Midnight's Children

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE

Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born into a wealthy Kashmiri-Muslim family in Bombay before India declared independence from British rule. His father was a skilled lawyer and businessman, and his mother was a teacher. Early in life, he was educated at a private school in Mumbai and later attended a British boarding school. Ultimately, Rushdie studied at King's College, University of Cambridge, where he earned an M.A. in history. He began his career in London in the 1970s as a copywriter for numerous advertising agencies and published his first two books during this time, including *Midnight's Children*. Following the success of *Midnight's Children*—which subsequently won the Booker Prize in 1981 and the Best of the Bookers in 1993 and 2008—Rushdie began writing full-time and has since published several award-winning novels, essays, and short stories, including *The Satanic Verses* and *East, West*. In 1983, he was elected as a fellow to the Royal Society of Literature, the United Kingdom's premier literary organization, earning him the credentials FRSL. Following the 1988 publication of *The Satanic Verses*, a controversial novel concerning Islam and a controversial Muslim tradition, Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of Iran, issued a *fatwa*, or bounty, on Rushdie's head for blasphemy. After Rushdie was forced to spend years in hiding, the former president of Iran declared the *fatwa* finished; however, the order was never officially lifted, and the bounty was recently increased in 2016 to over three million dollars. In 1999, Rushdie was awarded Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, the highest form of French recognition for contribution to the arts, and in June of 2007, he was knighted by the Queen of England for accomplishments in literature. Since 2000, Rushdie has lived exclusively in New York City, where he was named the Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University in 2015. He entered into four marriages, each ending in divorce, and has two sons, Zafar, born in 1979, and Milan, born in 1997.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Major occurrences within protagonist Saleem Sinai's life are juxtaposed alongside Indian and other world events, and Rushdie even incorporates actual historical figures—such as Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India—as characters within the novel. Arguably, one of the most important historical events in *Midnight's Children* is Indira Gandhi's Emergency, a country-wide state of emergency which took place in India from 1975 to 1977. Gandhi recommended the Emergency to the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, in response to growing civil unrest and violence, and it was so declared on June 25, 1975. The Emergency suspended the citizens' right to vote, giving Gandhi absolute power—and the ability to rule by decree. She censored the press and imprisoned those who opposed her, including other politicians. Many human rights violations took place during the Emergency, such as a forced sterilization program planned and executed by Gandhi's son, Sanjay, a fellow Indian politician. The Emergency officially ended on March 23, 1977, after Gandhi released the last political prisoners and allowed citizens to vote. *Midnight's Children* is a critical look at this dark time in Indian history and the tyrannical rulings of Indira Gandhi, who sued Rushdie for libel in 1984. Surprisingly, Gandhi's lawsuit did not seek to ban the book or strike her name from it; instead, she sought to remove a single sentence which implied that her husband died as a result of her neglect, hence her nickname throughout the novel as the Widow. Gandhi won her case and the offending sentence was removed from the published text.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many of Salman Rushdie's works, including *Midnight's Children* and *The Enchantress of Florence*, fall under the subgenre known as magical realism, which is a specific type of artistic realism that seeks to depict everyday occurrences infused with magical or supernatural elements. Magical realism is thought to have originated with Latin American works from the mid-twentieth century, such as Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones* and Gabriel García *Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which Rushdie actually references in *Midnight's Children*. Since then, magical realism has grown to include other works of English literature, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Illumination Night* by Alice Hoffman. Rushdie claims to have been influenced by the writing of both Borges and García Márquez, as well as James Joyce and Thomas Pynchon, whose level of complexity is reflected in Rushdie's own writing. *Midnight's Children* is heavily intertextual—meaning it frequently references other famous literary works—and Rushdie often mentions the Middle Eastern folktale, *One Thousand and One Nights*, along with other texts, such *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Rushdie is also an important contributor to postcolonial literature (works written by people from previously colonized countries primarily focusing on the political and cultural implications of independence on the formerly oppressed), and *Midnight's Children* has become a postcolonial mainstay, along with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Midnight's Children*
- **When Written:** Late 1970s through 1980
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1981
- **Literary Period:** Postmodern, Postcolonial
- **Genre:** Magical realism
- **Setting:** The subcontinent of India
- **Climax:** Shiva and the Indian army attack and destroy the magicians' ghetto, where Saleem lives with his wife, Parvati-the-witch, and her son, the biological child of Shiva whom Saleem claims as his own.
- **Antagonist:** Shiva
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Back-up Plan. Rushdie has long since been a huge fan of film and theater and claims that acting was his back-up career choice in the event that his writing failed to take off. Rushdie's love for film is reflected in his writing, which is infused with numerous references to actors and movies, and he even made cameo appearances in the films *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Then She Found Me*.

