Chapter II
A World on the Move: the Postmodern and Diaspora

I thought: Nothing stands still. Everything changes. I will inherit no house, and no house that I build will now pass to my children. That way of life has gone. . . . When I came here, this flat was still the Belgian lady’s flat. It wasn’t my home; it was like a camp. Then that camp became mine. Now it has changed again. . . . I was homesick, had been homesick for months. But home was hardly a place I could return to. Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost. (Naipaul 107)

Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world. (Heidegger 219)

At the turn of the century capitalism became overwhelming and communication technology made tremendous progress. People nowadays cannot but confront a world on the move. Several social theorists agree that contemporary societies, when deeply influenced by the worldwide change, are now in a new stage of development, or a stage they call “the postmodern.” The postmodern condition and the concomitant globalization have a great impact on the contemporary lifestyle, identity formation, and the way of thinking. Emerging alongside the postmodern phenomenon and globalization, diaspora embodies the mobility and mutability of the contemporary world and nowadays, it gains more and more attention in the academy. Chiefly tackling the tension between home and aboard (Kalra 17-18), the concept of diaspora intermingles with such ideas of “ethnicity, immigration,
settlement and race” (Kalra 9) and it also indicates the complicated process of identification in a postmodern world. In this chapter, the primary aim is to gauge what inspiration the postmodern elements give to the life experience of diasporic subjects, and also to explore in what aspect Salman Rushdie represents the postmodern and diasporic condition in *The Satanic Verses*.

Triggering myriads of drastic, incompatible, and worldwide disputes in terms of literary, political, and religious fields, Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* is a controversial novel of metamorphosis, dislocation, demolition, and frontier crossing\(^1\). By means of intricate word games as well as perplexing, unanticipated, and abstruse storylines, *The Satanic Verses* aims to delineate a crumbling world in which everything that was originally fixed, static, complete, and authentic is now unruled, shaken, disarrayed, and interrogated. It is an age when the commonplace is irretrievably unfamiliarized, the profoundness ruthlessly flattened, the rigid boundary transgressed, and the master illegitimized. This vision of fluctuation, uncertainty, fracture, and displacement is best embodied in diasporic subjects, for they bear compatible or incompatible memories, emotions, and cultures in the process of transnational frontier crossing. In other words, *The Satanic Verses* revolves around an inevitable phenomenon of uncertainty, fluidity, and transformation as well as its representation in the predicament poignantly experienced by diasporic subjects, their nostalgic vision of imaginary homelands, and their ambivalent, often antagonistic, relations with host countries. By means of intertwining three seemingly disjunctive but essentially interrelated storylines (that is, the deification and mental collapse of Gibreel Farishta, the transmogrification and eventual reconciliation of Saladin Chamcha, and the revelation of Mahound), Rushdie attempts to scrutinize how diasporic subject position represented in the text responds to the opaque,

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\(^1\) Professor Jung Su, in “Crossing Frontiers: Diaspora Identity in *The Satanic Verses*,” contends that frontier crossing, transgression, and cultural translation are shown to be the fundamental elements to the perusal of *The Satanic Verses*. Employing these ideas as the underlying device, Su examines “how the question of the diaspora identity is metaphorically expressed” (3). In this article, the relation between frontier crossing and the diasporic experience represented in *The Satanic Verses* is particularly scrutinized.
unmoored, and distressing situation confronted by diasporic subjects in the contemporary world of instability, heterogeneity, and capriciousness.

Throughout the novel, a decisive question is unremittingly reiterated: “what kind of idea is he? What kind am I?” (111) Taking as the starting point this noteworthy question which is uncomplicated on the surface but recondite in content, Rushdie indicates the essential issue of identity inescapably encountered by human beings in general, or diasporic subjects in particular, in a world of mutability, transience, and disintegration. The significance of the concept of identity consists in the fact that it explicitly circumscribes “the possibilities of what we are and what we can become” through “the signifying practices and symbolic systems” (Woodward 14). That is to say, identification is an indispensable process through which our existence in the world is endowed with a strong sense of belonging and because of which such questions as “who am I? What could I be? Who do I want to be?” (Woodward 14) are offered a plausible answer. Through the process of identification, we become aware of what position we occupy, where we belong, and who we are. Stuart Hall in “The Question of Cultural Identity” distinguishes three disparate notions of identity: the Enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the post-modern subject (Hall 1996: 597). The concept of the Enlightenment subject makes much of “the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action,” (Hall 1996: 597) while the notion of the sociological subject places emphasis on the social, political, and cultural relations of each individual with the world he/she inhabits. In addition, according to the conception of the sociological subject, each individual is sutured into an already established structure, with his/her position assigned beforehand (Hall 1996: 598). In this process, the individual position in a social structure becomes effectively and “reciprocally more unified and predictable” (Hall 1996: 598). To put it simply, the premise which the Enlightenment subject and the sociological subject have in common is a unified, stable, and coherent identity. However, these two perspectives are obsolete and far away
from the present-day living experience under Hall’s exposition. As a result of the drastic alteration of social, cultural, economic, and political structures in late-modernity, the concept of identity becomes “more open-ended, variable, and problematic” (Hall 1996: 598). The notion of the post-modern subject, in comparison with those two concepts of identity mentioned above, therefore comes into existence. It highlights a process of fragmentation, disassembly, proliferation, and problematization. As Stuart Hall clarifies in “The Question of Cultural Identity”, the post-modern subject is conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity. Identity becomes a “movable feast”: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us (Hall, 1987). The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent “self”... The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. (Hall 1996: 598)

The post-modern subject, under Hall’s depiction, is consistent with the configuration of present-day identity, and at the same time its characteristics are closely relevant to the changeable, transient, and unsettled phenomenon in postmodernity.

This post-modern identity as well as the distinguishing features of postmodernity is, in my thesis, taken as a starting point to examine the impact which the postmodern phenomenon makes on the process of identification, and the life experience and predicaments of diasporic subjects represented in The Satanic Verses. In order to achieve these goals, this chapter will delve into the postmodern elements and diasporic experience in The Satanic Verses. The first part of this chapter focuses on the notion of the postmodern, its impact on the notion of identity, and the embodiment of the postmodern elements and the spirit of postmodernity in The Satanic Verses. The second part of this chapter is concerned with the idea of diaspora, the historical survey of Asian immigrants in Britain, and the diasporic experience represented in the text.
The Condition of Postmodernity: a Theoretical Review

Since the Second World War, the flourishing development of capitalism, the advancement of technology, and the widespread phenomenon of globalization all contribute to an intense and considerable transformation in social, cultural, and economic structure as a whole. In order to comprehend the condition of knowledge and the consequent phenomenon happening in the contemporary world, Jean-François Lyotard, one of the foremost critics of the second half of the twentieth century, brings up a groundbreaking and remarkable interpretation of this condition and its manifestation in science, literature, and art. As a foundational and influential text of postmodern theory, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is basically an account of “the ways in which different ways of knowing about and dealing with the world—science, technology, law, the university system, etc.—are understood and valued in contemporary society” (Malpas 15). From the very beginning of *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard determines to “use the word *postmodern* to describe that condition [of knowledge and of the current world]” (xxiii). The most frequently discussed assertion of Lyotard is this compendious, profound, and aphoristic sentence: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives” (xxiv). This dictum indicates that the old times when metanarrative or meta-theory serves as the only dominating principle have already passed away. A time, in which myriads of contingent, transient, and discordant small narratives undergoes competition, contradiction, negotiation, reconciliation, and compromise, is about to come. The close attention paid to numerous small narratives suggests that a universal law is, in this turbulent age, no longer possible and that the condition of discrepancy, contradiction, and inconsistency will always remain.

