

Exploring Magical Realism and Postmodernism in Salman Rushdie's *Victory City*

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3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

Victory City takes readers to a fascinating adventure into the past of one of India's prosperous cities, Vijayanagar. In Salman Rushdie's alternative storytelling of the history of the city, the central focus is put on one Pampa Kampana blessed with divine power. Recounting the magical rise of the city and its inevitable decline, the novel problematizes historical representation. This paper evaluates the novel as a historiographic metafiction and examines its magical realist and postmodernist elements. Through close textual analysis, the study highlights the sceptical inscription of historical representation, the conflicted depiction of metanarratives and ideologies, the use of self reflexivity, narrative plurality, and intertextuality in order to establish its postmodernist stance. Similarly, the portrayal of realism juxtaposed with the magical, and the fluctuating development of the magical and the real within the narration are also analysed to comprehend its magical realist features. The intersection of magical realism and postmodernism in the novel depicts that history is challenged and re-casted through the scepticism propelled at the normativity of realism and the acceptance of the unfamiliarity of the magical.

Keywords

Historiographic metafiction, magical realism, postmodernism, alternate history, self reflexivity, realist code, nonrealist code

Chapter 1

Introduction

Salman Rushdie's *Victory City* transports readers to the creation of one of the greatest cities, Vijayanagar, of the Indian subcontinent. Rushdie accords a magical spin in his retelling of that glorious past, the city's advent, the persistence, and the unfortunate decline. Recasting the history of Vijaynagar through the incorporation of magical realism, the novel contends history as a discipline and historical writing as one of the most sought out ways of knowing the past. Divided into four chapters titled birth, exile, glory, and fall, the novel recounts the lifetime of Pampa Kampana, the central character and the prime force behind the origination of the city.

1.1. Brief Overview of the Novel

The novel begins with the discovery of the long narrative poem titled *Jayaparajaya*, one whose literary merit is said to parallel the *Ramayana*, from the ruins of Vijayanagar. The writer of the poem is introduced as Pampa Kampana who has written extensively about the city, its rulers, its people, and their lives intertwined to her own fate. When the nine-year-old Pampa Kampana witnesses the horrible self-immolation of all the women of her village in fear of being captured and sexually violated by the winning side after their ruler's defeat in a battle, she inwardly wishes to never give up her life for the sake of retaining men's honour or mourning their lives lost in battles that in no way offer any meaning to life. The confounded, traumatised, grieved yet determined Pampa Kampana receives a divine decree wherein she is granted a lifetime of more than two and a half centuries. The celestial deity blesses her with magical power, and gives her the prophecy of building and writing about one of the extraordinary and supreme cities of the entire world only to watch its traces being wiped out

of history for more than four centuries. Having received the decree and witnessing many other fantastical incidents, Pampa Kampana arrives at a cave where the twenty-five-year-old sage named Vidyasagar shelters her.

Pampa Kampana lives with him, cooking and cleaning for the two of them, without ever speaking. During their stay together, Vidyasagar engages in occasional forceful sexual interactions with her while simultaneously pursuing his search for knowledge and the true meaning of life. When she turns eighteen, they are visited by the two Sangama brothers, Hukka and Bukka. She gives the brothers a sack of magical seeds, and asks them to plant those near the place of the women's burning. Following her command, the brothers plant the seeds and watch an entire city with all its infrastructure and fully developed human beings sprout. The newly sprouted people, not being aware of their purpose and for the lack of any explanation of their sudden existence, start creating chaos and disorder. However, by sunrise, peace and order is restored as Pampa Kampana whispers into their hearts the stories of their origins, their roles, their ancestry, and their ideologies required to become fully functional human beings. With Pampa Kampana as the queen and the eldest Sangama brother, Hukka, as the king, the city of Vijayanagar begins its existence.

The first part of the novel entails the successful curbing of the threat of usurpation of the throne by the other three Sangama brothers, the expansion of the reign of Hukka in faraway territories, the arrival of a Portuguese traveller Domingo Nunes who Pampa Kampana falls in love with and her giving birth to three daughters with Nunes, Hukka's anguish at his wife's conspicuous infidelity and his immersion in religious extremism and battles to distract himself from the knowledge that he does not have an heir to the throne from his bloodline, his subsequent death and Pampa Kampana's marrying Hukka, her birth of three sons, her sudden decision to pass the royal decree of daughters having the right to the throne instead of boys in

order to set an example to improve the overall status of women, the sons' revolt against the decision and their banishment from the royal household, Bukka's death in a battle with the neighbouring rulers endangering Pampa Kampana and her daughters' station, the exiled sons' siege of the throne and pronouncing a death sentence against Pampa Kampana and her daughters forcing the women to go in self-hiding in the enchanted forest accompanied by their martial arts trainer named Grandmaster Li and a former soldier named Haleya Kote, and the re-education of the people of Bisnaga regarding their origination from magical seeds.

The second part, injected with the most magical realist sequences, recounts their exiled life. The refugees manage to find ways of surviving in the wilderness of the jungle inhabited by creatures that can communicate with them and each other through the "Master Tongue." Even the jungle is not safe as it is threatened to be occupied by pink monkeys whose intention is to topple the existing order and establish their own. During her stay in the jungle, Pampa Kampana sends crows and parrots as spies to Bisnaga. They tell her that Vidyasagar is the real controller of Bisnaga as the king listens to whatever he says. They spread the lie that Bisnaga is not the result of any magic and that they are just like any civilisation, with history, with real stories. They also ban witchcraft and make people believe that the whispering of Pampa Kampana is just a myth. People start to forget the story of their origin, and Pampa Kampa becomes a musing of a past that never happened.

It is during this time that she notices her elder daughter's closeness towards Grandmaster Li, the second daughter's weakness towards Haleya Kote, and the third daughter's curiosity in living with the other women of the forest. With a heavy heart, she sets her elder daughter free to explore a life of travelling with Li, and with Haleya Kote's help she secretly returns to Bisnaga. From then on, she starts whispering again into the king's and people's heart in order to change the extremist ideologies of the city to that of the progressive

and liberal ones envisioned by her during the inception of the city. In a tragic turn of events, Haleya Kote passes away and the second daughter eventually dies of old age and heartbreak. Pampa Kampana returns to the forest when summoned by the third daughter seeking help against the invasion by the pink monkeys. With the help of the forest deity, she defeats the pink monkeys but falls into a deep slumber for years until awakened by a descendant of her elder daughter, Zerelda Li.

The third part of the novel commences with Pampa Kampana's return to Bisnaga with Zerelda Li, both of whom metamorphose into birds and drop from the sky in front of the present king, Krishna Devaraya, and the people of Bisnaga. Taking them to be celestial beings, the king and his people hold them in high esteem which is further enhanced upon the exhibition of their intellectual and physical prowess. The king makes Zerelda Li one of his queens, and also does a marriage of political convenience with the daughter of one of powerful neighbouring kings. In the course of events, Zerelda Li dies during pregnancy marking the end of Pampa Kampana's bloodline. Later on, Pampa Kampana gets to act as the Regent Queen in the king's absence and cause remarkable prosperity in the city. She also builds impregnable walls around the city with her magical power. Of the king's two children from the other queen, the prince dies during infancy and Pampa Kampana and the royal chief minister are accused of having a hand in his death. A grief-ridden and rage-induced Krishna Devaraya orders the two of them to be blinded, marking the beginning of the last part.

A blind Pampa Kampana reflects on her prolonged life where she has been a bystander of the loss of everyone dear to her. Retracting from life, she waits silently for her demise. However, she remembers that her task is not over yet as the decree was that she will die only after she finishes recording the entire history of Bisnaga. With the help of the king's daughter, she writes everything until the last moment of its siege by the Delhi Sultanate. The novel ends

with Pampa Kampana helping the king's daughter metamorphose into a bird and letting her fly away from the ruins, and her burying the sealed clay pot containing the manuscript.

1.2. Research Purpose and Thesis Statement

Since the novel lacks any research on it, this paper examines the presence of magical realist and postmodernist elements in the novel. Taking the novel as the primary resource and through close textual analysis, the paper engages with the theories of magical realism by Ursula Kluwick, Wendy B. Faris, Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, and Kenneth S. Reeds among others, and the theories of postmodernism specifically by Linda Hutcheon and Jean-Francois Lyotard. The discussion postulates that the novel is a historiographic metafiction which problematizes history, questions metanarratives and disputes ideologies to expose the falsified notion of their universality, employs the techniques of self-reflexivity, narrative plurality, intertextuality, and temporal disjunction, and casts doubt on any representational paradigm. Simultaneously, the novel contains persistent magical elements separating the realist and unreal representations hindering the readers in forming a conclusive stance, and the portrayal of the fantastical alongside the real to juxtapose and undermine textual stability and conclusive interpretations. The end result is that the intersection of magical realism and postmodernism in the novel depicts that history is challenged and re-casted through the scepticism propelled at the normativity of realism and the acceptance of the unfamiliarity of the magical.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Despite the paradox of the impossibility of fixating on a definition of postmodernism and magical realism due to the former's limiting of its own possibilities and the latter's extensively narrow focus on the Latin American variant, distinctive theoretical frameworks of the two can be discerned on the basis of recurrent thematic specifications. Tracing these thematic specifications within the novel through close textual reading, this paper deciphers the novel's postmodernist and magical realist elements and their overlapping. In doing so, the thesis establishes it as a historiographic metafiction, and traces the specific traits of Rushdie's trend of magical realism as divergent from those of its pioneers.