Banned Books. Many of Salman Rushdie's works are considered controversial, especially within Muslim societies, and *The Satanic Verses* has been banned in several countries. Rushdie reports that when his mother lived in Pakistan, he was unable to enter the country to visit her.

PLOT SUMMARY

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* begins as narrator Saleem Sinai urgently tells the story of his life. Born at the exact moment of India's independence from British rule, Saleem is inescapably "handcuffed to history," and his own fate is intertwined with that of his nation. Saleem's entire body is cracking, crumbling under the stress of "too much history," and he is slowly dying, disintegrating into "(approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, necessarily oblivious, dust." Saleem must work fast if he is to tell his story before he dies, and he begins with his Kashmiri grandfather, Aadam Aziz.

Aadam has just returned to Kashmir from medical school in Germany, and he is disillusioned with his traditional Indian life. One morning, while kneeling to pray, Aadam strikes his **nose** on the ground, and three small drops of blood escape from his nose. From that moment, he vows "never again to bow to any man or god." Soon, Tai, the old boatman, alerts Aadam to the illness of Naseem Ghani, the daughter of a local landowner. Arriving at the Ghani's, Aadam finds Naseem hidden behind a large sheet with a small hole cut in the center, and he is made to examine her through the opening. Over several years and many illnesses, Aadam and Naseem fall in love and are finally married, and the two prepare to move to Agra for Aadam's new university job.

In Agra, Aadam and Naseem are witnesses to Mahatma Gandhi's hartal and the violence of the British military, and in the aftermath of a massacre, Aadam befriends the Hummingbird, a Pro-Indian Muslim politician who inspires optimism throughout Agra. Aadam also meets Nadir Khan, the Hummingbird's private secretary, and after the Hummingbird is murdered by assassins, Nadir takes refuge under Aadam's floorboards, much to the dismay of his wife Naseem, known in her marriage as Reverend Mother. While living under the floor, Nadir falls in love with Aadam's daughter, Mumtaz, and the two are married, spending three blissful years together underground. Ultimately, it is discovered that Nadir is impotent, and he is forced to divorce Mumtaz, who is left heartbroken. Mumtaz soon remarries Ahmed Sinai, who changes her name to Amina, and the two move to Bombay after she becomes pregnant.

Ahmed and Amina buy a mansion from William Methwold, a British colonist who is preparing to return to London after India's independence, and they quickly move in, living amongst the Englishman's belongings and customs. Growing increasingly pregnant, Amina goes into labor on the eve of India's independence, along with another pregnant woman from Methwold's Estate named Vanita, the wife of a poor accordionist who entertains the residents on the estate. Both women give birth at the stroke of midnight; however, Vanita dies shortly after, leaving her infant son, Shiva. Alone with the two children of midnight, a midwife named Mary Pereira switches the nametags of the children, effectively replacing rich with poor, in her own "private act of revolution." In the days following, Mary's guilt is so severe that she offers her services to Amina Sinai as an ayah to care for her infant Saleem, and she readily accepts. Mary returns to Methwold's Estate with the Sinais, where she continues to keep her secret for several years before finally blurting it out, a victim of her own guilt.

As Saleem grows, it is clear that he is not a normal child. He grows too quickly, he rarely blinks, and after an accident in his mother's washing chest, he begins to hear voices, made possible by his large, congested nose. The voices in Saleem's head are the voices of the other children born during the midnight hour of independence, the "metaphorical mirror of a nation," who each also happen to be endowed with different magical powers. Saleem attempts to organize the children, creating a forum for them in his mind, but their prejudices get the better of them, and they are unable to band together. Ultimately, it is Shiva who succeeds in dividing the children, and Saleem is left helpless.

Saleem continues to grow and moves with his family to

Pakistan. As civil unrest brews leading up to the Indo-Pakistani War, he is again left helpless as bombs from an air-strike kill his family. In the chaos of the bombing, Saleem is hit in the head by an airborne **spittoon**, causing him to forget his name and identity. Saleem is soon drafted into the Pakistani army and he witnesses unspeakable events, finally running away into the jungle to avoid further violence. When he emerges from the jungle, the war is ending, India is victorious, and Saleem is still not sure who he is. During a celebratory parade, he runs into Parvati-the-witch, a fellow child of midnight who immediately recognizes Saleem. The two fall in love, and when Saleem is unable to father her children, Parvati puts a spell on Shiva, and he soon impregnates her. He quickly loses interest (as he always does where pregnancy is concerned), and Parvati is free to marry Saleem, who has agreed to father her unborn child.

