictional works
- trace the basic outline of the story of *Midnight's Children*
- critical discuss the reception of Rushdie as a leading English language writer of current times
- appreciate the new space created by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in Indian English fiction writing

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit shall introduce you to Salman Rushdie and his novel *Midnight's Children* which is one of his most celebrated novels winning the Booker Prize in 1981. The novel is also categorised as the best of all the Booker winners marking the 25th and 40th anniversary of the prestigious award. However, it does not mean that the greatness of the novel is conceived of primarily because of the award it has pocketed to its credit. In reality, the novel engages many a good seminal issues giving it a distinctive

colour and position in literary circle. Given its wide-ranging reception, *The New York Review of Books* hails *Midnight's Children* as "an extraordinary novel" that has given a new orientation to fiction writing at world stage. An eminent critic named Clark Blaise also gives major thrust upon the novel saying that "the literary map of India" is going to ink up a new chapter and the entire "continent" finds a new voice with the novel. Such a strong belief in the novel, particularly the one relating to the continent is debatable since it brings into fore an essentialist formulation Rushdie himself has long been up against. Moreover, the statement refers to an underestimation of the literary output in the vernaculars, and it is more of a pro-English judgment. Putting the debate aside, what strikes us the most about the novel is its distinct approach to various subject matter and issues. Hence the novel makes an interesting reading, which could be situated at various trends of thought in recent critical schools. As Rushdie is well known for his keen interest in history, the novel could be approached from this perspective. Indeed, it is a revisionist reading of Indian history that constitutes major space in the narrative. Denial of official version of history reiterates Rushdie's postcolonial position, which he carries out to the extent of historiographic metafiction. As the presence of the past characterises historiographic metafiction, the phenomenon has its say in the form of history, which is personal, non-official, often blurred by non-remembrance or the failure of remembering. This is somewhat very much potent in breaking down barriers assigned to public-private domains. Saleem Sinai's narration of Indian history is materialized not in its unadulterated form; rather it is coloured, manipulated, and "pickled" subject to change and, if required, rectification. Hence, the pickle factory introduced into the novel is a metaphor establishing the impossibility involved in presenting things in fundamental spirit.

14.3 SALMAN RUSHDIE: LIFE AND WORKS



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

A well-known personality in world fiction today, Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947 in Bombay. Belonged as he is to a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent, Rushdie enjoyed the liberal outlook the members of the family would like to maintain at home and the larger spectrum of society as well. His father, Anis Ahmed Rushdie was a Cambridge-educated lawyer turning his attention to business. The name of his mother was Negin Bhatt. Rushdie was the eldest of four siblings. Showcasing his talent and inquisitive bent of mind right early in his life, Rushdie's alma mater was Cathedral School followed by John Connan School in Bombay. Subsequently, he got admitted into the prestigious Rugby School in Warwickshire, and availed many a good lesson pertaining to various subjects. Though his stay at Rugby was not sweet memorizing, given the prevalence of racism, he confessed his indebtedness to the institution in respect of education and learning. However, racism was not a hindrance to his pursuit of higher learning at King's College, Cambridge, where he met a number of influential thinkers. Here he took a degree in history in 1968. He lived in England from 1961 to 2000 with exception to a few occasional visits to India and Pakistan. He has been married four times, and has two sons, Zafar and Milan. He now lives in the United States of America. During his stay in England, he first worked in a fringe theatre and then as a copywriter in an advertising agency.

Rushdie is very much open to the developments all around, and hence his literary career is fabricated with myriad of issues and perspectives. Indeed, he carried out an uncompromising zeal and protested against all sorts of injustice and discrimination. Global politics, especially geo-political developments draw his attention at the earliest. For instance, in the 1980s in the UK, he supported the Labour Party and stood in favour of breaking down the shackle of racial discrimination. Similarly, he expressed satisfaction

at the removal of the Taliban from Afghanistan. He did not like the war in Iraq and the exclusive nature of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India. What he stands for is the mandate of a secular human being and a society free of all anti-human forces.

Till date, Rushdie has a good number of texts to his credit. Though he started his writing career in a fringe theatre and as a copywriter, his real gusto has been for fiction and non-fiction writing. As such, he arrived at the scene with *Grimus* (1975), a fantastical science fiction par excellence. Drawing on a twelfth century Sufi poem by the name of "The Conference of Birds", the novel is an anagram of the name 'Simurg' meaning a large, wise and fabled bird in Persian mythology. The novel is followed by his magnum opus *Midnight's Children* (1981), the narrative of which ranges from the infamous Jallainwala Bagh Massacre till the imposition of the Emergency during the rule of Indira Gandhi. A rich amalgam of magic, farce, symbolism and allegory, the novel places history in association with fiction with the story of Saleem Sinai and the one thousand children, born at the stroke of midnight when India achieved independence, running parallel to the social and political destiny of the new nation.

Then he wrote *Shame* (1983) taking the socio-political turmoil of Pakistan into account. The clash between military and civilian rule and the culture of shame and honour affecting the concerned are highly allegorical in nature. With Omar Khayyam Shakil, a bicultural narrator, recounting the events, the text introduces Hyder Raza and Iskander Harappa, the fictional recreations of President Zia-ul-Haq and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is one of his most controversial novels, attacked primarily for the alleged blasphemy against Islam. There are three distinct plots constituting a major space in the novel. The first one is that of two actors namely Gibreel Farishta, who has played numerous roles in scriptural movies of all faiths, and Saladin Chamcha, who is a stage radio actor accumulating vast experience to his credit. The second plot is that of Mahound, a fictionalized representation of Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. And the third plot is that of a mystic named Ayesha whose meeting with Archangel Gabriel proves disastrous as she leads the villagers

to the Arabian Sea and getting drowned despite the assurances of Gabriel regarding their safe passage to the sea and consequently to Mecca. However, setting aside the controversy, the novel may be studied as an incredible rendition of the immigrants' problem, especially racial discrimination at the hands of the British.

When controversy had been at the peak with the fatwa being imposed upon, Rushdie published *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1900) in a fairy-tale manner. Very much popular with children, the novel recounts the adventure of Haroun, who along with the army of Gup City throws out Khattam-Shud from the city of Chup meaning silence. As Khattam-Shud pollutes the Ocean of Notions, the main source of stories for Haroun's story-telling father, Rashid, Haroun's successful mission at overthrowing the pollutant establishes the importance of stories in one's life. Indeed, it is through stories or narrative that one's existence is felt in every aspect of life.

Rushdie's next major novel is *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), and it is through the Zogoiby family saga that he recounts the failure of pluralism and multiculturalism in a country like India. Here too, the theme of good versus evil is repeated with the commentary on India's politics getting due focus. The narrator-cum protagonist Moraes Zogoiby, who is affected with a disease that ages his body at twice the normal rate, witnesses the darker aspect of life right from his father's spice business to the more profitable job in drug trading and smuggling.