Contemplating the passage from modernity to postmodernity, Lyotard hypothesizes that the essence and condition of knowledge will undergo a material change when “societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern

age” (Lyotard 3). In other words, the development of technology, the progress in the methods of communication, and the blooming of capitalism have an unprecedented influence on the status of knowledge as well as the transmission of knowledge. The circulation of knowledge, for instance, jeopardizes the solidarity and consistence of the national boundary as well as the state power during a time when intra-national and extra-national communication becomes a leading and energetic actor in the global stage, for knowledge gradually assumes the form of value and “[becomes] a commodity that is bought and sold on the market” (Malpas 18) in this age which is characterized by the prevalence of capitalism. He argues that with the alteration of the status of knowledge, such fields as science, arts, and literature “cannot be reconciled according to a single account of their positive interrelation, in terms of progress towards the emancipation of mankind, for example” (Williams 27). That is to say, the all-inclusive, integrated, and harmonious unity of these fields in terms of values, rules, and aims proves to be nothing more than a mere unilateral willingness. For example, the rules of science and those of arts are always already incommensurable, for “there is no overall narrative that can give us overarching rules between fields” (Williams 27).

After investigating the social configuration in this new knowledge-based economy, Lyotard then proceeds with an examination of language games and the nature of social bonds. He contends that the structure of society is composed of multitudinous statements and rules which determine whether a language move is legitimate or illegitimate. As he unequivocally expounds,

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal points” of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of message pass. (15) As subjects in society, we inextricably exist within this framework of language games and
within this structure, each individual must occupy a position. Lyotard then argues that there is incommensurability between diverse language games. By this he means that there is not a shared, universal set of rules, values, and norms which is overarching enough to perform the role of the sovereign dominator. From this linguistic account, he extends to other fields and claims that “[just] as different types of games have distinct sets of rules, different societies have diverse forms of politics, law and legitimation” (Malpas 23). The so-called meta-language, along with the other words possessing the prefix “meta”, is therefore de-legitimatized, to use Lyotard’s peculiar term, and ceases to be effective and valid. As Lyotard distinctly elucidates,

In contemporary society and culture—postindustrial society, postmodern culture—the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (37)

According to Lyotard, the changing status of knowledge which takes place in the second half of the twentieth century gives rise to a widespread doubt about the grand narrative. Deeply immersed in this disbelieving atmosphere, “we ‘must arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus’” (Harvey 52). Together with the incommensurability of language games, the loss of faith in metanarrative, or in a universal law, summarizes the primary distinguishing feature of the postmodern condition: “a fragmented society with many different and incompatible moral and social codes” (Williams 34).

Lyotard’s groundbreaking report sheds light not only on the shifting condition of knowledge but also on the concept of the postmodern condition, particularly the notion of identity. As Lyotard explains,

The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread. It
is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an
indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules. (40)
An individual’s identity is thus characterized as multiple and disruptive. Since the grand
narrative by no means proves to be legitimate and appropriate, “there is no longer any
unifying identity for the subject or society” (Malpas 29). In a word, the true kernel of the
postmodern is that everything that was originally identified with linearity, rationality, unity,
and absoluteness, or with the organizing and unifying power in modern time, is now
challenged and interrogated. As David Harvey indicates in The Condition of
Postmodernity, “Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or
‘totalizing’ discourses (to use the favoured phrase) are the hallmark of postmodernist
thought” (9). Underscoring the key motifs of de-centering, fragmentation, disenchantment,
and dislocation, the condition of postmodernity brings about a particular “structure of
feeling,”3 to use Raymond Williams’s term. This postmodern structure of feeling, as
Kobena Mercer argues,

means a recognition of the fragmentation of traditional sources of authority and
identity, the displacement of collective sources of membership and belonging
such as “class” and “community” that help to construct political loyalties,
affinities, and identifications. (50)
The collapse of metanarrative, the waning of absoluteness and universality, and the crash of
authority all herald the coming of the postmodern age. The extraordinary, influential, and

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2 Harvey’s The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change is an outstanding
and remarkable text which cannot be underestimated in today’s discussion about postmodernity. As a
professor of geography, Harvey employs concrete and distinct examples of architecture, painting, and urban
space design to explicitly illustrate the passage through to postmodernity and the social, political, and economic
changes in the twentieth century. Among several critics that talk about postmodernity and postmodernism, he
is one of the most convincing in my point of view.

3 Williams uses the concept of “structure of feeling” to delineate the widespread impression which people
perceive toward a particular time and place. That is to say, structure of feeling characterizes the shared living
experience, the common values, the general social mentality, and the culture of a particular historical moment.
Related issues can be found in such reference materials as The Country and the City (1973), and Marxism and
far-reaching effect of the postmodern condition still lingers on in the present day.

When discussing the concept of postmodernity, contemporary critics are unlikely to leave the notion of deconstruction out of consideration, for what these two concepts have in common is the celebration of a condition characterized as disrupted, indeterminate, and de-centering. In other words, due to their identical attention to “[making] alterations in the foundational groundings of cultural practices,” (Collins 133) the idea of postmodernity as well as the concept of deconstruction is interrelated and interdependent. Among various critics who probe into the quintessence of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida is the daring, prominent, and leading exponent whose perspectives undermine the usual way of thinking in terms of philosophy, literature, linguistics, arts, and architecture. In his point of view, “deconstruction designated a double movement: both disordering, or disarrangement, and also re-arranging” (Collins 91). Often misunderstood as a practice that recklessly rejects meaning and overturns the authority, deconstruction in reality endeavors to interrogate, unfamiliarize, and problematize the usual assumptions. It is an elaborate practice, the substance of which consists in re-inscription, re-working, and re-thinking of the original center, rather than in the indiscreet repudiation and subversion of it. What is bewildering, enigmatic, and obscure, however, is that any definition which attempts to translate the meaning of deconstruction, in effect, always already fails to achieve this goal, for “[d]econstruction, Derrida suggests, might be better described as a suspicion against thinking ‘what is the essence of?’” (Collins 93) The ordinary and taken-for-granted sentences —deconstruction is something or deconstruction is not something— are, at the outset, distorted and deviate from the faith of deconstruction.