As Parvati goes into labor, civil unrest in India continues and Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minster, declares a state of emergency. Parvati finally gives birth to a son but, sadly, she is killed. At the same time, Saleem is kidnapped by Shiva and dragged in a van, where he is taken, along with the other children of midnight, and forcibly sterilized during Mrs. Gandhi's sterilization program. Finally, Indira Gandhi's Emergency ends, and Saleem and the other children of midnight are released from their imprisonment. Saleem soon finds his son and he moves back to Bombay, where he discovers that Mary Pereira is the owner of a local **pickle** factory. As Saleem finishes the telling of his story, he decides to begin telling his future, and he starts with his wedding to Padma, his companion and audience for the telling of his story. Padma and Saleem are to be married in Kashmir; however, before they are, Saleem finally succumbs to the cracks in his skin, and he crumbles into six hundred million pieces of dust.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Saleem Sinai – Saleem, the story's protagonist and narrator, is the living embodiment of the newly independent country of India. Rushdie's novel is largely allegorical, and the character of Saleem is the personification of his country—diverse, conflicted, and rooted in religion. Born at the precise moment of India's independence from British colonialism, Saleem is endowed with the supernatural power of telepathy. In addition to connecting him with the Midnight's Children Conference—the other children born during the midnight hour of India's independence and the metaphorical "mirror of the nation"—Saleem's telepathy gives him incredible insight as he tells the story of his life, beginning with his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and culminating with Saleem's son, Aadam Sinai. Saleem is the manager of a **pickle** factory and is also a writer, and he is determined to preserve his story before he dies, a victim of "too much history." He begins to crumble and crack "like an old jug," a reflection of India's partitioning and division along lines of religion, language, and class, and it is slowly killing him. Saleem's story is repeatedly complicated by Shiva, the story's antagonist. Shiva, who is also born at the precise moment of India's independence, is Saleem's only competition as leader of the Midnight's Children Conference, and he is determined to undo all of Saleem's efforts to discover the true purpose of the children and their varied powers. Saleem's ayah, Mary Pereira, a former midwife at the hospital where Saleem and Shiva are born, switches the two infants just moments after their birth in "her own private revolutionary act," swapping rich with poor, forever changing the lives of everybody associated with her fated alteration. Ironically, despite Saleem's true parentage, he physically resembles Aadam Aziz—who is technically *Shiva's* biological grandfather—inheriting his bulbous **nose**, "Kashmiri blue eyes," and his inability to either "believe or disbelieve in God."

Shiva – The story's antagonist and Saleem Sinai's alter ego. Like Saleem, Shiva is also born at the precise moment of India's independence from British rule, and he is likewise endowed with a magical power, though Saleem's power of telepathy is stronger than Shiva's gift of war. Shiva, the supposed son of Wee Willie Winkie and his wife Vanita, is named after the gods of destruction and procreation, and is born with a set of "menacingly knocking knees," which are reflective of his power. Shortly after Saleem and Shiva's birth, a midwife named Mary Pereira swaps the two babies in her own "private revolutionary act," effectively switching rich with poor. Saleem is brought up in Shiva's rightful life, and he assumes Shiva's role as the leader of the Midnight Children's Conference, the gathering of all the children born during the midnight hour of India's independence, and the metaphorical "mirror of the nation" of India. Shiva repeatedly tries to usurp Saleem's power, and he sabotages all of Saleem's efforts to identify the children's purpose in the newly independent India. Shiva is also the biological father of Parvati-the-witch's son. Parvati traps Shiva into impregnating her, knowing that he will lose interest in her after she is pregnant, allowing an impotent Saleem to claim her fatherless baby. Shiva, who ultimately becomes a soldier in the Indian Army, destroys the magicians' ghetto where Saleem and Parvati live with their newborn son during the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, and Parvati is killed in the process. After Gandhi's emergency, Shiva is never heard from again, and Saleem continues to raise Parvati's son.