Next novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) presents the love story of Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama with the former being dead when the narrative begins. Cama's search for the love in the extraordinary life of music forms a fascinating space in the narrative. *Fury* (2001) is his first major novel completely set in the west. Malik Solanka, a doll maker, leaves England for New York nurturing the romantic idea of leaving the past behind. Contrary to this, he experiences fury as an inseparable entity both within and without. With *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie returns to India taking Kashmir as a major theme. There is a triangle that most of the Indo-English writers seem to be obsessed with. Shalimar is a Muslim; he is in love with Boonyi, a Hindu, and his rival is Jewish Max Ophuls. Imbued with

melodramatic elements as the novel is, what is unusual is the characters' failure of moral responsibility.

His next venture *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) is basically focused on trans-national migrants and the cultural alienation felt and experienced by the concerned. With Niccolo Vespucci visiting the Court of Akbar the Great and claiming himself to be the child of the lost Mughal Princess Qarakoz or Lady Black Eyes, the novel is more of the experience of exile and the series of changes that accompany such a phenomenon. This work of excellence was followed by *Joseph Anton* (2012), a memoir written under the pseudonym as used in the title. While in hiding following the period of the *fatwa*, Rushdie used the name for personal activity. The memoir provides us with vital information about the life of the novelist and also the background of various literary undertakings by him.

Next novel *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015) is another significant addition to his illustrious career. Latest novel *The Golden House* (2017) recounts the story of a wealthy family from Rushdie's hometown Mumbai. Desperately trying to forget the 26/11 attack to reinvent in New York city, the family does have bitter experience about the political upheavals in recent US history. Documenting socio-political events like the rise of the ultra-conservative Tea Party, the Gamergate scandal, the novel makes an interesting reading.

Besides the novels, Rushdie also has written one collection of short stories, *East, West* (1994), and a documentary entitled *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1987). His numerous literary reviews and essays are included in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), and *Step Across this Line: Collected Non Fiction* (2002). His non-fiction works give us valuable insights into fiction writing and the various issues as embedded.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What type of family back up Rushdie enjoys during his childhood?

Q 2: How much was Rushdie influenced in his Rugby and Cambridge days?

Q 3: How would you locate *Midnight's Children* in contemporary Indian fiction writing?

Q 4: What is your approach to the accusation of blasphemy brought against Rushdie?

14.4 STORY OF THE NOVEL *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* recounts the longer span of India's socio-historical and political developments ranging from the infamous Jallianwala Bagh Massacre till the lifting of the emergency in the late 1970s. This has been done introducing Saleem Sinai as narrator, who is born precisely on the stroke of midnight when India got independence from the British rule. Including himself, there are one thousand one children born at the historic moment, and interestingly they have respective talent showcasing the possibilities the new nation-state is capable of. There is a close bond between the children and the nation since both of them are newly created. Saleem is very much candid saying, "…I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country." His grandfather, Dr. Aadam Aziz is an interesting personality whose stay in Germany pursuing learning changes his outlook and finds it hard to adjust himself to native culture. After his return from Germany, he hardly concentrates on tradition-laden prayer as it prevails in society. In contrast to Dr. Aziz, the text engages the boatman Tai, who expresses disgust at foreign culture and influence. Indeed Tai is very much concerned with ethnic identity, and a separatist ideology always conditions his existence. He says, "Kashmiris are different…we are not like Indians, always making battles."

Dr. Aziz's approach to Naseem Ghani through a perforated sheet is a metaphor standing for presenting something in microcosm, not in whole. Despite his love, he never succeeds in seeing her face. It is through the parts that he forms an image of the whole. In the meantime, the Muslim League becomes powerful and the followers are hell bent on demanding a separate country. To this, Mian Abdullah opposes in the strongest terms. Unfortunately, his secular ambience is rejected and consequently killed with his right hand Nadir Khan being scarcely saved. Dr. Aziz is closely

associated with them, and this has brought public history into contact with personal history. Further Nadir Khan's marriage with Dr. Aziz's second daughter, Mumtaz gives this relation a firm base. His eldest daughter, Alia and the youngest Emerald get engaged to Ahmed Sinai and Major Zukfiqar respectively. Getting married, Alia has been christened as Amina Sinai, the rearing mother of Saleem Sinai. Lifafa Das' peepshow, a novel way of exhibiting small pictures shown through magnifying glasses, is a significant episode warranting a shrewd and observant eye to attain the details. Ahmed and Amina Sinai are intended to buy a house owed by a British by the name of William Methwold. The latter exhibits his capitalist attitude and wants to retain some of the features of the house. It relates to the clutch of the colonizers even after handing over the political reign. Though Ahmed Sinai is a successful businessman, he finds it hard to sustain the stature since his property has been confiscated going against the mandate of a secular society.

In course of time, Ahmed Sinai turns out white, and this shows the residues of colonial air or the hold of the Europeans in new forms. Including Saleem, there are one thousand and one children born between 12 to 1 a.m. on Aug. 15, 1947. However, all of them do not survive since malnutrition, disease and misfortune cost their life and as many as 420 died, and the rest 581 survived. Saleem becomes the central figure of all the midnight's children. Hence, the Midnight's Children Conference is formed, the prime agenda being co-ordination among the children. The conference does not last long as it soon disintegrates. As developments of national interest have bearing on private life, it may also turn out the other way round. Commander Sabarmati's murder of his wife and Homi Catrack ignites so much public ruckus that the entire nation involves in it. Recounting India's political and historical developments is an uncontested aspect to Saleem. However, he also becomes a part of Pakistan's history when General Zulfiqar summons him to attend the occasion meant for sending President Iskander Mirza to exile following Commander-in-Chief Ayub Khan's directives. As the narrative progresses, everything starts crumbling. For instance, the rage of Saleem's spinster aunt, Alia Aziz puts the condition of Pakistan in peril. Moreover,

Amina's getting pregnant at the age of 42 or Ahmed Sinai's total failure at the business validates this state of affairs. This personal history finds its ramification in the disorder observed in the wake of the war with Pakistan in 1965. Unfortunately, the war with Pakistan cost the life of Saleem's family members. Rushdie's gusto for satire is very much pronounced in the novel. For instance, his religious satire comes into effect when Ayooba Baloch, Shaheed, and Farooq, three young Pakistani soldiers, come under the exotic influence of goddess Kali in the cave of the Sundarbans.