Central to Derrida’s ideological system is his critique on phonocentrism and logocentrism which are entrenched in the tradition of Western thought and which serve as the fundamental and unquestionable premise in terms of philosophy, literature, arts, and other fields. Unwilling to take for granted the self-evident, pre-given, and paramount concepts of
phonocentrism and logocentrism, Derrida commences to contemplate on the condition of
language, on the attributes of speech and writing, and on the metaphysics of presence and
absence, and during this process, Derrida himself demonstrates the major concern of
deconstruction. In *Of Grammatology*, one of Derrida’s most outstanding texts, he
scrutinizes, interrogates, and disassembles the long-term superiority of speech over writing to
elucidate the mode of critical analysis he calls “deconstruction.” According to Derrida, the
superiority of speech over writing is closely related to the structuralist view on language, the
foremost principle of which is, in the first place, enounced by Ferdinand de Saussure.

Saussure contends that “language is a differential network of meaning,” (Norris 24) and at the
same time language is a system of signs. By this he means that the production of meaning
lies in its relation and discrepancy with others. What signifies the idea of light, for instance,
is not the essence of light per se, but rather the disparity between light and dark.

Furthermore, Saussure divides the sign into two further elements: the signifier and the
signified:

There was, he argued, the *form* (the actual word, image, photo, etc.), and there
was the *idea or concept* in your head with which the form was associated.

Saussure called the first element, the *signifier*, and the second element—the
corresponding concept it triggered off in your head—the *signified*. Every time
you hear or read or see the *signifier* (e.g. the word or image of a *Walkman*, for
example), it correlates with the *signified* (the concept of a portable
cassette-player in you head). (Hall 1997: 31)

After contemplating Saussure’s separation of the signified and the signifier, Derrida
recognizes that the smelly ideology of Western phonocentrism and logocentrism is, in
practice, inherent in Saussure’s ideological system. He claims that at the heart of Western
thought, “[t]he exteriority of the signifier is the exteriority of writing in general” (Derrida 14)
and that this indisputable exteriority of writing, or of the signifier, is for a long time
depreciated as a complete divergence from authenticity and truth. In the tradition of
Western philosophical thinking, speech, or voice, represents truth and accuracy, for “[i]n
speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, an
inward and immediate realization of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect,
transparent understanding” (Norris 28). Christopher Johnson elaborates on the conventional
distinction between speech and writing:

Whereas speech is habitually associated with reason and rationality (the Greek
notion of logos) and the voice is perceived as being closer to the inner “truth” of
individual consciousness, writing is considered to be a secondary extension or
supplement to the voice, an auxiliary technology employed by human reason but
not essential to it. (4)

This phonocentric inclination which prevails over the tradition of Western thought derives
from “the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence” (Derrida
12). That is to say, speech stands for presence and thus authenticity, whereas writing merely
guarantees absence and hence deferment of authenticity. Derrida, however, brings up his
distinctive, unprecedented, and dauntless perspectives on the concept of writing, which defies
entrenched phonocentrism and logocentrism in the Western ideological system. According
to Derrida, writing is the element of undecidability, which underscores a status of
indeterminacy and slippage. As Christopher Norris clarifies,

Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language
and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge.
In this sense, oral language already belongs to a “generalized writing”, the
effects of which are everywhere disguised by the illusory “metaphysics of
presence”. Language is always inscribed in a network of relays and differential
“traces” which can never be grasped by the individual speaker. (29)
writing, Derrida undoes the long-term priority of speech over writing and hence demonstrates the spirit of deconstruction.

Postmodern Elements in *The Satanic Verses*

As a novel revolving around the diasporic experience in a kaleidoscopic, aberrant, and contingent postmodern world, *The Satanic Verses* is written in an ambiance of the rapid spread of globalization, whose distinguishing features are mutability, disintegration, fluidity, and frontier crossing. Profoundly influenced by the social milieu and configuration in the late-1980s Britain[^4^], Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* intends to bring to light the “morbid symptoms of just such a crisis [of authority], the death throes of the old commingling with the birth pangs of the new” (Israel 162). During the transitional phase in which the primarily established practices, values, and norms are by degrees regarded as obsolescent, the social, cultural, and political ambiance is portrayed as uncertain, mutable, and transient. In this condition of displacement, disenchantment, and de-centering, the unique, subversive, and newly burgeoning way of thinking begins to dominate over the obsolete one. Vividly inscribed and illustrated in *The Satanic Verses*, these peculiar characteristics of a postmodern time are represented in terms of symbols, characters’ behavior, and their opinions.

One of the most salient, significant, and penetrating symbols in *The Satanic Verses*, air space serves to be the quintessential epitome of the postmodern world in the twentieth century, for the attributes of air space are consistent with those of the postmodern condition, with the values, principles, and spirit celebrated by the inclination towards postmodernity. In the first place, readers are capable of recognizing the extraordinary position which the symbol of air occupies in the text, for the book begins with the major protagonists’ being in the air and their subsequent stumbling from the sky. The protagonists’ location in the air

[^4^]: In the second part of this chapter, I will make a thorough inquiry about the transformations of the social ambiance in Britain from the 1960s to 1980s.
obliquely suggests that we, as subjects in the postmodern world of the twentieth century, inextricably come up against a situation that is puzzling, insecure, obscure, and uncontrollable. Rushdie, in delineating the mysterious, inscrutable, and comical air crash scene at the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*, ruminates over the concept of air as well as its inspiration to the current world. As he demonstrates,

> Up there in air-space, in that soft, imperceptible field which had been made possible by the century and which, thereafter, made the century possible, becoming one of its defining locations, the place of movement and of war, the planet-shrinker and power-vacuum, most insecure and transitory of zones, illusory, discontinuous, metamorphic,—because when you throw everything up in the air anything becomes possible—wayupthere, at any rate, changes took place in delirious actors that would have gladdened the heart of old Mr. Lamarck: under extreme environmental pressure, characteristics were acquired. (5)

This passage explicitly indicates the features of air space: illusory, transitory, metamorphic, and discontinuous. These features, at the same time, are appropriate to be employed to portray a postmodern time, whose key motifs are unreliability, capriciousness, opacity, and uncertainty. In addition to its embodiment of the condition of postmodernity, air space signifies that everything is possible, achievable, and imaginable in this highly mutable, floating, and ephemeral space. In a nutshell, air space is a place in which the inconceivable becomes materialized, the stable destabilized, the continuous disrupted, and the established crumbled. Within this space which is characterized by movement, discontinuity, and metamorphosis, newness is able to come into the world. Furthermore, Gibreel Farishta’s penetrating dictum, “*We are creatures of air, Our roots in dreams And clouds, reborn In flight,*” (13) implies that our identity is no longer fixed, earthbound, and steadfast since we ground our roots in insecure air space, in illusory dreams, and in ethereal clouds. We are, in this age, destined to be rooted in illusory and shapeless ground and thus, the idea of home,
belonging, and land is in the process dispersed and reduced to nothing more than a mirage-like nostalgia. When tumbling from the sky, Saladin Chamcha, at the same time, perceives the peculiarities of the clouds:

Chamcha in his semi-consciousness was seized by the notion that he too, had acquired the quality of cloudiness, becoming metamorphic, hybrid, as if he were growing into the person whose head nestled now between his legs and whose legs were wrapped around his long, patrician neck. (6-7)

The “quality of cloudiness,”—its opacity, fluidity, capriciousness, and indistinctness—once again reveals the quality of air. At the same time, it underlines the ineluctable metamorphosis, indeterminacy, and ephemerality in this time.