Aadam Aziz – Saleem Sinai's grandfather, Reverend Mother's husband, and Amina Sinai's father. Saleem's story begins with Aadam thirty years before India's independence, and he is a reflection of the many effects of colonialism on the colonized. For example, Aadam is westernized—meaning he has been educated in European schools—yet he still finds value in traditional Indian culture. He also abandons his Muslim faith, and similar to his future country of India, supports a secular

state instead of a state-sponsored religion. Like Saleem, Aadam has a massive **nose**, "Kashmiri blue eyes," and supports a more progressive India. He encourages his wife to exit purdah, and he assists in Mahatma Gandhi's hartal. Allegorically, Aadam represents the struggle of modern India under the continued control of the British and beyond independence. Many of Aadam's struggles aren't resolved with liberation alone, such as his ambivalence in his belief in God, and these struggles are passed on to Saleem, where they are central in the development of a new nation. Aadam lives to be an old man and dies, deranged and bitter, under the care of his wife.

Naseem Ghani / Reverend Mother – Saleem Sinai's grandmother, Amina Sinai's mother, and Aadam Aziz's wife. Naseem is first introduced when her father, Mr. Ghani, tricks Aadam into falling in love with her. Using the "magical and sacred" allure of a perforated sheet, Ghani summons Aadam, a doctor, to examine his daughter from behind a purdah, and after many years and several fake illnesses, Aadam and Naseem fall in love. Their love, however, is doomed from the beginning, and their union is an unhappy one. After their marriage, Naseem morphs into Reverend Mother, a particularly unpleasant and unattractive version of herself who rules over her family like a tyrant, imposing punishments and leveling insults. Reverend Mother is resentful of Aadam's support of her exit from purdah, and she serves to personify the pre-independence concept of womanhood and femininity in India. She is dedicated to her domestic responsibilities and her religion, which she equates with morality, and she cares very little about politics or the oppression of others. Reverend Mother is killed in the Indo-Pakistani War, when a bomb is dropped on her during an air raid.

Mumtaz Aziz / Amina Sinai – Aadam Aziz and Reverend Mother's daughter, Nadir Khan and Ahmed Sinai's wife, and Saleem Sinai's mother. Mumtaz, an Indian of a darker complexion, is described as "a blackie," whose skin tone makes it difficult for her mother to love her. She meets and falls in love with Nadir Khan, an impotent poet, whom she is forced to divorce in the name of motherhood. Mumtaz then marries Ahmed Sinai, her sister Alia's supposed suitor, who forces Mumtaz to change her name to Amina. Amina and Ahmed go on to have two children, the Brass Monkey and Saleem, but she is never able to love Ahmed in the same way that she loves Nadir. As Ahmed's wife, Amina continues to secretly see Nadir until Homi Catrack is murdered by a jealous husband for having an affair with his wife. Effectively warned of the potential consequences of infidelity, Amina refuses to see Nadir again, growing "prematurely old" before she is later killed in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Nadir Khan / Qasim Khan – The personal secretary of the Hummingbird and Mumtaz Aziz's first husband. Nadir, an amateur writer of little skill, is described as a "rhymeless poet" and a "verbless bard," and he is a known coward. He runs away frightened when the Hummingbird is killed by unknown assassins, and he willingly divorces Mumtaz when her mother, Reverend Mother, objects to their sexless marriage on account of his impotence. After leaving Mumtaz and changing his name and identity to Qasim Khan, Nadir becomes an official candidate of the Communist Party in India's 1957 election, narrowly losing to the All-India Congress. During Mumtaz's second marriage to Ahmed Sinai, Nadir secretly pursues Mumtaz and frequently calls her, arousing the suspicions of her children, Saleem and the Brass Monkey. He finally exits *Midnight's Children* after Commander Sabarmati murders Homi Catrack for having an affair with his wife, Lila. Homi's murder effectively warns Mumtaz of the consequences of infidelity, and she stops accepting Nadir's phone calls and secretly meeting up with him.

Ahmed Sinai – Amina's second husband and protagonist Saleem's father. Ahmed is first introduced as the suitor of Amina's sister, Alia; however, Ahmed quickly falls in love with Amina after she is divorced from her first husband, and he never does propose to Alia. Ahmed has already been married and divorced by the time he marries Amina, and Amina's mother, Reverend Mother, dislikes him from the start. Ahmed and Amina's marriage is generally an unhappy union, in which Amina continues to pine over her first husband, and Ahmed sinks deeper and deeper into alcoholism and depression. Both of Ahmed's children, Saleem and the Brass Monkey, have a strained relationship with their father, and he is separated from his children for four years when their mother moves them to Pakistan without him. Ahmed's relationship with his family finally improves after he suffers a cardiac complication, but for most of the story he alienates himself from his family. He is killed after moving to Pakistan in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