Like Saleem's parents, his son does have the same condition, i.e. the mixed parentage. Though society knows Saleem and Parvati as parents, their son, Aadam Sinai is born out of the relationship between the latter and Shiva. Interestingly, he is born when Emergency is clamped upon India by Indira Gandhi following the impasse conditioned by the Janata Morcha as it opposes her political leadership. Once again, public event gets intertwined with the personal one. Speaking of his son's disease, Saleem observes, "...our private emergency was not unconnected with the larger, macrocosmic disease, under whose influence the sun had become as pallid and diseased as our son." Despite all sorts of misfortune and misconception, Saleem wants to stay connected to history or the past. When he loses the silver spittoon in an eviction drive, he laments the blur it would create on his connection to history. Ironically, Saleem's visit to the brothel is somehow assumed as an attempt at defying history and genuine identity since this is a place "without faces or names; here people have no memories, families or past…"



LET US KNOW

Rushdie has been a votary of metafiction, and this aspect, among host of others, brings him closer to postmodernist perspective his writings constantly warrant. The epical span of the novel and the multi-layered discourse bring into being polyphonic structures, and this phenomenon breaks down the essentialist and originary ideas usually assigned to various

discourses. Instead of a chronological order of things and issues, there is a free-flowing, fluid and timeless patterns of history, nation etc. that Rushdie convincingly deals with. Saleem's narration is self-reflexive, self-conscious, at times paradoxical and critical. Hence, the novel is unanimously accepted as something about itself and about other literature as well. Given the engagement of parody and intertexuality of history, which is an inseparable part of historiographic metafiction, *Midnight's Children* stands tall since the political, social and cultural domains of India have been presented in the mode of parody, as the novelist thinks it appropriate to do the same. Moreover, public history of the country is related to the personal one, which has made it subject to many versions of history. In fact, Rushdie's approach to history in its non-official parlance and conditioning is equally applicable to other issues as well. For instance, his views on homeland that he has left behind years back is unfailingly concerned with plural or multiple versions. In his *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*, Rushdie talks about homeland in its imaginative or fictional rendering, and this turns out more real than a realistic portrayal.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Why are the life of Saleem and the rest of the midnight's children seen against the backdrop of history?

Q 6: How would you trace the rootedness and rootlessness in the personality of Dr. Aadam Aziz?

Q 7: How is the secular fabric conditioning the life of the Sinai family?

Q 8: Write a note on the Midnight's Children's Conference.

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF RUSHDIE

Rushdie is perhaps one of the most worked-out novelists drawing wide-ranging interest from critics as well as well-wishers. On the one hand, both his life and writing claim much recognition and accolade, while on the

other, unparalleled criticism has been levied upon him, prime cause being the alleged blasphemy and approach to a sensitive issue like religion. His relentless contention against an essentialist, closed, official, monolithic, and originary rendering of various issues and subject matter makes his writing worth counting, which at times puts him into utter limbo as well. If his stature as a novelist is firmly established with *Midnight's Children,* it is *The Satanic Verses* that engages him in the whole range of controversy, and the development is very unfortunate sine it undervalues some of the striking features his writing upholds. Still Rushdie occupies a position of a dignity that is simply astonishing. Given the epic grandeur of *Midnight's Children*, Robert Taubman talks about the rich amalgam of family history, fantasy, allegory, political satire, and, above all, a quest motif and self-examination most of the major characters would like to carry out to the utmost. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her edited work, *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings* observes high of its postcolonial colouring that subverts the received versions of historiography, and a postmodernist thrust upon decentering and hybridity covers a considerable space in the narrative. As these trends have been much in vogue, Rushdie comes out relevant in terms of addressing them in an incredible manner. This has been given further edge with Rushdie harping upon metafiction as a preferred area in writing. Keith Wilson makes an in-depth study on this aspect and brings out many a good insight into his texts. Referring to *Midnight's Children*, Wilson observes that the novel is about itself, and there is an abundance of self-reflexive, self-conscious, and even paradoxical narrative enterprise. Engagement of parody and intertexuality of history characterize much of Rushdie's writing. Metafiction being a postmodernist phenomenon is well executed by Rushdie, which has been a point of major discussion among the critics.

Rushdie's rejection of public-private barriers, as also other barriers, is one of the preferred areas most of the critics have taken note of. The stance appears in opposition to the colonialist and other self-assuring ideologies as rampant in socio-political scene. Andrew Gaedtke, in his essay on "Halluci-nation: Mental Illness, Modernity, and Metaphoricity in Salman

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*", talks about the mixed space consisting of Saleem and the larger spectrum of nation. To quote: "Born at the precise hour of India's emergence as an independent nation, Saleem Sinai finds himself endowed with the ability to 'tune-in' to the thoughts of his fellow citizens. Saleem's mental reception extends to the borders of the young dominion- a condition that transforms his mind into a forum for a chaotic, national conversation." This phenomenon brings into fore a new perspective to historiography undermining its official and formal rendition. Another vital area of Rushdie is the use of symbol and metaphor, the purpose being the exploration of some hidden issues he strives to bring to the limelight. In most of the writings on him and also his interviews, there is a constant reference to symbol and metaphor, and how they impact various issues being dealt with. However, a critic like Clare Barker cautions the readers of the tendency, and the way it may deter one's approach to the texts in respect of focusing the significant issues. Citing *Midnight's Children* and its readership, he says that "symbolic readings of *Midnight's Children* problematically sideline its keen interest in the material nature of embodied experience: analysis of diversity within the Indian body *politic* obscures Rushdie's explorations of the *human* body and the vast spectrum of abilities and disabilities found within a nation's citizenry."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the major issues in Rushdie's writing that most of critical observations engage?

Q 10: How is historiography viewed in *Midnight's Children* by the critics?



14.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that the Indian-origin writer Salman Rushdie has given a new orientation to Indian writing in English. His publication of *Midnight's Children* attains recognition worldwide

getting the Booker Prize in 1981. Given the magnanimity of the novel, entire continent is thought of having a voice. This unit has introduced you to the interesting story of *Midnight's Children* in which Saleem Sinai, the narrator, is mysteriously born at the precise hour of India's independence, and the novelist makes a perfect blend of private and public life, while also providing a renewed interest in historiography. *Midnight's Children* is a wonderful novel recounting the life of the Sinais or the Azizes in close relation to the socio-political and historical contexts. There is fine mixture of private and public life in good proportion. Introduction of major women characters is equally interesting. Amina Sinai, Mary Pereira, Parvati, Padma, among many others, encapsulate many a significant vital issue in the novel. While narrating the incidents, Saleem's constant address to Padma whether the narrative is worth counting sets up the dignity assigned to female characters in the novel. Rushdie has been one of the most worked-out novelists at the world stage. Vital issues like the postcolonial nation state, hybridity, historiographic metafiction, parody, metaphor, Indian body politic etc, have been well documented by most of the critics. Besides, the use of parody, intertexuality of history mingled with self-reflexive, self-conscious, and often critical narrative enterprise reiterate Rushdie's preference for metafiction in his writing.



14.7 FURTHER READING

Brennan, Timothy. (1989). *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation.* London: Macmillan,

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. (Ed). (2003). *Rushdie's Midnight's Children—A Book of Readings.* Delhi: Pencraft International.

Rao, M. Madhusudhana. (1990). "Quest for Identity: A Study of the Narrative in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children". The Literary Criterion*. Vol. 25, No. 4.

Walsh, William. (1995). "India and the Novel." Boris Ford (Ed) *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Orwell to Naipaul.* Vol. 8, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Born to a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent, Rushdie enjoys a liberal back up during his childhood… …unlike most of the orthodox or dogmatic mind set of his family members, his family members were receptive… …his father, apart from being a successful businessman, was a Cambridge-educated personality… …mother, Negin also showcased a tendency to adapt whatever good comes into effect.