The motif of air, together with its attributes of transience, uncertainty, and opacity, is highlighted in “the change in consciousness that came with modernity and persisted in intensified form into postmodernity” (Gane 21). When wrestling with the ephemerality and changeability of the condition of modernity, Marshal Berman describes:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. . . it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air”. (15)

The condition of modernity represented as disruption, ephemerality, and startling change, in Harvey’s point of view, still finds its echo in the postmodern condition. Or, to put it more specifically, the postmodern consciousness consolidates, reinforces, and celebrates this concept of transience, fragmentation, fluidity which is already experienced in modernity. Born in a time when “all that is solid melts into air,” we are now poignantly experiencing
“the vertigo of an age without foundations” (Gane 21) in a postmodern age.

Also related to the characteristics of the postmodern, the imagery of disintegration and the potential reorganization are demonstrated in this proverbial sentence: “To be born again . . . first you have to die” (3). Tumbling from the sky, Gibreel frenziedly and deliriously sings: “To be born again . . . first you have to die” (3). This succinct, penetrating, and aphoristic sentence, on the one hand, foreshadows the further happenings with reference to Gibreel and Saladin’s survival after the air crash and, on the other hand, implies one of the primary motifs in the text:

How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine? Is birth always a fall? Do angels have wings? Can men fly? (8)

While the narrator is addressing this pivotal and quintessential query which is recurrently interrogated in the text, the answer to the question is already circuitously presented. Only through the process of “fusion, translations, conjoinings” (8) can newness enter the world. What signifies the process of “fusion, translations, conjoinings” (8) is the idea that the established is crumbled, the stable destabilized, the integrated unraveled, and the irrelevant yoked together. By the same token, the meaning implied in the maxim, “To be born again . . . first you have to die,” (3) underscores a new beginning after a process that is characterized as unstable, fragmentary, indeterminate, and mutable. Through this process of deconstruction, disjunction, and transformation, the shackles of fixity, totality, and authenticity is thrown off and the collapse of metanarrative is anticipated.

In addition to the prominent symbol of air space, Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses*, manifests the postmodern consciousness in some characters’ deeds and attitudes, including Bilal the disciple and Salman the scribe. They either embody the postmodern resistance to
the grand narrative or demonstrate the ephemerality, fluidity, and discontinuity in a
postmodern age. In the “Mahound” chapter, the slave Bilal, a faithful adherent of Mahound,
is coerced by his master to enumerate the gods:

the slave, Bilal: how his master asked him, outside the Lat temple, to enumerate
the gods. “One,” he answered in that huge musical voice. Blasphemy,
punishable by death. They stretched him out in the fairground with a boulder
on his chest. *How many did you say? One, he repeated, one. A second
boulder was added to the first. *One one one.* (102)

In spite of the ruthless abuses and intolerable tortures befalling this poor man, Bilal insists on
saying that the number of the gods is “*One, one, one*” (102). The “terrifying singularity”
(102) consolidates the strength of Mahound. Thus, it threatens to overpower the authority of
Abu Simbel as well as polytheism which Simbel stands for. The threefold announcement,
for one thing, seems to compliment Bilal on his resolute and steadfast belief in oneness,
unification, and absoluteness. For another, however, it insinuates the key motif of the
decomposition of metanarrative which underlies the entire text. At the same time, it
indicates that the nature of oneness and absoluteness, or the grand narrative, is hollow,
illusory, and fragile, for the tripling of “*One, one, one*” (102) stealthily transforms
singularity into multiplicity. In other words, Bilal never recognizes that the oneness he
worships is by no means the oneness in which he believes during the process of saying “*One,
one, one*” (102). On the contrary, the univocal and authoritative oneness is ruthlessly
exploded into multiplicities of minute and autonomous oneness. Consequently, the oneness
comes through an essential metamorphosis by means of disintegration, de-centering, and
proliferation. The radical transformation, which reduces totality, singularity, and unity to
fragments, multitudes, and disunity, corresponds to the true kernel of deconstruction as well
as the characteristics of the postmodern condition. With the exemplary model of Bilal the
disciple, Rushdie seeks to manifest that the destructive power always already underlies the
supreme, commanding, and absolute grand narrative, although latently, stealthily, and
inconspicuously.

In comparison with Bilal the disciple who unwittingly overturns the dominant,
peremptory, and absolute metanarrative of Mahound, Salman the scribe deliberately tampers
with Mahound’s supreme teaching. As a devout adherent of Mahound at the outset, Salman
sees through the despicable scheme of Mahound due to their intimacy. Mahound, for
instance, does not pay much attention to norms, doctrines, and rules initially. But afterwards,
multifarious standards are stuffed into the followers’ day-to-day life:

but in those years Mahound—or should one say the Archangel Gibreel?—should
one say Al-Lah?—became obsessed by law. Amid the palm-trees of the oasis
Gibreel appeared to the Prophet and found himself sprouting rules, rules, rules,
until the faithful could scarcely bear the prospect of any more revelation, Salman
said, rules about every damn thing. . .It was as if no aspect of human existence
was to be left unregulated, free. (363)

Every kind of “rules, rules, rules,” (363) in terms of Salman the scribe, makes Mahound
sound like a doctrinaire, rather than a religious mentor. Besides, when Mahound’s
perspectives are called into question by the disciples, the Archangel Gibreel’s perpetual
endorsement of Mahound also contributes to Salman’s incentive to rebel against his teaching.
Accordingly, Salman little by little falsifies Mahound’s religious discipline without being
noticed. In the process, he recognizes that “[t]here is no bitterness like that of a man who
finds out he has been believing in a ghost” (368). Disassembling the originally inviolable
and domineering authority, Salman’s alteration of Mahound’s uppermost words suggests
Salman’s disillusion and mistrust, and also it implies the mutability, uncertainty, and
inauthenticity of the so-called metanarrative. Once more, Rushdie wrestles with the concept
of disenchantment, deconstruction, fragmentation, and displacement in the postmodern
vocabulary and with the “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard, xxiv) by means of
Salman’s resistance to the authoritative grand narrative.