Though there are debates regarding the concrete origin of postmodernism, the widely agreed upon opinion is that it began in architecture and simultaneously made its way to art and literature. Although tracing back an exact moment of its genesis is debatable, postmodernism can be said to have emerged after the failure of the moralities and principles of modernism and its disillusionment marked by the end of the Second World War. The word "post," hence, denotes a break-through from the modern aesthetics, sensibilities, and narratives. By extension, postmodernism poses a contestation of and challenge to the existing structures as echoed in Jean Francois Lyotard's famous assertion of postmodernism being "an incredulity towards metanarratives" (167).

By contending the dominant features of our ways of life, postmodernism denaturalises and casts doubt upon those to show the cultural constructedness of what we consider natural (Hutcheon 2). This scepticism against any totalizing narrative works twofold: firstly, it dismantles the existing dominant view, and secondly, it calls attention to the subordinated and marginalised view (Butler 15). It does so by using "the reappropriated forms of the past to

speak to a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it” (Hutcheon 12). What ultimately arises from this are multiple discourses, each signifying the relativism of truth (Butler 16). Therefore, the very concept of reality is perceived with distrust. Reality becomes realities and something we do not live inside of but within representations of (21).

By highlighting how the dominant ideologies are not given to us but made by us or resultantly subverting those, postmodernism problematizes the politics of representation in its refusal to champion one. Hence, postmodernism is inseparable from politics as Hutcheon explains: “While the postmodern has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political action, it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique” (3). Much of this denaturalisation takes place through techniques such as “overt self-consciousness about language and (hi)story” (6). As such, postmodern texts and artworks are inevitably political as its paradoxical self-reflexivity is never neutral. In his book titled *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, Christopher Butler provides a comprehensive history and key theories and terms of postmodernism as a literary and art movement having immediate social and political rapport. Arguing postmodernism to be a set of beliefs that are not clasped together, Butler asserts that the “underlying deep dialectic – between reason and scepticism, reality and the image, the political powers of inclusion and exclusion” are its central focus which is to be analysed in terms of its relation to and interaction with other principles of thoughts (127).

In this regard, the politics of representation is questioned and subverted mostly through assessment and re-examination of the past. One effective embodiment of this, Hutcheon says, is problematization of history through historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction is a literary genre. It combines fiction and historiography to explore the

relationship between history and literature. It makes use of self-reflexive and self-conscious techniques to examine the ways in which history is constructed and represented in literature. Unavoidably, it challenges the absoluteness and sanctity of historical reality and offers alternative narratives to it. Historiographic metafiction establishes that despite the necessity of the historical context, meaning is not in the events but in the systems which make those past events into present historical facts (Hutcheon 89). By taking a closer look into these systems, by dissecting and reinscribing those into alternatives, the concept of historical knowledge is problematised and its authenticity and validity is challenged. To explain, “Historiographic metafiction shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured, and in the process manages to broaden the debate about the ideological implications of the Foucauldian conjunction of power and knowledge—for readers and for history itself as a discipline” (120).

The most prominent features of historiographic metafiction include narrative plurality and disunity, fictive corporeality, and fragmentation of subjectivity or identity of characters in order to challenge and expose the constructedness of history (90). Even though historiographic metafiction also project a look into the history, the blending of fictiveness into historical facts works as a blur against the concrete distinction between the two. In Hutcheon’s words, “Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity” (93). Thus, it prevents both history and fiction from being conclusive by taking into account the purpose they serve instead of the causes they arise from. However, the problematization of history in the context of postmodern historiographic metafiction is debatable among intellectuals.

Trygve R. Tholfsen's "Postmodern Theory of History: A Critique" speaks of the shortcomings of historiography in postmodern theories. Attacking the postmodernist stance of dismissing the specifically "historical" mode of comprehending the past, he criticises its inability to offer alternative resolutions. According to him, postmodern theory not only "represents only one version- nihilist, anti-historical and Neo-Nietzschean" but also dismisses the "distinctly historical preoccupation with details of time and location" (208-216). As such, it acts as a distraction in the progress of history as a discipline and the formulation of its theories. In a similar vein, Fredric Jameson "points to a defining sense of the postmodern as 'the disappearance of a sense of history' in the culture, a pervasive depthlessness, a 'perpetual present' in which the memory of tradition is gone" (Butler 110). Although the paradoxical and contradictory criterion of postmodernism is arguably justified, it is crucial to acknowledge that problematizing history is to be perceived as an essential and not obstructive practice. In light of this, problematizing history does not make it invaluable or render it meaningless but enables one to look at history differently. The understanding of historical knowledge as constructs of individuals having significant presence on the historic timeline is necessary to take into consideration the absence of the epistemological insights of the minorities.

This is why historiographic metafiction's teasing the truth and lies of historical record, and incorporation and not assimilation of historical data are effective and mandatory tools to analytically assess the past (Hutcheon 114). This is further done by introducing narrating subjects who are unreliable or overtly controlling and do not know the past with any certainty. However, even this opens historiographic metafiction to the very contradiction and paradox it tries to address. How can dominant history be challenged when narrators of alternate history are unreliable? To answer this, Hutcheon argues that the aim of historiographic metafiction is not to transcend history by replacing the dominant narrative point of view with an equally acceptable alternative one, rather to merely challenge it through a problematized inscription of

subjectivity into history (117-118). The end result is creating scepticism towards the singularity of truth through unreliable narration and revealing the multiplicity of reality. The narrating subject in such cases symbolises a system of structures, oppositions and differences instead of embodying living subjectivities.

One significant characteristic of historiographic metafiction that directly contends with historical account is intertextuality. Incorporation of references to the texts of the past not only channels access to multiple and varied vantage points of interpretation but also promotes open endedness by decentralising meaning. As Roland Barthes puts:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message of the Author-God’) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash . . . Literature . . . by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text, (and to the world as text) liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is in the end to refuse God and his hypostasis – reason, science, law. (223)

Hence, meaning is neither fixed nor independent of other available texts. Intertextuality both “provides and undermines context” (Hutcheon 127). Through intertextuality, the meaning making does not rest solely upon the author but readers are also made to participate in it. By opening the readers to the traces of the past, intertextuality in historiographic metafiction makes them aware of the past and its records. Additionally, it makes them conscious of to what extent those traces have been and could have been altered. Consequently, it reflects that “History is therefore at base just another more or less socially acceptable narrative, competing for our attention and our assent; just another way of putting things, which will survive, or not, through a process of discussion and debate” (Butler 33).

The connection between literature and history is strongly asserted through intertextuality in historiographic metafiction as intertexts from both are present. In this regard, the concern that historiographic metafiction renders history irrelevant becomes dismissed since historical intertextuality familiarises the unfamiliar while the metafictional intertextuality problematizes such familiarisation (128). It is important to note that historiographic metafiction with intertextuality as a postmodernist device is not to be perceived as a replacement of other tradition of thoughts but as how it works to highlight the fallacies of those.

The incorporation of intertextuality alludes to the merit of the author as a reservoir of knowledge and different discourses. This leads to rethinking the role of the author and its subsequent relationship to the text. Addressing the conventional notions of authorship and authorial power, Michel Foucault revokes the question of what constitutes an author and the relationship between a text and its author in his article titled "What is an Author?" He rejects the traditional understanding of an author being an autonomous entity having absolute power over the text. Instead, he suggests that the author is an assimilation of all the discourses and systems of power that form and disseminate texts.

Too much focus on the author's ideology or biography shifts focus from the text's own signification and obstructs its nuanced interpretation. Therefore, focus should be put on the interrelationship between the text and its contexts instead of the text and its author. Multiple and varied interpretation of texts arise only when the author's role in directly controlling and generating the meanings of the text is dismissed, and instead the text is perceived solely on the basis of the structures inherent within it and those related to the context of its production. As Butler says, "the task of criticism is not to re-establish the ties between an author and his work or to reconstitute an author's thought and experience through his works and, further, that

criticism should concern itself with the structures of a work, its architectonic forms, which are studied for their intrinsic and internal relationships” (301). Looking beyond the author’s intended meaning, Foucault invites readers to connect with the social, historical, and cultural contexts and discourses comprising the text’s meanings. This allows a critical apprehension of the text through plurality of meanings and interpretations, and thereby de-constructs the concept of authorship as an absolutely singular and fixed identity.