Ans to Q 2: Rushdie was largely influenced during his Rugby and Cambridge days… …having done schooling at home town at the initial stage, he quenches his thirst for knowledge at the famous Rugby School… …faced racism… …much of his political commentary sets strong dissent against this inhuman development… …his stay at the King's College, Cambridge dispels the dark episode of racism and he enjoyed pleasant moment pursuing higher learning… …association with E. M. Forster went a long way in directing his pursuit of learning… …his interest in history is coupled with distinctive approach that undermines the conventional mode of thinking.

Ans to Q 3: *Midnight's Children* enjoys a distinctive position in Indian Writing in English… …in addition to the novel approach to subject matter, his use of the English language keeping open to the sentiment and mood of the people of India imparts a new dignity… …eminent writer, Anita Desai speaks very high of Rushdie's novelty of treatment… …MC engages a perfect amalgam of history, myth, folk culture, magic realism, politics etc, in an enviable manner.

Ans to Q 4: With *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie enters the whole gamut of controversy… … on Feb 14, 1989 *fatwa* was imposed upon him by the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran… …the charge being his intentional move against the Islam… …it was called blasphemy… …largely political than critical… …in academics, the allegation flares up much discussion… …Gauri Viswanathan observes that "it (blasphemy) has

usefulness in providing an index to the uneven development of world societies, as well as establishing the status of their laws in guaranteeing fundamental liberties of speech and the degree of tolerance that their civil societies are inclined to show."

Ans to Q 5: In his Cambridge days, history was his chosen area of study… …in his view, history is not a dead past… …however, it is not the unadulterated form of history that he strives to focus… …rather in its manipulated, fragmented, coloured, conditioned parlance… …showing Saleem and the rest one thousand children against the backdrop of history, the novel undermines the strict public-private barriers and the official version of historiography… …moreover, selection of the tumultuous phase of Indian history in the 20th century from the onset of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre till the later part of the Emergency clamped by Indira Gandhi is significant… …the Nehruvian concept of the nation-state and its history is seen with a sceptical eye…

Ans to Q 6: The ideas of rootedness and rootlessness are very significant in the novel… …if the boatman Tai is uncompromisingly rooted in his *Kashmiriyat*, Dr. Aziz inherits both the developments… …his foreign education finds it hard to adjust to the native tradition… …on the other, he is not completely free of the customs and code of belief… …his dislike for Nadir Khan and second daughter Mumtaz for not having children after two years of marriage establishes this point… …the dualism relates to the conditions people mostly experience in present context when we talk about diaspora or trans-national movements across the globe.

Ans to Q 7: Secular fabric of life impacts the Sinai family to a greater deal… …upholding this ideal is significant, especially in view of intolerance and communal violence impacting society… …Amina Sinai's protection to Lifafa Das when the latter falls victim to the rage of the Muslims at Chandni Chowk refers to her secular bent of mind… … though a minor, Saleem also sustains the ideal that finds the opposite

of its postulation in Shiva… …in contrast to Saleem, Shiva follows discriminatory practices and divisive policies.

Ans to Q 8: The Midnight's Children Conference is a platform of all the children born on the stroke of midnight when India got independence from the British colonial rule… …Saleem bears the responsibility to maintain correlation among the children who are gifted one way or the other… …his absolute control is not supported by his anti-thesis Shiva… …he says to Saleem, "you can't run the Conference; without me, they won't even be able to listen to you!"… …ironically, the conference dies out in the succeeding phase… …the impossibility of binding people into a common platform is well documented here…

Ans to Q 9: It is widely known that Rushdie is one of the most worked-out novelists… …every aspect of his writing engages much discussion among the critics… …of many a good issue, history, politics, representation of metropolis, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, hybridity, metafiction, parody, subaltern dynamics, symbol, metaphor etc. have been approached in a greater degree… …focusing major issues by the critics makes his writing more interesting… …indeed the critics' concern for various aspects as represented relates how far-reaching influence he has exerted upon contemporary thinking.

Ans to Q 10: Undeniably, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* engages historiography as a preferred area… …historiography not in its official rendition, but its non-official, subjective and constructed formats… …dealing with or recounting history from the point of view of a child, someone not coming into the mainstream recorder of history, the novel also brings into limelight the taste of subaltern discourses of history… …blurring the personal-public barriers in history writing involves the postmodernist conditioning as well.



14.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1. How does Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* initiate a new trend in Indian writing in English? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 2. Would you say that Rushdie's personal life affected his writing to a great extent? How far is it applicable to a writer claiming himself from a postmodernist viewpoint?

Q 3. How is history represented in *Midnight's Children*? What kind of similarity do you notice between history and fiction? Discuss.

Q 4. Given the accomplishment of nation and nationality, would you consider *Midnight's Children* as an allegory of nation? Give a justified answer.

Q 5. How do secular and religious ideas affect the characters in the novel? What kind of society is envisioned in the novel?

Q 6. What is your approach to the ideas of rootedness and rootlessness as presented in the novel? What does Rushdie want to highlight in the postmodernist context? Discuss in detail.

Q 7. Write a note on the gender issues as raised in the novel. How are they relevant to Rushdie's macro narratives?

Q 8. What are the major critical practices bestowed on Rushdie? Examine their prime concerns relating to his writing?

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UNIT 15: SALMAN RUSHDIE: *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Reading the novel *Midnight's Children*

15.3.1 Major Themes

15.3.2 Rushdie's Art of Characterisation

15.3.3 Rushdie's Narrative Style

15.4 Let us Sum up

15.5 Further Reading

15.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.7 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read the novel in terms of its various important aspects
- discuss the important themes of the novel
- explain Rushdie's mastery over the art of characterisation
- describe Rushdie's narrative style used in the novel
- make an assessment of Rushdie as an important English language author through your reading of the novel *Midnight's Children*

15.2 INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the fact that Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has curved a niche on the world literary scene that is unprecedented on many fronts. Be it the choice of subject matter or the distinctive narrative style or both, what comes up is the sheer mastery he has materialised, and that is so in an enviable manner. Though the novel has heralded a new dawn in Indian English fiction, it is not simply bounded to the confines of the said category; rather it extends the horizon and turns out an exemplary rendition

in respect of mapping the world fiction as well. The greatness of the novel is not simply the matter of the Booker Prize; in reality, the novel touch Rushdie has imparted, especially to the use of a global language in engaging the mood and sentiment of the newly formed Indian nation state is worth remembering. Given such a magnitude the novel has scaled, it is imperative that meticulous reading is given the topmost priority. While reading, it comes to the purview that the text engages a number of chapters, in total thirty (30), each of which dealing with the tumultuous history and politics of India in close connection with individuals, and the way they are influenced by developments of public interest and vice versa. This has been made more interesting with the fabric of magic realism the novelist finds himself at a comfort zone. Like other literary giants in this category including Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Gunter Grass, Rushdie also makes use of, significantly as one of the postcolonial devices. In addition, he is very much successful in capitalizing the scope offered under the belt of magic realism. This unit shall help you to discuss the novel *Midnight's Children* in terms of the various important aspects.