Transience and fragmentation, which are the salient features of postmodernity, usher in the coming of an age without foundation. Being born in this postmodern age of discontinuity, metamorphosis, and deconstruction, people are unlikely to ascertain who they really are. This condition suggests that the Western center and other authorities alike are nothing more than a ridiculous myth. Moreover, it manifests that the concept of identity is transformed from an originally permanent, immovable, and integrated entity into a fugitive, mutable, and palimpsest-like space. Rushdie employs the symbol of air as well as some characters’ behavior and attitudes to demonstrate the belief of deconstruction and the postmodern condition penetrating the entire text.

**The Diasporic Experience: A Theoretical Review**

Throughout *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie incessantly ruminates over an abstruse but critical question: “What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?” (111). This piercing question suggests that as we approach the turn of the century, we doubtlessly witness the common and irretrievable anxiety about a tottering foothold in a time that is characterized as unreliable, capricious, opaque, and uncertain. Representing the far-reaching apprehension brought forth by the extermination of the metanarrative, this stinging query tolls the knell of unchanging essence, stability, and totality. To put it simply, this signifies an anxiety about who I am, where I belong, and where home is, about the concept of identity. Among people all over the world, diasporic subjects, who go through the uprooting and transgressive process of frontier crossing, have the profoundest experience of identity anxiety. In *The Satanic Verses*, what Rushdie exquisitely and vividly depicts is this kind of predicament experienced by diasporic subjects, including dislocation, displacement, and eradication. In order to grasp
the distinctive experience of “uprootings/ regroundings”\(^5\) as well as the subsequent identity crisis, we have to, in the first place, delve into the concept of diaspora, including its historical meaning, the development and transformation of this idea, and its close relation with the postmodern condition.

Since the Second World War, the far-reaching influence of capitalism, the advancement of technology in particular, and the widespread phenomenon of globalization give rise to a drastic, astounding, and unprecedented metamorphosis in social, cultural, and economic structure as a whole. Among myriads of transformations in social, cultural, and economic structure, the large-scale population movement along the surface of the earth proves to be the most vital and profound change which has an unimaginable and astonishing impact not only on intra-national cartography but also on transnational and international demography, ethnography, economics, sociology, and politics. Due to the advancement of communication and transportation, “the encounter between diverse cultures, histories, religions and languages” (Chambers 2) interrupts the preceding integrity of the sense of ourselves and constitutes the unique living experience of the contemporary world. The rapid mass population movement, beginning in the twentieth century and persisting in the twenty-first century, fractures the formerly rigid national boundary. At the same time, it interrogates the concept of who I am and what home is. This phenomenon of mass population movement as well as its impact enkindles a series of ardent critical discussions and then critics commence to investigate those who undergo such a process of migration, displacement, and dislocation. As Iain Chambers explains in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*,

Indeed, a significant tendency in present-day critical thought, confronted with the shrinkage of the European rationale that once claimed to speak for all and

everything, is to adapt metaphors of movement, migration, maps, travel and sometimes a seemingly facile tourism. (2-3)

Those “metaphors of movement, migration, maps, travel” (Chambers 3) become nowadays the major issue in critical discourses and they are subsumed into the category of diaspora. Or, the rapid increase in mass population movement across the entire world consolidates the widespread circumstances of diaspora. Hence, when critics probe into the condition of mobility, the concept of diaspora should be brought to the foreground.

Tracking the historical signification of diaspora, we are able to recognize that diaspora, in reality, undergoes a substantial alteration. At the outset, the word “diaspora” originates from the Greek: “dia, ‘through’, and speirein, ‘to scatter’” (Brah 181). It is a condition of dispersion that is particularly applied to the banishment of the Jews from Israel. As a result of its emphasis on deprivation, deportation, and elimination, the concept of diaspora is always tinted with reluctance, compulsion, and terror. That is to say, the notion of diaspora “connotes flight following the threat of violence rather than freely chosen experiences of displacement” (Gilroy 318). Owing to the compelled dispersal and unwilling scattering, the formation of diaspora as well as the diasporic consciousness has recourse to an identity that hinges on “the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the process of dispersal” (Gilroy 318). Strictly circumscribing the idea of diaspora, William Safran establishes a defining model which is grounded on the Jewish diaspora. According to his model, diaspora is said to be an exilic community, the crucial characteristics of which are the loss of homeland, the scattering from an earlier center to the periphery, a collective memory and inextricable nostalgia for homeland, an experience of uprootedness, estrangement from the host country, and a perpetual desire to return (Clifford 304). However, in exploring the diasporic experience, James Clifford discovers several loopholes in Safran’s Jewish model, which relentlessly exposes the inefficacy of his model. Likewise, Avtar Brah asserts that “to
The term “diaspora” does not necessarily refer to a given homeland, a fixed origin, and the

transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland—at least not to the degree that Safran implies. Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin. (306)
process of dislocation, migration, and accommodation also plays the momentous role in the formation of diasporic identity. Furthermore, Clifford thinks highly of the historical trajectory of diaspora in that diaspora, in his point of view, is always already historicized and cannot be conceived outside the “specific maps/histories” (319).

In comparison with Clifford, Gilroy ruminates over the black diaspora and argues that diaspora prompts us to “re-assess the idea of essential and absolute identity because it is incompatible with that deterministic way of thinking” (331). Born in a time in which the intra-national and extra-national mobility contributes to the inescapable fissure between “the place of residence and that of belonging,” (Gilroy 329) we can simply grasp the notion of identity in terms of its contingency, diversity, indeterminacy, and conflict. With mass population on the move, the fixed identity grounded on primordial kinship and territory proves to be unattainable. As Gilroy indicates,

As an alternative to the metaphysics of “race,” nation and bounded culture coded into the body, diaspora is a concept that problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location and consciousness. (328)

Also associated with the concept of identity are his brand-new perspectives on the distinction between route and root. He considers that during the process of the former slave trade and the later globalization, the roots of the Third World are, en route, brought to the First World and at the same time a great many identities are rooted on the route. Therefore, the concepts of fixed origin and unchanging identity fail to represent the authentic “histories of crossing, migration, exploration, interconnection, and travel—forced and voluntary” (Clifford 316).

In Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities, Brah brings up an exquisite point of view on diaspora. Criticizing all discourses rooted in the fixed identity and origin, the concept of diaspora is involved with “a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire
for a ‘homeland’” (180). That is, what diaspora underlines is a spiritual uprootedness which inscribes the “homing desire” (180) without anticipating to return to a fixed origin. An illusory and inauthentic fabrication created by the diasporic nostalgia, the idea of home is, in Brah’s view, “a place of no return” (192). Besides, Brah proposes the concept of diaspora space as the confluent nodal point of diaspora, borders, and the politics of location or dislocation. As Brah specifically elucidates,

Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle. (208)

To put it simply, diaspora space is a place in which the frontiers between interior and exterior, between kin and adversary, are always already contested and the operation of diverse social, political, economic, cultural powers, to a great extent, influence the configuration of diaspora space. In a word, diaspora space not only involves the dispersal from a place of fixed origin to periphery but also underlines “spatial structures and their formative political and economic processes” (Ma 9) as well as the power relations during the process of dispersion.