In a similar vein, Roland Barthes also examines the notion that the author’s interpretations and intentions cease to hold any power over the meaning of the text once it is made accessible to the readers. Regardless of the author’s purpose, ideologies, and the context in producing a text, the responsibility of interpreting the meaning of the text rests solely upon the readers. The author, therefore, goes through a symbolic death whose function is no more than being a mediator reiterating a plethora of ideas and it is the task of the readers to decode those and choose the ones they find most satisfactory in terms of the textual context.

Like Foucault, Barthes also argues against putting excessive focus on the author’s personal life or social context during the production of the text. He says that such an approach oversimplifies textual interpretations, makes the inherent plurality of language obscure, and thereby limits textual inferences. The death of the author simultaneously gives way to the birth of the readers who are vested with the power to directly engage with the text and decipher it. Removal of authorial domination makes a text the receptacle of multiple realities and truths all suspended together waiting to be picked up by the readers. Both Foucault and Barthes’s convictions support the doctrines of postmodernism, and *Victory City* is indicative of this. The fact that no information about the identity of the translating author is disclosed at any point of the narration releases the text from authorial domination and transitions it to the domain of the readers.

To sum up, historiographic metafiction aligns with the postmodernist enterprise to challenge and problematize any representation of the past and draw its relevance to the present by bringing forth multiple viewpoints through multiple referential loci. In doing so, not only does it appoint several narrative strategies such as fragmentation of subjectivity and events, unreliability of narration despite references to historical records, and the sceptical reception of events through the blending of historical facts with fictive imagination but also transcends the limits of genre categorisation. It asserts that neither history nor fiction is sufficient on its own to completely represent events but that the combination of two is a fruitful attempt to give a broader picture.

A similar objective is also achieved through *Victory City*. In reconstructing the history of Vijayanagar, Rushdie chooses the fictional Pampa Kampana whose divine decree is to contribute to the rise and the fall of the city. The city's history becomes known in the present times because of Pampa Kampana's narrative poem documenting every incident to have occurred in it. Therefore, none of the events can be received with the certainty of not being influenced by fictivity. Yet, there are several references to actual historical places, situations, and people to discern that the novel is not entirely grounded in fictional elusivity. Thus, the only acceptable conclusion is that Pampa Kampana challenges and offers an alternative take on history. Like Saleem Sinai, she embodies the fictionality and subjective portrayal of history, and foregrounds the shortcomings of history alone in depicting the past.

This amalgamation of history and fiction in the novel is also the point where magical realism comes into play. Due to its portrayal of real events alongside the unreal through the construction of "a hypothetical course of past events that ostentatiously differs from actual history in order to explore alternative histories," *Victory City* also qualifies as a uchronia fiction (Kluwick 44). The function of such fiction is to depict the unrealised and alternate

historical possibilities that might have led to different consequences or prevented the cyclical repetition of those. Rushdie accomplishes this objective through its fusion with magical realism. Although magical realism has gained immense popularity over the last few decades, its definitions are limited as it is mostly associated with the Latin American variant. As such, many writers even refuse to be labelled with the tag as it constricts their works to be mimetic of the Latin American techniques and methods.

To briefly discuss the history of its inception, the genre has simultaneously been explicated by Franz Roh and Massimo Bontempelli who believed that it is moored in realism and makes visible the magic behind everyday life and object. They were keen on promoting techniques that showed the intricate wonderful aspect of reality. However, what remained largely ignored in their observations was the role of the supernatural within the genre. Furthering their remarks, Johan Daisne characterised the genre as constitutive of the intermingling of everyday reality with dream. Afterwards, Hubert Lampo opined that it is incorporation of reality with the irrational and the absurd.

It was not until Alejo Carpentier coined the term “marvellous of the real” to situate the incorporation of magic with the real as a strand exclusive and natural to the literature of Latin America that the term magical realism came into being. Despite the fluctuating differences in the definitional characteristics of the genre, it consists of two parts as evident from the term itself. Though there are diverging opinions about what specifically constitutes each part, it is undeniable that the magical part of it is associated with the supernatural or events that are not governed by logic, and the real part of it is replicative of the world moored in logic and rationality. Kenneth S. Reeds’ book titled *What is Magical Realism?: An explanation of a Literary Style* provides an all-encompassing overview of magical realism’s history and

analyses the texts of different authors to show its characteristics. Reeds' characterisation of the features of magical realism is based on textual evidence instead of the prevailing theories.

One way of magical realism's functioning, as found in the texts of Jorge Luis Borges and Carpentier, is the use of the neo-fantastic and the recasting and reclamation of the history of the suppressed. The neo-fantastic acts as a vehicle to depict the fantastic in a way that it is naturalised within the fabric of the narration (Reeds 84). It fills in the places where realistic narration would be insufficient to convey an aspect of reality. Since readers tend to participate in the reading experience from a stance of their own historical moment, the neo-fantastic contributes to the separation of the fictional world (101).

Reeds argues that such a technique does not only "naturalise the magic in the fiction" but also "convey ideas about fiction's nature" (103). That the fictional world is different from the readers' temporal and spatial reality is constantly evoked through the recasting of history through neo-fantastic events alongside the real. Such juxtaposing portrayal is the merging axis of the postmodernist self-reflexivity of historiographic metafiction with magical realism in the novel. This is because the readers come to a conclusive stance not through negation but through acceptance of the neo-fantastic as the normative ordering of the fictional world and fiction being the mode in which the real and the neo-fantastic coexist.

On the other hand, similar to historiographic metafiction's function of problematizing history, the voices of the marginalised embedded with magical or supernatural components facilitate our understanding of history through new lenses (104-105). This is accomplished in the novel by giving precedence to and fictionalising the lives of eccentric secondary or missing historical figures whose magical powers are inseparable from history. The consequence of this is that it not only facilitates rethinking the past through alternative perspectives but also connects its relevance to the present and locates the events that give

history its cyclical or linear nature. The geographical and cultural context of the texts are important in order to understand why the particular type of magical element introduced in a specific text foregrounds the ideological orientation of that text, a point raised by both Ursula Kluwick and Wendy B. Faris.

Kluwick majorly focuses on the specificities of Rushdie's magical realism and shows its deviation from other strands. In *Exploring Magical Realism in Salman Rushdie's Fiction*, she shows that magical realist texts are culture specific and that individual and local diversity of these texts make magical realism a genre difficult to bind with a common denominator. Even within the magical realist tradition of the same writer, Rushdie for instance, the features are not identical due to the geographical, cultural, and contextual diversity. Taking Rushdie's major works and closely analysing them, Kluwick insists that Rushdie's ideological orientation can only be understood when his strand of magical realism is redefined and separated from others. Kluwick shows that Rushdie's magical realism is fundamentally ambivalent (2).

Kluwick says that Rushdie's magic realism can be best understood as a combination between the postmodern and the postcolonial as a site of clash of representational codes in light of his socio-political ideologies. Because it is ambivalent, there is no definitive closure. As such, readers are faced with riddles that cannot offer interpretative closure, thereby achieving the postmodernist status. This, she argues, is a particular reading strategy called "a reading back." Since there is contradiction among the different representational magic realist codes, "representation becomes fragile and different realities begin to oscillate" which is why the readings remain open and welcome differences (2). Ambiguity is accentuated through the placement of realist and non-realist codes side by side, and readers are constantly required to reevaluate and shift their positions.

Kluwick portrays that instead of establishing a hierarchical relation between the realist and the non-realist code “Rushdie’s novels not only continuously challenge and hence ultimately deprivilege either of the two epistemological codes, they celebrate their common failure. To some extent, therefore, Rushdie’s magic realist fictions are always also metafictional discourses on the mode of magic realism itself” as neither the realist nor the unrealist code is sufficient to stabilise the text and offer interpretive closure (33). Juxtaposition of the different paradigms of the real and the unreal casts doubt not on the events themselves but also on the very act of representation. Suspicion is thrown on the normativity of the real or the non-normativity of the unreal through elaborate redundancy of unimportant details and the obliteration of functional insignificance through the weight of symbolic content (37).

In alignment with Kluwick, Faris perceives magical realism as a decolonizing agent that challenges the dominant mode of Western realism from within (1). However, she does not see it as a mere postcolonial style but also as a writing style that embodies innovation and the re-emergence of submerged narrative traditions (2). Taking the formal and stylistic characteristics of the genre in light of how it engages with or diverges from different cultural and traditional contexts, she sketches five characteristics of magical realism. As she writes, “I suggest five primary characteristics of the mode. First, the text contains an “irreducible element” of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity” (7). All of these characteristics are apparent in the novel as discussed in later chapters. Through analysis of significant magical realist texts, her portrayal of showing bodies to be inscribed with political connotations when induced by magic is crucial for this research.

Specifically, since the novel's main character and the source of the magical code is a woman, her contention that female characters act as vehicles of inversion of the patrilineal tradition of realist literature can be aptly applied in the analysis of the novel (175).