15.3 READING THE NOVEL *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*

It is widely known that Rushdie presents a panoramic view of the Indian sub-continent with myriad of political, historical, social, and cultural milieus in *Midnight's Children*. Taking such a magnanimous effort into account, he adopts the technique of a family saga, and through the means of relating their stories and narratives, the larger spectra of issues of public concern are noticeably referred to. This novel technique caters to the dual taste of the reading public, besides facilitating ideas of historiography, especially in the postcolonial and postmodernist parlance. The shrewd mix up of family and the nation seems to be a challenge to the official and originary trends of representing things and issues. The essentialist and exclusive bent of representation is something Rushdie discards in the novel, and both the family and the nation have been looked upon from this perspective. The three generations of the Sinai family and a disintegrated, fragmented and coloured nation constitute the very gist in the narrative.

Though one way or the other, the novel appears to have a close bond with the nation, and such a conditioning relates to the controversial Fredric Jameson's generalised observation regarding all "third world" texts as *national allegories*. It is known that Jameson's is the stance that has flared up much dissent among the academics, perhaps most powerfully with Ijaz Ahmad. For him, Jameson's too simplistic a comment brackets all "third world" texts as national allegories, and it relates to the shallow knowledge he is in possession of. Indeed Jameson's observation is based on writing in English, completely missing the output in the vernaculars. However, setting aside the debate centering the major thrust on national allegories, we cannot rule out the presence of the nation in the text, albeit in a different colouring. It is not the Nehruvian idea of the nation as a homogenous and unitary entity; rather as a heterogeneous and constantly shifting body in which sticking to a distinct, dominant, and singular ideology is a misnomer.

The tumultuous history of India in the 20th century is a major area of interest Rushdie executes in the novel. Dealing with history in one's literary pursuit is not new; it goes far back. What is new with Rushdie is the recounting of history with the lens of a person born mysteriously at the stroke of midnight when India inks up a new chapter in her long and arduous run. As such official and recorded history that gained due momentum in the colonial phase is not taken into count, and the self-reflexive nature of historiography introduced into the novel orients it towards the level of metafiction. This postmodernist device goes a long way in situating Rushdie in the present context. The metafictional fabric gets further vent in the distinctive usage of narrative, and some other vital developments like hybridity. The contradictory and often paradoxical narrative strategies of Saleem Sinai are effective measures in realizing metafictional colouring in an enviable manner. Despite Saleem's usual self-assuring and self-justifying position, keeping constant company with Padma and asking her to look into the narrative is contradictory in nature. In addition to this, a kind of polyphonic structure characterizes the novel to a great extent. Though Saleem is the narrator and the narrative structure depends largely upon his narrativising acumen, other characters having distinctive voices are not

sidelined. Instead, they have their equal say, which impairs the dominant authorial position. In this context, French poststructuralist critic Roland Barthes' a bit radical view about the "death of the author" may be referred to. Indeed Rushdie has taken up so many issues of public concern that the self-assuring tendency of being an author bears the least attention, and most often getting sidelined.

It is true that Rushdie's writing inherits the tag of postcolonial condition, and he looks upon this aspect, not in a conventional manner or what others usually take for granted. Interestingly, the contradictory nature of postcolonial condition is something that he represents in his writing. As in *Midnight's Children*, the romantic concept of the nation state in postcolonial context is made fun of since everything does not turn out good as it is expected. When stark criticism is laid upon the colonial juggernaut particularly in terms of all out exploitation of the native inhabitants, it is assumed that the breakdown of colonial machinery will address the untoward developments going on under the pall of colonialism. This messianic assumption bears a wry face once the colonial rule is over. In fact, conditions remain more or less the same. It is an irony that Saleem's towering presence also experiences insecurity since he is constantly under fear that the anti-national forces will "trample" him at any moment. Moreover, the cracks and fissures in his body point out the lacuna the country is passing through. This aspect is a blur on the romantic idea of a postcolonial nation state. If postcolonialism envisages uniformity and equality that were improbable under the pall of colonialism, ground reality speaks the other way round. In postcolonial nation state, many disturbing developments, particularly communal tensions, condition the life and society. Lifafa Das' victimization to the rage of the Muslims at Chandni-Chowk or losing Ahmad Sinai's business property at the hands of the Hindu activists presents the picture a postcolonial nation state sustains. However, this is a part of the larger structure, which speaks of a different picture too. Democratic and secular aspects meant for involving people at equal fronts are to be noticed in the family set up of Dr. Aadam Aziz, and his daughter Amina Sinai is seen to have nurtured in a greater degree. Even in the household of Ahmad Sinai, one may see the close bond among the followers of various religious sects.

It is transparent that the novel presents the concept of nation, but not in its Nehruvian parlance as a unitary and an essentialist conditioning. Instead, it presents the nation as a fragmented, coloured and conditioned entity. This postulation is pertinent in trans-national and global context in which sticking to the monolithic idea of a nation is not logical. In addition, enunciation of major themes, discussed in the designated section, relates the great variety of taste the novel evokes. As such, themes like history, memory, rootedness/rootlessness, secularism, body politic, private/public barriers, hybridity etc. come to the purview, and dealing with the same make the novel of count and recognition. Taking into account the major themes as introduced into the novel, what is intended is the great variety of tastes Rushdie has designed to impart. Given his preference for history, the novel engages the long history of India strikingly ranging from the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre until the critical phase of the Emergency. In fact, history is conjoined with political developments, and this has made the theme more interesting. Usually recounting of events and actions is primarily based on official records and other forms of sources that are validated in formal standpoints. In opposition to this, Rushdie makes dexterous use of memory in the narrative, which bears the edge of a postcolonial stance, something he uncompromisingly stands for. In the pretext of this, other issues of importance also come to our view, notably the sense of being rooted at a period when everything is in flux. Of course, socio-cultural aspects go a long way in conditioning one's sense of being rooted and/or uprooted. The novel engages this aspect in the personalities of Dr. Aziz, boatman Tai, and a few others. Another significant area the unit discusses is the body politic, something that speaks a lot, albeit the least attention given in most of the associated critical discourses. As it is seen that having a unique and originary cultural body is simply unthinkable in this global world, Rushdie presents hybridity as a relevant concept to accomplish such a development. The novel involves a number of characters and situations in which a rich mix up of different factors are at play. Interestingly, hybridity does not appear as an obstacle; rather a part of life that goes all along. Like the role played out by memory in postcolonial narrative, hybridity also relates a postcolonial condition ruling out the essentializing back up of the colonial state of affairs.