Widely appropriated in this time of globalization, the term “diaspora” nearly takes the place of migration, transmigration, and transnational movement. It delineates a large-scale

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Rosemary Marangoly George also investigates the concept of home in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Originally, home “connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection” (1). Inherent in the term “home” is the sense of belonging and stability. Always regarded as “fixed, rooted, stable” (2), the idea of home undergoes qualitative change in this time of decolonization, migration, and globalization. Consequently, it is not appropriate to “insist on any one overarching formula for ‘home’” (2). Furthermore, Iain Chambers in *Migrancy. Culture, Identity* also ruminates over mobility of home and impossibility of origin. From his perspective, home is to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place, and belonging. (4)

The term “home”, in this postmodern age, goes through a process of re-assessment, re-articulation, and re-thinking.
people on the move, an experience of “rupture, scattering, and reproduction” (Tölölyan 11). Although closely associated with nostalgia for homeland, it re-establishes, re-defines, and re-articulates the idea of home. Being in the status of diaspora, diasporic subjects inextricably and irretrievably come up against the identity crisis. Always already having got mired in a vacillating choice between assimilation and maintenance of their conventions at the moment of migration, diasporic subjects constitute an expatriate community incarnating the anxiety behind this question: “What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?” (Rushdie 111)

Not only the circumstances of dispersion, of establishing a home that is away from home, but also the condition of postmodernity evokes the reconsideration of the concept of identity “not as transparent or unproblematic. . . [but] as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 1990: 222). In The Satanic Verses, what Rushdie vividly portrays is the diasporic experience of “rupture, scattering, and reproduction” (Tölölyan 11) and the identity crisis which definitely befalls in the condition of postmodernity.

“The Changing Face of Britain”?: A Historical Survey

From centuries past to the present, human beings have witnessed a series of large-scale population movement along the surface of the earth. Serving as “the motor of history,” (Huntington 198) the worldwide migration alters intra-national and extra-national cartography, demography, ethnography, economics, sociology, and politics. In the process, the present-day social, political, economic, and demographic configurations of communities are beginning to take shape. The incentives to facilitate the increased, rapid, and enormous population movement are manifold, but approximately the prevalence of capitalism, the

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7 The title is borrowed from a section of Chris Weedon’s Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging. This book revolves around identity, difference, origins, and the diasporic experience. In this section, “the changing face of Britain,” things at issue are the transformation of social milieu and factors generating this effect.
economic growth, and tendency towards globalization play the leading roles in the process of global circulation. As Samuel Huntington clarifies,

This new wave of migration was in part the product of decolonization, the establishment of new states, and state policies that encouraged or forced people to move. It was also, however, the result of modernization and technological development. Transportation improvements made migration easier, quicker, and cheaper; communications improvements enhanced the incentives to pursue economic opportunities and promoted relations between migrants and their home country families. (Huntington 199)

During a period when the West meets the Rest and vice versa, the metamorphoses in the national, communal, and individual memories, histories, and cartographies are anticipated and consequential. In Britain, in particular, such factors as “migration, devolution, globalization, the end of Empire, Britain’s long-term decline as a world power, the development of a widespread moral and cultural pluralism and an increasing degree of integration with Europe” (Weedon 31) all contribute to the metamorphosis in society. In order to comprehend the historical background of Rushdie’s writing and the migrant condition represented in *The Satanic Verses*, the idiosyncratic history of migrants in Britain is brought to the foreground in this section.

Around the 1950s and the early 1960s, a period when the whole universe came back to life after the devastation of the Second World War, the first wave of extensive population movement in Britain took place. Newly arrived immigrants were, for the most part, laborers from ex-colonies, for “Britain experienced severe labour shortages during the post-World War II period of economic expansion” (Brah 21). South Asians resettled in Britain often took up those indecent jobs which were discarded by white workers, in substance, “unskilled jobs involving unsociable hours of work, poor working conditions and low wages” (Brah 21). Those immigrants from South Asia had to endure impoverishment as well as the harsh
working environment in Britain. In addition, they had to receive unfriendly, brittle, and even antagonistic social attitudes toward them. Early immigrants in the 1950s and early 1960s, however, were still under the impression that new life in Britain, in the main, was promising and tolerable: “The 1950s for them had been a period of finding their bearings in a new country. The 1960s was the decade during which a large number of families were reunited” (Brah 27).

The immigrant situation had considerably and dramatically changed in the 1970s and the 1980s. Before Margaret Thatcher’s coming to reign in the 1980s, the entire Britain witnessed the irretrievable deterioration of the economic situation. Subsequently, the severe economic downturn intensified racial discrimination and antagonism, for white workers tended to ascribe their unemployment to those immigrants who took up their jobs. With the purpose of pandering to the public appetite for anti-immigration during that time, Thatcher “pledged that, if elected, her party would ‘finally see an end to immigration’” (Brah 37). She claimed that the integrity and authenticity of Englishness, or the British way of life, would remain intact as long as immigration law was carried out. Moreover, this policy, once put into practice, would keep British citizens away from being thrown into the predicament of unemployment, a situation that was maliciously ascribed to immigrants’ taking up myriads of harsh, unpleasant, and low-paid jobs in the labor market. Consequently, the police as well as the immigration service exercised coercive and brutal force in search for alleged illegal immigrants. As Brah makes clear,

Discrimination in employment continued. As the recession deepened, Asians’ jobs were among the most vulnerable, and the unemployment rates in areas of high Asian concentration rose quite dramatically. Racist attacks remained on the increase, and this period witnessed the murder on the streets of several Asians,
including Gurdip Singh Chaggar and Altab Ali\(^8\). (39)

In a word, due to the condition of unemployment and irreconcilable character of immigrants, the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s in Britain witnessed “sharp changes in European attitudes and policy” (Huntington 199): the ruthlessness of immigration law and the entrenchment of racism.

**Diasporic Impulse in *The Satanic Verses***

The Britannic social ambiance in the 1970s and the 1980s, during the reign of Thatcher, is insinuated into Rushdie’s narrative in *The Satanic Verses* and it becomes the underlying prerequisite of the novel. In general, *The Satanic Verses* is a novel revolving around diasporic self-positioning and migrant displacement in a kaleidoscopic, aberrant, and contingent twentieth-century world. By means of vividly, intricately, and exquisitely delineating the lived experience of diasporic subjects, Rushdie aims to attract reader’s attention to the poignancy behind this cynical question: “*What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?*” (111) A “refrain-cum-lament incanted throughout the novel,” (Israel 167) this question indicates the hard choice confronted by people on the move, that is, a vacillating decision between assimilation into the host country and preservation of their conventions at the moment of migration. The diasporic vacillation as well as the grim reality of migrant’s life in Britain is profoundly and subtly explored in this section.