Maryam Ebadi Asayesh also makes a similar claim in her work titled *Patriarchy and Power in Magical Realism* wherein she explores how magical realist techniques within the works of different writers are discursive in dissenting the ideological orientations of patriarchal power. From her close reading of several texts, the chief features of magical realist techniques contending patriarchy and power extracted are that of retelling history through marginal characters, temporal disorder where the timeline of the narrative events are neither linear nor circular and the time references are indeterminate, polyvocality insinuating contradictions through multiple voices exhibiting antithetical ideologies, overtly carnivalesque depiction of incidents, and storytelling as a mode of survival and preserving the past.

Literature of magical realism often runs the risk of being mixed with that of fantasy due to the presence of events that are unexplainable by the logic of the human world. However, the primary distinguishing factor between the two is that unlike fantasy literature the setting in magical realism has some resemblance to the human world. Even though events that would otherwise not make sense in the human world occur, the realist elements offer a medium for the acceptance of those. Amaryll Beatrice Chanady addresses this in her book titled *Magical Realism and The Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*. According to her, magical realist texts consist of the natural and the supernatural elements. The magic realist narrator does not present the supernatural as problematic and neither does the reader perceive irrational occurrences as unsettling, rather accepts the coexistence of contradictory codes without questioning their compatibility or incompatibility (9-10).

In fantasy the irreconcilable conflict between the oppositional codes is easily recognised by the readers and they are frustrated in their attempt to reconcile it, whereas, in magical realism “authorial reticence” allows the readers to ignore the conflict. Therefore, magical realism is resolved but fantasy is unresolved. The core of Chanady’s understanding of magical realism relies on the harmonious interaction between the natural and the supernatural, neither of which contradicts or obscures the fundamental discourse of the other. Instead, she evinces that events are constructed with the two oppositional codes developed at equal pace and magnitude within the narrative; there is no surpassing of the one over the other. Kluwick strongly opposes this, and argues that the two oppositional codes are not always developed to an equal extent and that they are not in harmony at all times. Rather, it is the inherent disharmony within the narrative structure of the magical realist texts that characterise the oppositional codes.

Reeds, among others, explains that Chanady’s distinction of the magical realist and the fantastic is based on the cultural specificity of the texts as the magical effect would take place only when readers assume a Western empiricist stance and perceive the magical events as supernatural (68). Simultaneously, they have to view the textual world to be unfamiliar to them but events within it being familiar and commonplace to the characters. Such a bicultural dichotomic view can induce cultural biases and subject certain cultures to the discourses of exoticism. I show that Rushdie’s novel counter this by portraying that the magical elements that are unfamiliar to readers are commonplace and normative to the cultural context. The magical elements are specific to the cultural context and serve as the pathway to the ideological orientation of the text. Besides, the general trajectory of real events are not so influenced by the magical ones as to entirely subvert them. Instead, the magical events only offer counter vision to the historically dominant ones as they come out to be insufficient to change the way things end.

Since this thesis inspects the novel as a historiographic metafiction, locating the divergence or convergence of factual representations in the novel to actual historical records is necessary for the analysis. For this purpose, secondary sources relating to the history of the Vijayanagar empire have been consulted where relevant. Of these, the one directly sought out by Rushdie for writing the novel is that of Robert Sewell's *Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar; A Contribution to the History of India*. Taking historical archives, such as traveller's inscriptions of the empire, Sewell recounts the entire history of the empire starting from its uprise to its downfall. Instances of uncertainty coming up in multiple events in which Sewell's favouring of one based on his knowledge of history shows the inadequacy of these reports in completely reproducing the events of the past as these are never devoid of subjective interpretation. Furthermore, Sewell's stance on the history of Vijayanagar is highly Western empiricist. This is apparent from his authorial intervention in giving interpretations of political events. While such interpretations where he provides his own purview regarding the then rulers' intention behind different political decisions can be seen as his insight as a historian, these can nonetheless serve as diversion from historical facts. Sewell's book is primarily essential in locating the intertextual and parodic references in the novel with that of history.

Of the many achievements and glory of the Vijayanagar empire, its ability to maintain unity despite the social, cultural, and religious diversity of its population is a momentous factor in both the historical archives as well as Rushdie's retelling. Both Aniruddha Ray's article titled "The Rise and Fall of Vijayanagar- An Alternative Hypothesis to Hindu Nationalism Thesis" and S. N. Shivarudraswamy's article titled "Hindu-Muslim Relations Under the Vijayanagar Empire" highlight the secularist and religious tolerant ideologies of the empire despite the altering dynamics of the ruling power.

The picture of Vijayanagar painted in these articles is secularist and amicable where all the commoners, the elites, and the rulers were tolerant towards diverse faith and viewpoints. Although the novel also shows that the empire came into being with such a vision, unlike these articles, it also shows the collective failure of both the rulers and the ruled to uphold it even when initially implemented. Ray suggests that just as the rise of the empire is not owed to Hindu nationalism, its fall is not owed to religious feud. Instead the empire declines due to political and economical disjunction. While their studies focus strictly on the locale paradigm of the empire, Carla M. Sinopoli expands the horizon by incorporating socio-economic and political rapport to the broader framework of subcontinental politics. Looking at both the intra and extra regional chassis, Sinopoli's study is an insightful source to determine the communal bonding and the collective ideologies of the time period.

To conclude, the secondary sources reviewed for the completion of this thesis focus on the concept of postmodernism, magical realism, and the sociopolitical and the sociocultural dynamics of Vijayanagar. With reference to these resources, the thesis evaluates the postmodernist and magical realist aspects of the novel as well as points of their intersection.

Chapter 3

Revisioning and Reconstructing the Past

Rushdie's *Victory City* begins with the discovery of Pampa Kampana's narrative poem about the Vijayanagar city, widely known in the novel as Bisnaga. The initial pages of the novel foregrounds its historiographical premises by claiming that Pampa Kampana's account of the city is the most accurate in reconstructing the past of the city, thereby establishing the historiographical metafictional nature of the novel. As the narrator says, "We knew only the ruins that remained, and our memory of its history was ruined as well, by the passage of time, the imperfections of memory, and the falsehoods of those who came after. As we read Pampa Kampana's book the past was regained, the Bisnaga Empire was reborn as it truly had been" (Rushdie 8). Such a proclamation works "to foreground the totalizing impulse of western – imperialistic – modes of history-writing by confronting it with indigenous Indian models of history" (Hutcheon 62). By directly challenging its inter-text, the widely revered book on the history of Vijayanagar by Robert Sewell, the novel channels distrust towards the book's epistemological merit, and in a broader sense, towards the plausibility of all historical writing.

3.1. Problematising History: Whose and Which Versions Make the Archive?

Alluding to the constructedness of history, its facticity being tampered by ellipses in memory and individual biases, and therefore challenging the verity of historical records, the novel challenges traditional historical writing. This is further embodied through the character of Pampa Kampana. By choosing to retell the history of one of the most prosperous and powerful empires of the Indian subcontinent through a female figure, Rushdie tries to provide an alternative perspective to the dominant one. Since the task of writing history has traditionally been conferred on men, the first-hand experiences of women and their perspectives have largely been missing from traditional historiography. Similarly, written

storytelling too has been a chore undertaken by men while women have been endowed with oral storytelling. Both the conceptions have laid the foundation of and perpetuated a power structure of a centre and the periphery existing in constant opposition where the former toils to annihilate the latter. By means of the subversion of both of these conventionalised ideas through Pampa Kampana, the central-peripheral dyad is destabilised. *Victory City* is a historical retelling having a woman narrator who has also written down that history. By employing such a framework, Rushdie creates, to borrow from Robin Morgan, a “her-story” wherein history from a woman’s perspective and the role of women in history is reevaluated.

However, Rushdie is careful to not establish a new epistemological hierarchy as the outcome of the empire remains unchanged in spite of the alternative evocation of events. Instead, he shows that any representation, be it in the very discipline of history or knowledge production, cannot escape scepticism. This is demonstrated in the fact that Pampa Kampana is a fictitious figure who lacks an actual existence. Therefore, the reliability of the *Jayaparajaya* is to be received with as much distrust as the other acknowledged historical records even though the goal of *Jayaparajaya* is to call those into question. This is the novel’s central postmodernist paradox where the source of causing incredulity is itself incredulous, and is also what establishes it as a historiographic metafiction. Either way, “There is no masking of ideology, no smoothing out of contradiction, either in character or plot. The subject is an object of inquiry —and problematization. It is not taken for granted; it is not unchanging or unchangeable” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 220).