Apart from the major issues and their faithful adaptation in view of the existing trends and developments worldwide, Rushdie also scales enviable mastery over the art of characterization. Almost all the characters are aptly interwoven, and each one of them comes to the help of the narrative one way or the other. They are made more interesting because of their engagement in both private and public affairs that are of substantial resonance. Birth of the children at midnight is made concomitant with that of India when the country is going to ink up a new chapter after the end of the British colonial rule. To recount this, Saleem is given the responsibility, also power, of narrating the major events from his perspective. Even all the midnight children are presented as being in possession of distinctive capacities, which also relates the prospects the newborn nation is assumed to have in the following decades. Dr. Aadam Aziz's involvement in the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, of course in its aftermath, adds a significant dimension to the art of characterization, provided it establishes crossing individual bounds and getting entangled to the larger concern of the nation. At times it is supposed that Rushdie has given too much space to the public life of the individuals, and they are found missing some vital aspects.

However, the observation is partially true since the characters may not be seen having no individual life. In reality, they have distinctive personal life, and represented myriad of elemental issues pertaining to it. Apart from all this, the novel also engages significant narrative style, an aspect that has given Rushdie the status of an immaculate artist. Though Saleem Sinai executes the role of a first person narrator relating the events and action both of private and public interest, it is interesting to see multiple voices in the narrative, thus sidelining the dominant authorial voice that is usually noticed in most of the novels. As the narrative hardly follows linearity in recounting events, there is a greater scope in treating myriad of jumbled issues and incidents that are found relevant to the major thrust in the novel. This makes the narrative a patchwork reiterating Rushdie's larger concerns of issues brewing up in the postcolonial and postmodernist contexts. In view of his life long campaign for a plural and multicultural society combined with the recurring concepts of hybridity and adulteration, an inclusive nature

of the narrative as introduced into the novel turns out handy in their realisation. This relates the meticulous sense of artefact Rushdie always stands in favour of in his literary pursuits.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does the idea of nation impact *Midnight's Children*?

Q 2: What type of historiography do you notice while reading the novel?

Q 3: Discuss Rushdie's treatment of a postcolonial nation state in the light of the novel.

15.3.1 Major Themes

The novel presents a number of vital themes, and taking a look at all this, one may experience the great variety Rushdie has introduced into the novel. Indeed the major themes bring out a wide range of issues to the fore that are of immense public value in present context. In order to come into terms with the text, studying the major themes is of utmost importance. Let us discuss the themes as follows.

History/Politics:

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, of all the major themes, that of history and politics takes upon wider circulation and considerable weightage. As Rushdie is very much open to the developments in the areas, which he deals with in many essays included in *Imaginary Homelands*, and *Step Across this Line*, the Booker Prize winning novel is no exception to it. The tumultuous historical and political developments in the 20th century constitute a major space in the novel. Right from the second decade of the 20th century until the seventh, India passed through major hurdles, especially in political and historical domains. Be it the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre or the traumatic experience of the Partition or the

lethal Emergency, the people of India did not have the usual course of life. Almost every phase of life was immensely impacted, and this is what Rushdie tries to encapsulate in the novel. The national life is seen through the lens of that of an individual and vice versa. This ingenuity establishes Rushdie's status as someone who rejects official representation of historical and political records outright. Involvement of the mysteriously born midnight's children and the Azizes or the Sinais in the events of national interest points out the nexus between individuals and developments of public interest.

Hybridity:

Sustaining a single, dominant identity in the postcolonial context is exquisitely impossible. Formation of one's identity, also a given culture, relates to a number of factors and sources; all of which have their voices pronounced. This phenomenon results in the emergence of the concept of hybridity, and recent literary and cultural discourses harp heavily upon the idea. In *Midnight's Children*, hybridity plays an important role, and this establishes the text's association with the postcolonial, also postmodernist conditioning. Narrator-protagonist Saleem Sinai is a hybrid personality whose parentage is of many people. Though he is reared up by Ahmed Sinai and Amina Sinai, his biological parents are William Methwold and Vanita. Besides, he finds people like Nadir Khan, Wee Willie Winkie, General Zulfiqar as father figures and Mary Pereira and Pia Azia as mother figures. William Methwold's estate is a rich conglomeration of people having different religious, cultural, and economic baggage. Metropolitan life of Bombay, setting of the novel, also presents hybridized cultural and social ambience. Apart from all this, hybridity may also be located in the use of language. Instead of the use of a particular language, there is a mix up of various languages under one belt.

Rootedness/Rootlessness:

Most of the characters bear the sense of being rooted, which assumes greater degree when placed along the idea of rootlessness.

In present context, being rooted in one's native culture is not so easier a phenomenon. The global and trans-national positioning of people or their diasporic experience does not allow them to remain fixed or rooted in a specific location. Dr. Aadam Aziz's exposure to European learning, particularly that of Heidelberg finds him lacking in adjustment to his native way of life and society. On the other hand, boatman Tai is very much rooted in his native culture and identity. He likes to carry out the cherished idea of *Kashmiriyat* all through life. Even the children of midnight including Saleem have the sense of being rooted in the newly born nation. Ironically, they experience rootlessness remarkably in the vortex of anti-national developments like language specific state borders and conflict centering this.

Allegory:

Allegory is one of the significant themes, which has given an added weightage to the novel. As this distinctive device is designed to mean one thing in the form of telling or showing the other, the novel makes maximum use of it. Given the fictional quality in *Midnight's Children*, the life history of the Aziz family or the Sinai family, among many others, is recounted. However, the prime intention in the novel is not to deal with personal life in its own sake. In reality, it stands in conformity to the larger concerns of the nation—its history, politics, religion etc. Whatever is told or/and shown in personal life, it bears every resonance of public life, and vice versa. The allegorical dimension dries out strict barriers between public and private life, as in other areas. This postulation is given further vent in the form of body politic the novel engages in. Saleem's bodily fissures and scars or his impotence may be seen echoing the lacuna and points of disturbances the country is experiencing. Ahmed Sinai's skin going complete white refers to the continuing presence of the British machinery even after handing over the charge to the people of India.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4. What message does Rushdie circulate through the treatment of history and politics in the novel?

Q 5. Discuss hybridity as a postcolonial device.

Q 6. What contradiction do you notice in postcolonial conditioning?

15.3.2 Rushdie's Art of Characterisation

Rushdie is an immaculate artist showing greater mastery over the art of characterisation. Almost all his fiction writing encapsulates major space in this regard, and it goes a long way in furthering the narrative. Indeed Rushdie's characterization is not simply ornamentation; rather it helps gain the objective of the major issues raised in the novel. As the issues are many and varied, characterization also takes up stance in consonant with them. While reading the novel, Rushdie's main thrust is to present the 20th century India keeping in view the major historical, political, and cultural developments. Looking India at the macro level mostly in the postcolonial and postmodernist contexts warrants a kind of characterization that needs to be conducive and hence often complex too. In order to accomplish this, Rushdie presents a series of characters from various background and status. All this had not been possible unless Saleem Sinai would have been given the space of being the narrator-protagonist. Being one of the one thousand and one children born mysteriously at the stroke of midnight, Saleem's characterisation is very much important since he has the task of narrating both personal and public courses of action. The larger spectrum of concerns in Saleem has been an established reality. He says, in fact self-assuringly, "…I am the sum total of everything that went before me… to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world." Too much obsession with public life is often criticized to have cost Saleem's personal life, and recounting the

latter is said to be peripheral in comparison to the former. This is partially true since his personal life cannot be taken as of the least postulation. Be it his relation to Padma or weakness for Jamila Singer or genuine feeling for the parents, Saleem's is a life of count. What he tries to maintain is some sort of balance between public and private life, and he succeeds in this regard. Of course, he comes out handy in bringing forth metafictional acumen in the novel. Though touching upon concerns for various issues is the gist of his narrative, turning reflexive at times brings out the element in a greater degree.