By means of opaque, allusive, and equivocal delineation, Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses*, insinuates to readers that the underlying social, cultural, political, and economic ambiance and backdrop of the story is Britain under Thatcher’s governance, around the late 1970s and the 1980s. Given an embarrassing pseudonym in the text, “Maggie the Bitch,” (269) Thatcher in her reign puts into execution the merciless and rigorous immigration law

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\(^8\) According to the report, “From the Asian Left,” Gurdip Singh Chaggar, a Sikh youth, was murdered in Southall and Altab Ali, a Bangladeshi garment laborer, was also killed in London East End as a result of racial attacks.
which serves to be one influential aspect of “institutionalized racism”\(^9\) (Brah 38). The subsequent social problems, such as racial abuse and social conflicts, are expressively and metaphorically represented in *The Satanic Verses* to reflect the hard life of immigrants in Britain, as Hind, who is Sufyan’s wife, bitterly articulates: “every day you heard about this boy, that girl, beaten up by ghosts” (250). Chamcha’s mistreatment by the ruthless immigration police, for instance, is one of the most salient illustrations of the social reality during Thatcher’s reign. When searched out and arrested by the police and the immigration officers on the shore, Chamcha recognizes that misfortune grimly befalls and the formerly adorable concept of Englishness abruptly collapses. In the police van,

> The three immigration officers were in particularly high spirits, and it was one of these—the popeyed fellow whose name, it transpired, was Stein—who had “debagged” Saladin with a merry cry of, “Opening time, Packy\(^10\); let’s see what you’re made of!” (157)

Owing to the long-term xenophobia, the immigration officers spare no effort to deride, humiliate, and bully Chamcha. Their inhuman treatment of Chamcha, including the thrashing and revilement, reflects the harsh social reality during that period: “‘Animal,’ Stein cursed him [Chamcha] as he administered a series of kicks, and Bruno joined in: ‘You’re all the same. Can’t expect animals to observe civilized standards. Eh?’” (159) The behavior of the immigration officers suggests the predicament and racial discrimination faced by immigrants in Britain.

> The happenings with reference to Dr. Uhuru Simba manifest, on the one hand, the recurrent racial abuse and attacks on the London street, and on the other hand the

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\(^9\) By “institutionalized racism” (38) Brah means the racial discrimination and restraint ensuing from the operation of immigration laws and the British Nationality Act. In her point of view, the racial assaults emerge in an endless stream as a result of these two forms of institutionalized racism.

\(^10\) In Paul Brians’s “Notes for Salman Rushdie: *The Satanic Verse,*” the South Asians are generally called as “Packy” in London. In this thorough and detailed note, Paul Brians elaborates on the allusions, historical backgrounds, and connotations in *The Satanic Verses.* It proves to be a highly valuable supplementary reading material in the perusal of *The Satanic Verses.*
consequential uprising and disturbance planned by immigrants. Around the late 1970s, the racist violence and killings, reaching the zenith in history, were a genuine threat to the stability of society as a whole, for the radicalization of racial assaults not only endangered immigrants’ lives and their sense of security in Britain but also worsened the social conflicts. A large number of demonstrations, protests, and insurrections started by the ethnic group inflamed the irreconcilable feud and reduced society as a whole to a state of turbulence.

The characterization of Dr. Simba intimates that incidents involved with racial abuse and discrimination are highly political. Arrested on a charge of “Granny Ripper Murders,” (411) Dr Simba is maligned by the antagonistic state apparatus and even dies an inexplicable death. The Dr. Simba event illustrates that the manipulation of political power generates a great many tragedies and social conflicts. Even on the side of immigrants, the manipulation of political power still leaves its traces. When Dr. Simba is arrested, his mother gives a speech in a demonstration:

He [Dr. Simba] was a colossus among the dwarfs. “Make no mistake,” he said in that court, “we are here to change things. I concede at once that we shall ourselves be changed; African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cypriot, Chinese, we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans, if our mothers and fathers had not crossed the skies in search for work and dignity and a better life for their children. We have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society, to shape it from the bottom to the top. We shall be the hewers of the dead wood and the gardeners of the new. (414)

Simba’s arrest is a dramatic theme to be manipulated and so is his death. When he dies an unexplainable and inconceivable death, his advocates request immigrants in Britain to act, to start an uprising, to rebel against hostile racism, and to tolerate no more: “Stay hot,” Simba’s brother Walcott cried out to the assembly. ‘Don’t anybody cool off. Maintain your rage.’”
Hence, on the London street, “the slow flame” of wrath and discontent is step by step fanned within the immigrant community.

In addition to the harsh reality of racism in Britain, immigrants themselves also undergo a material change in the process of global circulation. The song ironically sung by Gibreel demonstrates the situation poignantly confronted by immigrants: “O, my shoes are Japanese...These trousers English, if you please. On my head Russian hat; my heart’s Indian for all that” (5). Beginning with a comical, incredible, and dramatic air crash scene, *The Satanic Verses* is a novel which hinges on “the disruptive and unsettling effect of the encounter of the marginal with its center” (Rutherford 10). The protagonists’ tumbling from the sky betokens immigrants’ abrupt and rash arrival at the Western center. Owing to the dramatic and reckless arrival in the West, immigrants bring forth a series of fragmentation, demolition, and dismantling on the part of both the Western colossus and petty immigrants themselves. As Rushdie demonstrates,

> mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongue, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*. (4)

In the process of hastily plunging into the heart of Britain, immigrants go through a disjunctive, fragmented, and unsettling experience. Memories of the past, the old self, mother tongue, the sense of existence and the relevant big words, “*land, belonging, home*” (Rushdie 4) are in the course of migration disintegrated, transgressed, and metamorphosed. In general, immigrants are prone to either internalize the Western values, norms, and ways of life, or maintain the conventional perspectives, practices, and life styles. In *The Satanic Verses*, the predicament and state of mind of diaspora is given a detailed and exceptional depiction in several characters.
One of the most radical instances in *The Satanic Verses*, “the bearded and turbaned Imam” (Rushdie 205) is an Islamic religious leader whose values, beliefs, and modes of life display his nostalgia for homeland and a desire to return. Defining himself as a reluctant exile\(^\text{11}\) in vicious London, who invariably orients himself towards the maintenance of “pristine, pure customs and traditions or unsullied glorious pasts,” (Brah 196) Imam conforms to the ancient concept of diaspora: loss of homeland, nostalgic memory of homeland, a sense of uprootedness, hostility towards the host country, and an anxiety to return. As Rushdie demonstrates,

> Who is he?  An exile. . . Exile is a dream of glorious return.  Exile is a vision of revolution: Elba, not St. Helena\(^\text{12}\).  It is an endless paradox: looking forward by always looking back.  The exile is a ball hurled high into the air.  He hangs there, frozen in time, translated into a photograph; denied motion, suspended impossibly above his native earth, he awaits the inevitable moment at which the photograph must begin to move, and the earth reclaim its own.  These are the things the Imam thinks.  His home is a rented flat.  It is a waiting-room, a photograph, air. (205-206)