To elaborate, two of the prime chroniclers of the Vijayanagar empire are Domingo Paes and Fernao Nunes whom Rushdie brings in the narrative. These travellers’ existence within the timeline of actual history and the novel creates what Barthes calls the reality effect, forming the connection of the novel’s fictiveness with realism. The mention of actual

historical figures and places is a deliberate technique that establishes the credibility of the novel's setting, thereby initiating the realist code of which more will be discussed in the next chapter. However, he inverts their names as Domingo Nunes and Fernao Paes signifying that the content of their writings is interchangeable too as it do not represent the psycho-social rapport of the city dwellers but their own exotic reception of their culture differences. The novel mentions the travellers' writing down their experiences, and blatantly imparts that their documentations are directed towards foreign consumption (Rushdie 65). That their records lack the totalized intricacies of the empire and are heavily focused on just the differential aspect of the culture affirms the limitations of such records. By including known historical personages, Rushdie problematizes historical knowledge and breaks any illusionist frame from the narrative.

The city of Vijayanagar comes to be known as Bisnaga throughout the novel due to the former traveller's inability to pronounce it, "My tongue can't make those sounds ... Not because of any speech impediment. It just won't come out of my mouth the way you say it," and Pampa Kampana's eager acceptance of the distorted pronunciation (Rushdie 35). Whilst there is no evidence of Vijayanagar being widely known as Bisnaga in any historical document, including Sewell's book, Rushdie's use of the name not only exposes western epistemological predisposition but also the subcontinent's own attitude towards such biases. He juxtaposes Pampa Kampana's avid adoption of the city's naming by a foreigner to Bukka's retort "The day will come ... when we will no longer allow foreigners to tell us who we are" (Rushdie 36). In later pages, he shows how Bukka and others' hostility towards the foreigner disappears and they accept him completely in their enthusiasm to learn about making fireworks and firearms from him. Rushdie hints at the colonisation of the subcontinent that is to come centuries later, and probes readers to the conundrum of to what extent colonisation is the consequence of the disposition of the colonisers and those colonised.

The distortion of names also portrays dubiousity towards the reception of both history and the novel. The earlier reiteration of *Jayaparajaya* being the most reliable retelling of Vijayanagar's history is contradicted when the author adds as a note of clarity:

Thanks to Pampa Kampana's amused delight in Domingo Nunes and his garbled mispronunciation, she chose to refer to both the city and the empire as "Bisnaga" throughout her epic poem, intending, perhaps, to remind us that while her work is based on real events, there is an inevitable distance between the imagined world and the actual. "Bisnaga" belongs not to history but to her. After all, a poem is not an essay or a news report. The reality of poetry and the imagination follows its own rules. We have elected to follow Pampa Kampana's lead, so it is her dream-city of "Bisnaga" that is so named and portrayed here. To do otherwise would be to betray the artist and her work. (36)

The implications of such an assertion are manifold. Firstly, as a historiographic metafiction, it "keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 121). It stresses the incredulity towards knowledge and its insufficiency in entirely representing the past as it is never exempted from subjective influence. With direct access to the past being denied, "all we can have are competing stories, which are variously given coherence by their historian narrators, and the past is no more than what the historians, whom we rely upon for various cultural reasons, try to say that it is" (Butler 35). Hence, Pampa Kampana's writing too becomes one among the many versions of Vijayanagar's history.

Secondly, it exposes fiction's elusivity and the function of authors and readers in consecutively imparting and comprehending meaning. It makes readers aware about their own distance from the textual world and its signifying systems. That the readers are twice

removed from the textual world, firstly, on account of Pampa Kampana who acts as the narrator and secondly, on account of the present author who acts as the primary focaliser, forces them to interpret the text solely on the basis of its narrative events. However, readers are made to share their point of view with that of the primary focaliser due to the focaliser's repeated intervention and interpretation of the narrative events. Resultantly, any doubt the focaliser casts on the reliability of the text not only accentuates the separation between him and the narrator but also influences readers' analysis of the text. Nonetheless, readers cannot disregard Pampa Kampana's version as mere subjective imaginative storytelling. This is because the novel is not narrowed down to her personal interactions or experiences, rather is broadened in the social, cultural, and the political domain of the entire Vijaynagar.

3.2. Representational Strategy, Self Reflexivity, and Multiple Realities

Drawing from history and yet separating the fictive world from that history by ascribing it the status of imagination of the narrating subject, the novel ends up problematizing the narrative subjectivity by making it come off as a myriad of voices having no single and unified perspective. Ultimately, it poses the question of whether Pampa Kampana is an actual subject and the facilitator of the novel or just a product of counter historical narrative, and the novel's postmodernist stature refuses any definitive answer. In essence, Pampa Kampana oscillates between the two, since unlike traditional historiography which offers a single, unitary perspective, the novel offers multiple and contradictory viewpoints. This is noticed when the same incident with incongruous rendition occurs without discerning which version is the truth. For instance, Pampa Kampana's memory of her stay with Vidyasagar is tainted with sexual abuse whereas Vidyasagar's version is in denial of it. The novel does not take sides with either but merely points out the equal possibility of the occurrence of both. Readers are not enlightened as to why Pampa Kampana's magical powers would prove to be

insufficient in protecting her or why she chose to endure the abuse in silence. On the other hand, it does not address why Vidyasagar would not openly refute her accusations even when he claims to be innocent. It merely conveys that, “truth itself is always relative to the differing standpoints and predisposing intellectual frameworks of the judging subject” (Butler 16).

Additionally, conjuring the history of an empire through the accounts of a literary piece also denotes the relationship between history and literature. Such a technique avers that “Historical meaning may thus be seen today as unstable, contextual, relational, and provisional, but postmodernism argues that, in fact, it has always been so. And it uses novelistic representations to underline the narrative nature of much of that knowledge” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 64). Besides, the mythic characteristic of *Jayaparajaya* makes it comparable to the *Ramayana* as the narrator claims, “It is generally agreed by scholars and ordinary readers alike that the quality of Pampa Kampana’s verse rivals, and perhaps even improves upon, the language of *Ramayana* itself” (Rushdie 15). Since the facticity of *Jayaparajaya* itself is questionable, its comparison with *Ramayana* also puts the absoluteness of its status as a metanarrative and one of the greatest literary pieces into question.

The nature of the narrative in Rushdie’s re-examination of the history of Vijayanagar is that of resisting the impulse of totalizing representation. Two layers of narratorial voice are present within the novel, one is that of Pampa Kampana and the other is that of the author who is a re-teller of her chronicle. Rushdie writes, “This is that story, retold in plainer language by the present author, who is neither a scholar nor a poet but merely a spinner of yarns, and who offers this version for the simple entertainment and possible edification of today’s readers” (9). By maintaining a constant authorial presence and including authorial comments on the various incidents of the novel alongside the voice of the original writer of

the text, the novel once again opens the discourse of historical knowledge to be subjected to the biases of those formulating it. The present author's function within the narrative is then not merely that of a passive translator but of an active interpreter having control over the overt and covert meanings of the text. The current author's presence within the narrative denies direct access to the past and alienates the readers from the realist illusion that the fictional world is coherent and closed.

Despite having an easily comprehensible plot, the novel gains its postmodernist and historiographic-metafictional status through the narrative technique. Narrative plurality is maintained throughout the text through authorial intervention. Both the author and Pampa Kampana as narrating subjects are not disintegrated but are situated disparately within the fabric of the text. This enables the acknowledgment of their ideologies and suggests alternating notions of subjectivity (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 174). Pampa Kampana's fragmented self also aids to the facilitation of this oscillation of subjectivity. Pampa Kampana's multiple roles as a magical entity, the conjurer of a future that topples the existing ideologies, the queen, and the mother of the heirs to the throne ruptures her self-expression and the readers' reception of her subjectivity as a whole being as highlighted by the narrating author. This is why even though Pampa Kampana makes it clear that her sons cannot be entitled to the inheritance of the throne because of their own ideological extremism, the authorial comment regarding her emotional deficit shifts the readers' appraisal of her character. In his words:

It is very striking that Pampa Kampana, describing these crucial and painful events in her book, writes about them without a trace of emotion, giving no hint of what must surely have been the case, that she must have felt anguished and conflicted at her sudden and absolute rejection of her sons; that Bukka too was deeply torn between his love of his wife

and his paternal feelings for his children; and that to choose his wife over his sons was—to say the very least—an unusual and unexpected move for a man of his position, and his time. She simply records the facts. Off into exile went the arrogant little boys, and the princesses ruled the court. We begin to see that Pampa Kampana possessed a startling—an almost frightening—streak of ruthlessness. (97)

The multiple role Pampa Kampana is assigned cause a split in her subjectivity and the narrating author's commentary accentuates this fissure. However, such a commentary affirms Pampa Kampana's credibility as an author whose records are devoid of personal sentiments. It shows that her role as an author overtakes her role as a subject of the text, and that textual interpretations do not rely on the interdependence between the two but on their distantness. The moment readers are made aware of the distance between the text and the author, it becomes more apparent that Pampa Kampana's actions are motivated by her vision to create a feminist utopia and fulfil her prophecy. Her status as an author attests Foucault's proposition that "the essential basis of this writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears," so that the scope of diverse interpretations can arise (300-301). With the narrating subject obliterated in such a manner, the narrating subject is stripped of the status of living subjectivity. The narrating subject merely concretises a system of structures, oppositions, and differences. Therefore, Pampa Kampana becomes a mere position in language, a site representing the clash of conflicting powers.