One of the major thrusts Rushdie has given to his novels is the exposure of the East to the West and the resulting clash between the distinctive cultural bodies. In *Midnight's Children*, Dr. Aadam Aziz is shown to have exposed to Western learning, particularly the teachings of Heidelberg, which problematizes his stance towards native culture. The confrontation between traditional and foreign values makes Aziz an interesting personality. However, he proceeds as usual, and this relates to positive acceptance of everything that comes under way. His receptive frame of mind appears more relevant, especially in diasporic and trans-national contexts. In addition, what assumes the utmost interest in Aziz's characterisation is the conditioning of secular ambience Rushdie vociferously opts for in his writing. This noble principle is so firmly established that his daughters particularly Amina Sinai inherit it in succeeding life as well. Amina Sinai's shelter to Lifafa Das at Chandni Chowk points out her secular fabric of mind. This secular aspect also conditions the household of Ahmed Sinai, for which his character becomes more striking. Besides a successful businessman, Ahmed Sinai showcases a liberal outlook and also a secular mindset. Keeping Mary Pereira, a Christian, at his household is a pointer towards this set of values. Though a maid, Mary Pereira appears as a mother figure to Saleem in the novel. This helps establish the concept of multiple parents to the narrator-protagonist, which is relevant in the postcolonial and postmodernist conditioning.

If Aadam Aziz, Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai do maintain secular ambience, Shiva, another midnight's child, is just the opposite. He is the anti-thesis to Saleem as well. It is true that Saleem exhibits some kind of democratic ethos in his manners and mindset. This is what he showcases in his approach to the Midnight's Children Conference, but it is looked at with scepticism by Shiva. Ironically, though a mismatch to Saleem, Shiva biologically fathers Aadam Sinai, Saleem's son. Like Saleem, Padma is also a dominant presence in the novel. Indeed her importance is of great consideration, and she always stands as mentor to Saleem. Though Saleem is very much confident as a narrator, he needs support and co-operation, given the grand design of representing the nation and family life he takes for granted. Moreover, to address any trace of doubt, and also to impart some objectivity to the narrative, Saleem's constant company of Padma is well justified. As such, her importance can never be ruled out in the novel. In characterisation, the selections of mythological names like Shiva, Parvati etc, give a new weightage and a kind of Indian colouring. However, the personalities are not treated as they are usually noticed in the tales and romances. They are portrayed with the fabric of satire and irony, which seems to be an innovation on the part of the novelist.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How do you perceive characterisation in the novel?

Q 8: What is your opinion about characterisation and the various issues they stand for?

15.3.3 Rushdie's Narrative Style

Rushdie enjoys the added gift of a unique style and narrative technique successfully represented in his writing. After the instant success of *Midnight's Children*, like Arundhati Roy's *The God of*

Small Things, the literary world acknowledges Rushdie as someone in possession of great sense of artistry and unparalleled imaginative grandeur. Indeed Rushdie's distinct narrative style appears in close connection with the larger designs he engages in his writing. Hence, the content or basic focus in subject matter is made more palpable with the excellence in the narrative style. As in *Midnight's Children*, the magic realist mode of narration is not a mere embellishment; rather it is concomitant with the allegorical representation of India involving the major decades of the 20th century. Well thought-out mixing up of magic realism, fantasy, history, myth in combination with personal life circle gives the novel a dignified position in respect of narrative excellence. Given such an amalgam of techniques, the novel is sometimes called a "non-fiction novel" uncompromisingly concerned with political allegory. Considering the wide range of issues and their execution through a great variety of narrative techniques, the fictional quality of the text often comes under scanner, and the critics tend more towards the non-fictional dimension.

In postcolonial parlance too, the rich narrative strategies used in the novel turn out of great count. To facilitate his postcolonial position, Rushdie presents the fictionality of history, in fact in an enviable manner. The history of India ranging from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre till Indira Gandhi's notorious feat of Emergency is what Rushdie takes up in the novel. However, recounting this long and critical history is not pursued from an official and essentialist standpoint. It is done through concerned individuals, and their personal life history is intended to showcase that of the country. This novel technique undermines the colonial and official modes of history writing. Including Saleem as protagonist-narrator, three generations of the Sinai family are adopted to record public history. Moreover, so many voices make their presence felt, and this costs the dominant and authorial voice in the narrative.

The novel has a gratuitous mix of English, Hindi, and Urdu words. To Rushdie, this is an instance of "chutnification", and the

metaphor attains due recognition in the postcolonial and postmodernist contexts. However, the over-use of this technique does not go scot free in the field of criticism. There are a few critics who call this an example of "pidgin English" having no trace of moderation and refinement. However, the observation does not speak of the entire picture. Most often, the rich mixture of words from various languages is categorized as "innovative" and "decolonizing" as well. The impossibility of adhering to a single, dominant, and exclusive language-culture warrants the extension of language boundaries, and this is what is done in the use of various languages. Such a use validates a condition that is an offshoot of the trans-national phenomenon in the global context. All this comes into effect with Saleem as a narrator who is highly self-conscious, coy, strident, subtle, aggressive, and fatalistic. Having a superhuman vision and an ability to hear unspoken words, Saleem also becomes doubtful in his narrative. The fabric of doubt relates to the rejection of absolutism, and this is somehow done in the novel.

Saleem's trace of doubt is sought to be reduced by making entreats to Padma, who stands by him all through. However, Padma does not always remain at the receiving point. Sometimes she plays tricks and it raises the element of doubt in Saleem. When Padma is asked whether it is right time for Saleem to narrate the personal account of their life, she appears to have taken it in a light-hearted manner. She says, "To me it's a crazy way of telling your life story if you can't even get to where your father met your mother." Indeed Padma symbolizes the role of a mentor in Saleem's narrative, and he gets some sort of moral support from her despite the lighter touch she imparts to the otherwise serious narrative designs. However, Saleem's dependence upon Padma in regard to continuing the narrative is just one half of truth since her desire to get a legitimized status in the narrative of Saleem is the other half of their narrative co-ordination. Saleem says, "My dung-lotus… has seemingly succumbed to a desire for legitimacy… in short, although

she has not said a word on the subject, she is waiting for me to make an honest woman of her." Another interesting aspect to the narrative is that there are a few passages marked with not having full-stops. They are too long to provide us the required details. This is intended to show haste and confusion in the narrator-protagonist, and the state of being is not simply that of Saleem, in fact it represents all of people trapped into the present day world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9. How does the magic realist mode of narration help Rushdie achieve allegorical dimension in the novel?