Within this “rented flat,” (206) Imam cautiously and discreetly guards against the intrusion of the evil things: “foreignness, Abroad, the alien nation” (206). The primordial incentive to lead such a solitary and self-contained life is his aspiration to achieve pureness, oneness, and

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\(^{11}\) In regard to the concept of exile, several scholars have probed into its meaning as well as its relation with diaspora. Overall, they both delineate a state of uprootedness, an experience of displacement. Although both associated with the loss of homeland, they have some slight discrepancies. Clifford contends that diaspora highlights maintaining a community and establishing a home away from home whereas exile focuses on the individual experience of displacement. (308) Besides, Israel, in discussing the exilic position and diasporic self-formation, claims that “exile is to diaspora as totality is to fragmentation, anxiety to schizophrenia, depth to surface, and exchange to flow” (8). The critical perspectives on the relation between diaspora and exile are not entirely identical and compatible. In my personal point of view, the demarcation line between diaspora and exile is indistinct and indistinguishable, for the term diaspora is so widely appropriated nowadays that it signifies almost any “processes the multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries” (Brah 194).

\(^{12}\) According to Brian’s “Notes for Salman Rushdie: *The Satanic Verse*,” Elba and St. Helena is an allusion associated with Napoleon. When Napoleon was expelled to Elba, he devised a way to return to France and, in reality, he made it. When he was definitively deported to St. Helena, he never succeeded in escaping from there. Hence, Elba stands for an achievable return, whereas St. Helena implies an unlikely return.
absoluteness which ensue from an “unsullied, unaltered” (207) life. In Imam’s view, “[i]n exile all attempts to put down roots look like treason: they are admissions of defeat” (208). Eliminating any factor that is likely to tarnish his idea of homeland, Imam exhibits the key motifs of ancient diaspora: strong attachment to the homeland and a perpetual aspiration to go back.

In comparison with the radical instance of Imam, Otto Cone manifests an extraordinary anxiety for assimilation, another extreme mentality represented in the diasporic experience. A Jewish immigrant from Poland, Cone finds the past in Poland an utterly unbearable and contemptible blemish in his life. Once getting away from the homeland, Cone discards old values, practices, and lifestyles: “[He] wanted to wipe the slate clean” (298). In order to thoroughly assimilate into the new way of life in London,

He Anglicized the name—Yelyena into Ellaynah—just as it had been his idea to reduce “Alleluia” to Allie and bowdlerize himself, Cohen from Warsaw, into Cone. Echoes of the past distressed him; he read no Polish literature, turning his back on Herbert, on Milosz, on “younger fellows” like Baranczak, because for him the language was irredeemably polluted by history. “I am English now,” he would say proudly in his thick East European accent. (297)

By means of re-naming as well as the embellishment of British elegant high style in gesture, dress, and behavior, Cone self-righteously and self-complacently considers that the haunting memories of Poland are no longer inscribed on his mind. To his surprise, however, they still stealthily creep into his life and unexpectedly leaks out through his “thick East European accent” (297). The itching and restless aspiration to assimilate into the British way of life seems to be alleviated and castrated by the tormenting and lingering past.

In The Satanic Verses, the Sufyan family is one of the most quintessential and authentic specimens who display the genuine lived experience, ordinary happenings, and mentality of diaspora. As a microcosmic epitome of the diasporic experience, the Sufyan family
expresses the residential environment and living conditions of the Indian-Pakistani immigrants in London. Once an “erudite schoolteacher of Dhaka,” (245) Muhammad Sufyan is dismissed due to his fervent discourses of communism, and consequently he has no alternative but to migrate to Britain. Life in London is not so much a fresh and promising beginning as a tough and precarious bet. Without proficiency in any particular line, Muhammad and Hind Sufyan can only earn a living through cooking the traditional Indian-Pakistani cuisine and running a shabby B&B. Their life, with Shaandaar Café as the focus, represents the immigrants’ difficult condition in London. Moreover, the dilemma confronted by the immigrants is distinctly and vividly put on the stage in their petty Shaandaar Café. Always already got mired in a vacillating choice between assimilation and maintenance of their conventions at the moment of migration, the Sufyan family undergoes the alarming and destructive implosion. Always regarding himself as “‘not so much an immig as an emig runt’,” (243) Sufyan possesses nostalgia for homeland and tenaciously maintains the conventions of homeland. When explaining the essence of self by means of the distinction between Ovid and Lucretius, Sufyan once again makes much of the unchanging old self in a shifting world:

“. . . Poet Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, takes diametrically opposed view. He [Muhammad Sufyan] avers thus: “As yielding wax” . . . “is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls,” –you hear, good sir? Our spirits! Our immortal essences!—“Are still the same forever, but adopt In their migrations ever-varying forms.” . . . ‘For me it is always Ovid over Lucretius,’” he stated.

(276-277)

Although the living environment is inextricably altered as a result of migration, Sufyan still persists in the maintenance of values, norms, and ways of life in the homeland. Unlike Sufyan, who firmly believes the invariable essence of self, Hind holds a more pessimistic
attitude toward their arrival in London, for “[e]verything she valued had been upset by the change; had in this process of translation, been lost” (249). Life in London, for Hind, not only signifies arduousness, impoverishment, and frustration but also implies an irredeemable fissure between two generations:

and worst of all, the poison of this devil-island had infected her baby girls, who were growing up refusing to speak their mother-tongue, even though they understood every word, they did it just to hurt; and why else had Mishal cut off her hair and put rainbows into it; and every day it was fight, quarrel, disobey. (250)

The irretrievable crack between two generations takes shape at the moment when Mishal keeps disclosing: “Bangladesh in’t nothing to me. Just some place name Dad and Mum keep banging on about” (259). Nostalgia for homeland embodied in the immigrants of the first generation is reduced to unfeeling “Bungleditch” (259) in the second generation. The most quintessential specimen who manifests the genuine lived experience, unsurpassable predicament, and manifold mentalities of diaspora, the Sufyan family embodies the diasporic experience in a shifting, kaleidoscopic, and precarious world.

A novel of metamorphosis, transgression, mutability, and diasporic experience, *The Satanic Verses* portrays a world in which fixity, stability, and authenticity are now unraveled, shaken, and interrogated. *The Satanic Verses* also indicates that we are now in a postmodern world where myriads of small narratives compete, contradict, and negotiate with each other. By means of concentrating on the diasporic experience in the text, Rushdie reinforces the impact which the postmodern phenomenon makes on the process of identification and life experience of contemporary people. In other words, what Rushdie portrays in *The Satanic Verses* is this intricate, bewildering diasporic experience in a postmodern time of disintegration, aberration, estrangement, and mutability. The unavoidable disruption, fragmentation, transience, and mutability of the postmodern, together with the displacement,
disenchantment, and dislocation of diaspora, lead to a world of inescapable and irretrievable movement.