What makes *Victory City* noteworthy as a postmodern historiographic metafiction and a magical realist novel is its portrayal of the originating story of the city. The exact incident and the manner of the origination of the city is a topic of discord. Though generally agreed that

the fall in the central power of the Indian subcontinent in the 14th century gave rise to several provincial rules and the escalation of Vijayanagar as one of the most formidable cities is the consequence of it, there is no concrete evidence as to how the founders came to build the city. Several myths surround their rise to power as described by Sewell, Shivarudraswamy, and Sinopoli among others. The novel does not take just one of the many myths circulating around the birth of the city but makes an amalgamation of all, preferring none in particular yet championing all. It also adds its own spin to the myth. Juxtaposed with the historical facticity of the context, such mythic fusion ascribes it the status of a quasi narrative devoid of any correspondence with reality.

Sewell writes that the most prominent myths are that the city has been established by one Deva Raya stumbling upon a meditating monk who advises him to build the city, or that the monk himself built the city and named it after him, or that the two Sangama brothers having escaped a central dispute take refuge in the wilderness and meet the monk under whose direction the city was built and named after. None of the myths acknowledge the existence of any Pampa Kampana whom Rushdie makes the driving force behind the city's origination. In Rushdie's retelling, Pampa Kampana having witnessed the self-immolation of the women of her village decides to overturn such an outcome for her own life and is granted divine power and a prophecy regarding the rise and fall of one of the greatest cities of history. Having witnessed the horrific burning of all the women, including her mother, a bewildered Pampa Kampana is sheltered by the sage Vidyasagar. Years later, when the Sangama brothers, having escaped from the Delhi Sultanate, come to seek the wisdom of Vidyasagar and also with the intent to behold Pampa Kampana's beauty, she gives them magical seeds. The city with all its infrastructure and even people grows out of thin air when they sow the magical seeds in the designated place. To conclude, Rushdie creates the character of Pampa Kampana whose very life is the prime source of the history of the city, and whose death is also the cause

of eradication of that history. The complex trajectory of history is compressed into the act of an individual's determination to defy convention.

The extent of impossibility of the event and the unbelievability it generates creates what Rushdie calls the "chutnification of history" elsewhere. Blending facts with fiction and blurring the distinction between reality and imagination, the distance between history and literature is mitigated and discourses on history as a discipline of preserving the past and literature as a tool of reconstructing it are renewed. The aftermath of such "chutnification" is that it shifts focus from the events themselves and instead highlights the underlying structures and principles that give order to those. Therefore, it is not the originating story that is important in itself in order to know the past but the sequence in which it is pieced within the novel and the function it serves which is that of recasting history by ascribing the magical realist essence to the novel. As Hutcheon explains:

The narrativization of past events is not hidden; the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure. The process of making stories out of chronicles, of constructing plots out of sequences, is what postmodern fiction underlines. This does not in any way deny the existence of the past real, but it focuses attention on the act of imposing order on that past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation. (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 63)

The choice of the originating story, the narrating subject, and the references to actual historical figures, places, and texts are schemes for the formulation of the novel as a uchronian text wherein the alternate and unrealised historical possibilities have been looked into with the trajectory of history remaining unchangeable at the end. These are also

representational strategies that challenges and complicates the execution and sustenance of realism.

3.3. Intertextuality: Coalescence of the Past, Present, and the Future

Intertextuality is a notable attribute of postmodern novels. Use of intertextuality not only brings the knowledgeability of the author into light but also the interconnection between texts of different time periods. One function intertextuality serves is temporal distortion of the ordering of the textual world. Intertextual references can be from the same time period of the text's production or the distant past and future. All intertexts serve to render the originality and authenticity of the text questionable and dismissible. Intertextuality demonstrates that all texts are mosaics of one another, and that they are merely different combinations of each other.

Any book on city/cities is bound to evoke Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* where the famous traveller Marco Polo describes different bizarre and magical cities to the emperor Kublai Khan. However, towards the end of the book Marco Polo confesses that he had been describing just one city all along and that is Venice. Though descriptions of none of the cities have the slightest infrastructural or societal resemblance to each other, they represent different aspects of Venice perceived from different vantage points. Venice stands unchanging in all its glory, yet it is the perspective of the people inhabiting it or visiting it that gives it different characteristics. Hence, none of the descriptions are untrue and the reality of the city becomes relative to people and places observed from. Rushdie makes a clever reference to this in *Victory City* when Zerelda Li supposedly draws a room full of maps of all the places of the world she has seen or heard of, but admits that "Every map that I have made is a portrait of where we are standing now. They are all maps of Bisnaga" (204). The statement reflects that though all cities can be different in terms of their exclusive characteristics, they are

nonetheless similar in essence as they serve the same function. In another sense, the statement also signifies the repetitive nature of history with the consequences of events varying in different degrees. Intertextuality also denotes that an author is an accumulation of previous authors just as the present consists of an accumulation of past events.

The boundary between the timeline of Bisnaga and that of later events in the subcontinent are frequently trespassed in the narration. Old Imperialism starts taking its roots during the later half of the Bisnagan rule, but the plot is largely unaffected by it. It appears that the central socio-political rather than the subcontinental dynamics gain preference within the narrative. However, the novel does mention Old Imperialism and the future of the subcontinent shaped by New Imperialism. Rushdie makes use of the pink monkey motif in the novel to indicate imperialism and the subsequent colonisation of the subcontinent. News of the pink monkeys disrupting the order of the forest circulates during Pampa Kampana and her daughters' exile. These notorious monkeys came sparingly as representatives of a faraway company, and at the beginning showed goodwill towards the inhabitants of the jungle. Possessing enough understanding of the "Master Language" of the jungle, they were able to communicate with other inhabitants and expressed their desire to obtain resources from the jungle in exchange of money or any other valuable material. They also alerted the inhabitants about a future where money will be all that matters and that they will be obliterated if they do not adapt to the changes to come. The entire episode is followed by the authorial commentary:

We may perhaps best understand the pink monkey narrative as an aspect of the Jayaparajaya's fascination with Time—Time divided into yesterdays, today's, and tomorrow's. The monkeys we first encountered in these verses, the gray Hanuman langurs of Bisnaga, are, we may say, the poet's gesture toward the mythical past of the great legends, while these pink newcomers represent an as-yet-unknown tomorrow, a tomorrow

that will fully arrive long after the poet's work is done. This, at least, is the proposition which, with all due modesty, is here advanced (Rushdie 173). The disjunction of time within the narrative is clearly indicated through this passage as the pink monkeys in question are the representatives of the East India Company of the 1600s. The foreshadowing enhances the mythic nature of the text and stresses that the text is regulated by both Pampa Kampana and the translating author. Hence, events within the texts are subjected to the knowledge and experience of both. While Pampa Kampana materialises a past erased from the dominant history, the translating author links that past to everything ensuing it, thereby obscuring temporal linearity but simultaneously installing and subverting the realist and the unrealist code. Emphasising the tension between the absence of the past and the presence of the present, and between the actual events of the past and the historian's action of organising them into facts, such temporal disconnectedness depicts the furrow between the past and the present, and between knowledge and experience (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 70). The pink monkey narrative is a far-sighted actualisation of the fall of the entire subcontinent.

3.4. Metanarratives Questioned, Ideologies disputed

One of the central motives of postmodernism is to cast doubt on the metanarratives and contradict ideologies. The universality of metanarratives and ideologies are perceived with suspicion as postmodernism refutes the idea of objectivity. Championing the concept of subjective experiences and perspectives, postmodernism promotes the individual over the collective, the local over the global, the periphery over the centre, the micro-narratives over the metanarratives by merely pointing out their differences without aiming to set up new hierarchies.

The first instance of this is found in Hukka and Bukka's wondering of the creation of human beings. The astonished Hukka and Bukka at people sprouting out of seeds muse:

What is a human being?" he wondered. "I mean, what makes us what we are? Did we all start out as seeds, are all our ancestors vegetables, if we go back far enough? Or did we grow out of fishes, are we fishes who learned to breathe air? Or maybe we are cows who lost our udders and two of our legs. Somehow I'm finding the vegetable possibility the most upsetting. I don't want to discover that my great-grandfather was a brinjal, or a pea. (Rushdie 24)

Contending over the most plausible story of the origins of humans and giving equal consideration to the fact that humans could have indeed originated from seeds and have evolved from vegetables, they end up parodying the several other religious versions. Moreover, the scientific theories on the evolution of human beings, the Darwinian theory to be specific, are also rendered silly through such satirization when Hukkam deduces, "And yet it is from seeds that our subjects have been born," Hukka said, shaking his head. "So the vegetable possibility is the most probable" (24).