Q 10. What kind of metafictional fervour do you notice in the narrator's position?

Q 11. What is your opinion about Padma in the cause of the narrative?



15.4 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, it may be conveniently assumed that Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a great literary undertaking. In addition to giving Indian writing in English a dominant status, the novel appears to have mapped world literature at one go. Distinctive use of issues and themes in close connection to their treatment is what strikes the most. As the turbulent phase in Indian history and politics is one of the chosen aspects, Rushdie adopts the magic realist mode of narration taking Saleem Sinai as narrator-protagonist. Mysteriously born at midnight when India gained independence, Saleem along with the rest of the midnight's children becomes entangled to the native land of their origin. However, the land or the nation is not presented in official and formal dimension. It is presented as being a fractured, disintegrated and conditioned entity. The postcolonial conditioning of the nation state is what the novel re-looks to point out whether the romantic ideals of the said state could be realised. Looking at the course of

events, the answer to such an issue is not positive since language divide or other forms of essentialist machinery causes the failure of this state of being. The reflexive, contradictory, and often paradoxical narrative strategies bring out the metafictional acumen at the earliest.



15.5 FURTHER READING

Bixby, Patick. (2001). "Writing back to the Postcolonial Rushdie and the Global Aesthetic". *The Atlantic Review*. Vol. 2, No. 4, October-December.

Fletcher, M.D. (Ed). (1994). *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

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15.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Nation or concept of the nation has always been one of the preferred areas of study among the Indian English writers… …it was perhaps the British colonial rule that had conditioned a strong sense of the nation… …even after the official and political declaration of independence, the strong dimension of the nation does not dry out… …as in *Midnight's Children*, nation is a significant aspect… ...but the treatment is not that of an essentialist and formal stance… …nation is shown in her fragmented, constructed, discontinued parlance.

Ans to Q 2: History has been a subject of choice for Rushdie… …in his Cambridge days; he got a solid platform to quench the thirst for history… …in *Midnight's Children*, one may easily find out history as a dominant part in the narrative… …like nation, history is also seen not in an official colouring… …a revisionist reading of history

characterizes the novel… … the turbulent phase of Indian history has been re-written or re-looked from the view point of the protagonist Saleem Sinai… …hence the novel takes the form of writing down history or what we call historiography.

Ans to Q 3: Rushdie's works are categorized as faithful documents of postcolonialism… …various issues and concepts are raised with a view to relating their dignity and noble postulation… …a challenging mind set finds its way into the dealing with such matters… … in *Midnight's Children*, the idea of a postcolonial nation state is not represented in its high romantic percolation… …contradictory nature of this state of affairs or development is what the novelist presents… …the novel shows how the rise of fundamentalism and fanaticism cost the fabric of a postcolonial nation state.

Ans to Q 4: Through the treatment of history and politics, Rushdie points out how significant they are in impacting life and society… …but they are to be approached from personal viewpoints… …this technique rules out the official recording of the said areas… … voice of the subalterns is missing from such an approach… …*Midnight's Children* gives voice to the multitudes in recounting many issues including history and politics.

Ans to Q 5: Undoubtedly, hybridity is a postcolonial device… …as postcolonialism strives to include various things and issues that are sidelined in the run of colonialism, hybridity also carries out an inclusive machinery… …so many people, so many cultural bodies, sources, factors have their say in hybridity… …hence a kind of liberating principle characterizes Hybridity.

Ans to Q 6: Though a votary of postcolonialism, Rushdie carries sceptical outlook… …it is generally assumed that postcolonial conditioning will rule out the darker phase of colonial manipulation… …this is better said than done… …there are certain developments within the postcolonial conditioning that cost the romantic expectations of postcolonialism… …Saleem Sinai's outsidedness is an offshoot of the contradictory nature of postcolonial conditioning.

Ans to Q 7: Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* introduces characterization as an important segment… …irony, satire, political and historical developments have their imprints on the art of characterization… …it is systematically poised between private and public concerns… … though often criticized for having upper hand of the public domain, this does not speak of the entire truth… …indeed both the concerns have their virtually equal say in characterization.

Ans to Q 8: Characterization is not simply ornamentation… …not embellishment… …it is not done for its own sake… …instead it stands for larger issues… …it is done in accordance with the demand of the issues… …it is for this that characterization is done with a purpose at hand… …if history, politics, culture and other forms of forces are at play, it warrants in-depth skill of characterization… …moreover, magic realist mode proves effective in characterization in the novel.

Ans to Q 9: In *Midnight's Children*, the magic realist mode of narration goes a long way in achieving allegorical dimension… …as the mirror is held "at a slight angle to reality" in the mode, it opens up immense possibility of dealing with a great variety of subject matter… …many issues at one go… …the political and religious allegory the novel intends to unfold is largely possible through the means of magic realism… …as the technique assumes some kind of interdisciplinary principle, it facilitates entry of great variety of vital aspects.

Ans to Q 10: Metafiction has been one of the much preferred sides to the writings of Rushdie… …thrust upon the aspect brings Rushdie closer to postmodernist condition… …its realisation prominently comes into being in the narrative strategies… …Saleem Sinai's narration is self-reflexive, contradictory; often paradoxical too… …hence, the narrative is about itself than something else… …this particular conditioning in the narrative is given further vent with the inclusion of Padma… …the paradoxical or contradictory nature of the narrative or the narrator's position is made more perceptible in the relationship between Saleem and Padma.

Ans to Q 11: Padma has always been a mentor of Saleem in the latter's narrative position… …it is true that Saleem is very much confident at the power of narrating both personal and public history… …this does

not remain in absolute position… …element of doubt characterizes his narrative… …hence the presence of Padma turns out more relevant… …Padma's act of listening to the narrative of Saleem imparts moral boost that helps him scale further advancement… …often she also gives lighter touch to the otherwise serious narrative trajectory.



15.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on the appropriateness of the title in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

Q 2: How does the concept of a postcolonial nation state impact Rushdie's writing? What is its irony he talks about in *Midnight's Children*?

Q 3: How does hybridity as a postcolonial device influence Rushdie? Discuss in detail with special reference to *Midnight's Children*.

Q 4: Do you find residues of colonialism despite India's political freedom announced at the stroke of midnight? Discuss with reference to Rushdie's *Midnight's Children.*

Q 5: How does native-foreign paradigm work in the novel? Elucidate in light of Rushdie's personal life.

Q 6: Write a comprehensive note on Rushdie's art of characterisation in the novel. How does characterisation help to sustain the major gist in the novel? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 7: What does Rushdie attempt to achieve in the narrative? How much credibility do you notice in Saleem Sinai's narration?

Q 8: Write short notes on the following:

- **a.** Adam Aziz
- **b.** Saleem Sinai
- **c.** Hybridity
- **d.** Rootedness/Rootlessness

*** ***** ***



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