Another ideological debate the novel undermines is that of the influence of fate or divine power in regulating human lives. Although Pampa Kampana made the city and its people rise from magic and initially controlled their thoughts and mindset through her whisperings, once people started living, interacting with others, and coming across other chains of thoughts, they started developing their own principles and reasonings. With their contemplation and rationality, they started deviating from the ideologies whispered into their hearts. Rushdie writes:

During the second half of Bukka's reign, Pampa Kampana took on this task of whispered reeducation. As we will see, it did not succeed. In this way Pampa learned the lesson every

creator must learn, even God himself. Once you had created your characters, you had to be bound by their choices. You were no longer free to remake them according to your own desires. They were what they were and they would do what they would do. This was “free will.” She could not change them if they did not want to be changed. (98-99)

Hence, these subjects who once upheld the liberal visions of Pampa Kampana whispered into their hearts became the ones supporting Vidyasagar’s religious extremism. This shows that the grand narratives have just as much significance as they are assigned with and that they are as replaceable as any other discursive thoughts. Furthermore, this sequence is also implicative of the obliteration of the author from the text as propagated by Foucault and Barthes. It is a symbolic commentary on authors not having absolute control over the meaning of the texts once it reaches the hands of readers.

The novel also sabotages the ideological orientation of Vijayanagar, and by extension, of nations in general. Vijayanagar comes into being with Pampa Kampana’s receiving the divine decree and her vision of forming a liberal society that operates on the equality of its male and female counterparts. Although Hukka and Bukka are welcoming of the people of different faith and sexual orientation during the initial period of the city’s formation, Hukka’s religious extremism and intolerance towards open expression of diverse sexual orientation and introducing reformatory principles to overthrow the previous ones towards the end of his life suggest the failure of the vision. The novel recounts such alternating fluctuating ideological inclinations during the reigns of different kings. The project of ascribing women equal status to men, being tolerant towards sexual promiscuity, and promoting art and literature alongside economic and political advancement, fails because of people’s deviation from the foundational objectives. Juxtaposing Pampa Kampana’s liberalism with DAS’s religious fanaticism, the novel shows how neither is sufficient in holding the nation together.

The backfiring of Pampa Kampana's extreme liberal ideals, the Hinduist extremism of Vidyasagar, the backwardness of Remonstrance, and the collapse of DAS are representative of the failure of singular ideological infrastructures in accommodating the diverse sociocultural background of the people. The novel also shows the impossibility of the coexistence of core beliefs of these ideals when, for example, Pampa Kampana's wanting to celebrate sensuousness by having explicit inscriptions over all the temple and household walls is met with fury by both religious fundamentalists and common people alike, and the DAS's enforcement of extremist values is met with rebellion. To elaborate:

[T]he kind of India that Rushdie advocates and insists ... is a nation that acknowledges its own hybrid state, striving to reconcile all its different religious and ethnic groups in a system in which hybridity is recognised as a positive force, not a threat. India's religious diversity, Rushdie suggests, can only be accommodated by its transformation into a profoundly secular state, and its ethnic diversity calls for a celebration of fusion and tolerance that eschews nationalism. His characters are allegories of both this hybrid ideal and of its failures. (Kluwick 108)

Chapter 4

The Mundane, The Magical, and The Inexplicable

4.1. Toying with Realism

As previously discussed, the very beginning of the novel shows its historiographic metafiction trait. Alongside, what fails to escape the readers' attention is the bizarre setting in which the plot unfolds. Pampa Kampana is introduced as two-hundred and forty-seven years old, the blind poet, miracle worker, and prophetess who finished writing the history of Bisnaga in the form of a narrative poem and hid the manuscript in a clay pot buried underneath the ground. The readers are at once pulled out of their own historical moment and reality, and are prepared to be immersed in the fictional world eliminating all sense of mistrust. However, they are soon provided with the historical background of the novel with the precise location, timeline, and references to multiple real historical figures and places. This simultaneous juxtaposition destabilises the feeling of any concrete sense of reality. As Reeds explains, "upon opening a piece of fiction, one is stepping into a world which is ruled by different laws than the real world and therefore cannot be interrupted by a supernatural event because the presupposition of reality upon which the possibility of the supernatural rests, no longer exists" (95).

The next scene affirms the realist code where the nature and consequences of war during the time period is depicted. The author explains that the women of the losing side collectively commit mass suicide in a burning pyre, a ritualistic phenomenon called Jauhar, in order to avoid being captured and sexually abused by the winning side. The nine-year-old Pampa Kampana bears witness to the horrifying event as her own mother too leaps into the pyre. Initially, she is in disbelief and deludes herself to think that "her mother was just being sociable and going with the crowd ... and soon they would all walk out of the flames,

unharméd, maybe a little scorched ... then Pampa and her mother would go home” (Rushdie 11). However, she immediately realises that the women cannot come back from death and that “she must conduct herself as an adult and never commit her mother’s last mistake. She would laugh at death and turn her face toward life. She would not sacrifice her body merely to follow dead men into the after-world. She would refuse to die young and live instead to be impossibly, defiantly old” (11-12). The too realistic portrayal of Pampa Kampana’s inner turmoil, her initial willing suspension of disbelief, and her immediate acceptance of the tragedy are colligated with her receiving the divine decree of magical powers and living long enough to witness the rise and the fall of a powerful and progressive empire. Such alternation between the real and the magical creates a sense of defocalisation, “deconstruction of empirically based authority, and hence to the creation of a narrative that encodes the ineffable” (Faris 103).

While the description of the Jauhar and the extent of impact it could possibly have on Pampa Kampana’s mental state is grounded in realism and undeniably believable, her receiving the boon signals deviation from it. The readers do not perceive this deviation with distrust, but rather they suspend their perplexity and accept it as the normative order of the textual world. Afterwards, a bewildered Pampa Kampana sees many fantastical events unfold before her eyes such as “a cobra using its hood to shield a pregnant frog from the heat of the sun,” and “rabbit turn and face a dog that was hunting it, and bite the dog on its nose and make it run away” (Rushdie 13). Had the presence of the unreal not been strong in the later parts of the novel and later events in the novel not been influenced by magic, readers could easily dismiss such episodes as fragments of imaginations induced by trauma. Additionally, these episodes are also what naturalises the neo-fantastic within the narrative framework. Since a realist narration alone would be insufficient to advance the plot and establish its historiographic metafiction status, the magical realist mode is used parallel to it (Reeds 84).

The unreal is woven intricately within the real in a way that readers cannot put away the logic of one in favour of the other. Thus, the only way they become reconciled to the distance between the two is by accepting the unreal part of the textual world to be regulated by an order that is different from that of the real part, and that both have to be functional simultaneously to stabilise the plot. Such simultaneous functionality creates, to borrow from Faris, “the space of the ineffable in-between,” a space that is relentlessly naturalised within the textual world (45-46).

The most recurrent magical aspect and irreducible element of the supernatural in the novel that dismantles its realism is Pampa Kampana’s ability to whisper into people’s mind after the divine enchantment. By whispering into people’s mind the stories of their ancestry, their faith, their ideologies, and so on, she controls the resulting chaos followed by the city’s advent from thin air and brings order to it. The whispering is a schematic device that highlights the constructedness of history and fiction. Pampa Kampana is able to mould the history of Bisnaga as well as procure the content of her narrative poem with the power to whisper into people’s heart and hear back their whisperings. The unreality of the city within the story and its people’s birth is masked through her whispered stories. The city has a physical embodiment, it has its people, therefore it is real. However, these people do not have any preexisting knowledge about the city or their own existence for that matter.

The city came to existence before the people did unlike the general convention of people existing before cities do. Hence, the case in the novel is not that of people inhabiting the city with their stories but that it is the city with its stories accommodating people. Here we have a history of an empire and its people who have to call their own stories that are mere whispers of another. Historical reality is thus juxtaposed with the magical fictitiousness with the whisperings as a mediating device between them as evidenced by the narration:

A whole city, people of all kinds and ages, blooming from the earth on the same day, such flowers have no souls, they don't know who they are, because the truth is they are nothing. But such truth is unacceptable. It was necessary, she said, to do something to cure the multitude of its unreality. Her solution was fiction. She was making up their lives, their castes, their faiths, how many brothers and sisters they had, and what childhood games they had played, and sending the stories whispering through the streets into the ears that needed to hear them, writing the grand narrative of the city, creating its story now that she had created its life. (34)

It is clearly mentioned in the passage that Pampa Kampana's whispers do not make the people believe in having any supernatural qualities themselves, but that she is merely spinning the yarns of very realistic mundane lives. These ordinary lives brought about by whispers of a magical entity depict the indeterminate nature of magical realist narratives.

Rushdie brings in the allusions to whisperings as a tool to disrupt the realist code. For instance, when Pampa Kampana realises the visible signs of Hukka's declining health, she begins to worry for the future. Though nobody dares point out the fact that her daughters are fathered by Nunes and not Hukka, she knows that the issue of succession will be disputed after Hukka's death. As such, she plans to side with Bukka and make him the next king. Alongside taking advantage of Bukka's sexual inclination towards her to manipulate him into her cause, she also uses her whispering on him. Telling him that "life is a ball that we hold in our hands. It is for us to decide what game to play with it," she makes him an aspirant for the throne. In this case, her whispering is of little value since Bukka would naturally have been the next king. The intermingling of logical procession of incidents with magical ones have only one function which is to unsettle the readers, make them hesitate, and constantly remind them of the conflicting presence of the real and the unreal code in the narrative.

4.2. Ordinary Lives, Enchanting Tales

The episode that is completely embedded with the most magical realist signification is that of Pampa Kampana and her daughters' exile. One of Chanady's central arguments regarding magical realism that Kluwick disputes is that of harmonious and equal development of the magical and the realist world (13). Kluwick's argument is rightly justified through the part on exile as the entirety of it is dominated by magic to such an extent that no connection to the realist code is present at all. To begin with, prior to the exile, the novel gives an absolute realistic portrayal of Pampa Kampana's sons' attempt to seize the throne and the endangering of her own and her daughters' safety. As such, they do not have any option except to run away to save their lives. Though the readers can accept the son's motivation and imagine the consequences of the daughters if the sons can seize power, it is questionable as to why Pampa Kampana's magical power is insufficient to prevent or resist such harm. This is one of the characteristics of magical realism where the readers are in doubt regarding the contradiction of the two codes (Faris 7). The end result is that there occurs a clash between the realist and the magical code in which readers are faced with an irresolvable ontological status regarding their acceptability (Kluwick 25).

Furthermore, the fact that Pampa Kampana and her daughters seek refuge in the enchanted forest shows the cultural specificity of the particular type of magical realism in Rushdie's fictions (Reeds 68). In order to understand why taking refuge in the forest is the most usual course of action for the characters, readers have to be aware of the spatial and the cultural setting of the novel. Being exiled to the forest is a commonplace attribute of Indian literature as seen in the great mythic texts such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. When the human world becomes unwelcoming, the wilderness becomes a place of comfort for the outcasts. Within the cultural paradigm of the textual setting, resorting to the forest is the most

usual course of action. However, readers not acquainted with such cultural signification pose the risk of reading the text as a discourse of exoticism because of which Rushdie begins the part with the explanation that “the jungle stands at the heart of the great ancient tales” (116). By bringing this aspect into notice, the status of *Jayaparajaya* to be one of such texts is affirmed.

Unlike the real world which is a place full of dangers for women, the jungle is a utopian reimagination of a place of safety and liberty for women. This is evidenced by the condition upon which men can enter the jungle. While women are allowed in the jungle without any reservation, only those men who are true to themselves and have the ability to abandon their carnal desires and embrace the moral attributes of their humanity are allowed in. If the condition is not met, then the men will be turned into women upon entering the jungle. The jungle is described as “For here it was the real world that was unreal, its laws had been blown away like dust, and if there were other laws here, they did not know what those laws might be. They had arrived in *arajakta*, the place without kings. A crown, here, was no more than an unnecessary hat. Here justice was not handed down from above, and only nature ruled” (119).

In this regard, the unconventionality of the ordering of the jungle is accepted by the readers “only within the context of the fictitious world” since “he does not integrate it in his own perception of reality” (Chanady 163). Though the rules of the jungle seem lucrative and utopic, readers are aware of its remoteness to their own reality and the real world. It is important to note that contrary to *Midnight's Children*, the jungle in *Victory City* is not a dangerous place but it is sustaining and accepting of the recluse.

Further description of the jungle sheltering animals unimaginable to the human mind implies the strong presence of the phenomenal world and the fact that the ordering of that world is inevitably different from the real world (Faris 7). When Pampa Kampana replies that

her magical powers will protect her from the wild animals of the jungle, the translating author's interpretation of the claim throws doubt on it. He says:

We must ask ourselves how great her powers could actually have been, and if the forest truly did contain wild beasts that never bothered them because of her witchcraft—as her story suggests—or if it was mercifully free of such dangers, and she was just making a sort of joke. Was it true that the goddess who gave her the gift of long life, and the power to give seeds the power to grow a city, and the power that enabled her to whisper men's lives into their ears, also endowed her with the ability to enchant the enchanted forest? Or was this poetry a fable like so many others? We must reply: either it's all true, or none of it is, and we prefer to believe in the truth of the well-told tale. (Rushdie 119)

Such an elucidation casting doubt upon the reliability of Pampa Kampana's account and her powers is a specific strategy of Rushdie's magical realism, argues Kluwick. The failure of representational systems in offering interpretive clarity is deliberately exposed through such authorial remarks which further causes the readers' attempt and subsequent failure to resolve the confusion ensuing from the inability to reconcile these scepticisms (Kluwick 32).

The magical realist sequence in the jungle also disturbs the conventional notion of time, space, and identity. Though some of their daily activities in the jungle are the same as that of the outside world, such as seeking a livelihood to mitigate hunger and building and maintaining a place to take shelter, their lives are not governed by the conventions of the outside world. In the jungle, they do not have to worry about not having their chores done or not fulfilling their ordained roles within a given time. Instead, they are freer in the jungle as they do not have to reckon with time and could do whatever they wanted and whenever. Freed from the societal expectations and ideological implications, they are allowed to follow their desires and discover their inner selves. This is indicated by the fact that all three daughters

who did not show any interest in men or being in love while they lived in the palace and were only occupied with fulfilling their roles as intelligible advisors and physically agile warriors, felt more inclined towards the former activities. Stripped of the roles of being the bearers of Pampa Kampana's utopian vision of Bisanaga, the daughters come in touch with their femininity and the fulfilment of their ordinary desires instead of being exemplary models. All of these give the reality effect the functions of which are to root the text in a recognisable reality by introducing some realism to the fantastic, and expose the cultural specificity of the reality being constructed (Kluwick 38).

One of the central themes of Rushdie's magical realism, Kluwick says, is that his characters are placed in hostile settings and their response to such settings are embodied through physical grotesqueness or eccentricity of character. Though Pampa Kampana does not bear any physical grotesqueness in the literal sense of the word, she is inscribed with magical power that completely detaches her from the very mundaneness that inflicted hostility upon her infant self. As such, her lasting youth is the grotesqueness of her character and her curse. The knowledge of her life surpassing those of everyone around her agonises her, and makes her unable to be completely emotionally attached to them. Although her body is untainted by the signs of ageing, it is her mind that bears its marks. Instances of it are found when she is unable to grieve the loss of her loved ones, yet inwardly holds herself responsible for their demise even though it is her fate to outlive everyone.

During her exile, Pampa Kampana sends a delegate of crows and parrots to spy on Bisanaga. The scene is lengthened with descriptions of the crows and parrots being playful in revealing information. They do not disclose the information all at once, instead they tease it. When asked questions by Pampa Kampana, they give answers in a roundabout way telling unnecessary details at first. What is important to note is that this scene does not have any

authorial intervention. Unlike the other magical realist scenes, there is no contesting commentary regarding its validity. The authorial reticence in this scene is indicative of the author's intent to unquestionably make the readers believe in the magic of the scene. Lack of explanation of the magical code naturalises it within the narrative. As Chanaday says, "An explanation of the supernatural, or an attempt to analyse the perspective that differs from our normal view of reality, would only draw our attention to the strangeness or even impossibility of certain events and beliefs" (149). Rushdie omits any explanation of the supernatural to avoid drawing attention to their impossibility.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

To conclude, Rushdie's *Victory City* is a retelling of the history of Vijayanagar composed into a narrative poem by Pampa Kampana. Blessed with longevity and magical powers by the deity, Pampa Kampana causes the origination of Vijayanagar and its people from vegetable seeds. Such an alternative assessment of history through the incorporation of the magical ascribes it the status of historiographic metafiction and magical realist fiction. Taking these two paradigms as the theoretical framework, this thesis has deciphered the features of historiographic metafiction and magical realism in the novel through close textual analysis.

Demonstrating history to be constructed through subjective lens and its fallacy to accurately represent the past, the elusive nature of fiction, and the portrayal of alternative points of view through the amalgamation of history and fiction shows the historiographic metafictional nature of the novel. Moreover, through the disjuncture of subjectivity and time through sceptic narration, juxtaposition of the accounts of the narratorial subject with the translating author's commentary, the emergence of multiple reality and intertextuality, and the contestation of grand narratives, the novel exhibits its historiographic metafictional stature. Simultaneously, the establishment of realist and non-realist codes to dismantle textual stability, and challenging and recasting of history through depicting the magical realist scenes alongside the realist ones and questioning their normativity are the aspects of magical realism evident in the novel.

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