The Brass Monkey / Jamila Singer – Saleem Sinai's sister and the daughter of Ahmed and Amina. The Brass Monkey is a feisty child who frequently sets fire to others people's shoes (while they're wearing them), and she forms a fierce alliance with her brother. The Brass Monkey is Saleem's opposite; she is beautiful whereas Saleem is ugly, and their parents initially favor their famous son and his historical birth over their headstrong daughter. While living in Pakistan, the Brass Monkey begins a singing career and becomes Jamila Singer. As Jamila, the Brass Monkey is the "Angel of Pakistan," and even her own brother falls in love with her. After Saleem is brained by a **spittoon** during an air-raid and suffers amnesia, Jamila delivers him to the Pakistani Army where he fights alongside other Pakistanis until he suddenly discovers his true identity and escapes the army, finding his way back to India. Despite being born a Muslim, the Brass Monkey is attracted to Mary Pereira's Catholic faith, and she joins a nunnery in the wake of the Indo-Pakistani War.

Mary Pereira – Saleem Sinai's ayah, or nanny, and his second

mother-figure. Mary is initially employed as a midwife in the hospital where Saleem and Shiva are born, and in a testament to her love for Joseph D'Costa, a notorious Communist, she swaps baby Saleem with baby Shiva, her own "private revolutionary act," switching rich with poor. In her guilt, Mary, a devout Catholic, offers her services to Saleem's mother, Amina, as an ayah. Throughout the years, Mary becomes increasingly close with Saleem and his family, making her confession difficult, and when she finally confesses after being driven nearly mad by her guilt, Mary runs away and lives with her mother. She remains absent until Saleem finally reveals her as the owner of the **pickle** factory where he works, and the ayah of his own son, Aadam Sinai.

Parvati-the-witch / Laylah – Saleem Sinai's wife and the mother of his son, Aadam. Parvati is a fellow child of midnight, and she is endowed with the powers of the illuminatus, or "the genuine gifts of conjuration and sorcery." Parvati tricks Shiva into impregnating her, knowing the he will lose interest once she is pregnant, allowing an impotent Saleem to step in as Aadam's father. Parvati is killed during Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

Padma – Saleem Sinai's companion and his assumed lover, although he is impotent. Saleem reads his story aloud to Padma, and she is one of the strong and independent women working in Mary Pereira's **pickle** factory. She intends on marrying Saleem, he presumably spends the rest of his short life with her.

Aadam Sinai – Parvati-the-witch and Saleem Sinai's son. Aadam, the biological son of Shiva, Saleem's arch enemy, is born during Indira Gandhi's Emergency, after which his mother is killed. Aadam is raised by his ayah, Mary Pereira, and he represents a new generation of Midnight's Children. This new generation of children, born to the first children of midnight, are an entirely new group of children who, similar to their parents, are endowed with magical powers. The children have the potential to transform postcolonial India into "the third principle," Saleem's vision of a way for Indians to overcome "the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labor, them-and-us," finally coming together, united.

Major Zulfikar – Initially Brigadier Dodson's A.D.C. (an official assistant to a high-ranking military officer), Zulfikar falsely suspects Nadir Khan of involvement in the Hummingbird's assassination. Zulfikar falls in love with Aadam Aziz's daughter, Emerald, and promises not to press charges on Aadam for harboring Nadir if he agrees to allow him to marry her. Zulfikar and Emerald are married and move to Pakistan after India's independence, where he later becomes a major in the Pakistani Army and is instrumental in a coup to overthrow the Pakistani government. Zulfikar serves as a stand-in father to his nephew Saleem Sinai, before being murdered by his own son, Zafar, a young man who repeatedly wets his pants growing up and is generally rejected by his father.

Tai – The old boatman who ferries people and goods across Dal and Nageen Lakes in Kashmir. Tai is the personification of Old India, and he represents a time and place that is untouched by British colonialism and other Western influences. Tai becomes angry with Aadam Aziz when he returns from a German medical school a changed and modern man, reflecting Tai's own fixed identity as a strictly Eastern character. Tai has an affinity for storytelling, and his incredibly long life serves as an endless source for the stories of India's rich history, which he happily shares with Aadam in his youth. Notably, it is Tai who tells Ilse Lubin of the place in Dal Lake where European women go to drown, and after her suicide he becomes sick with a mysterious illness, suggesting his guilt in connection with her death. Tai is killed in 1947, when he is shot during the Indian and Pakistani disputes over the territory of Kashmir, but he lives on through his stories and Hanif Aziz, Aadam's son who inherits the boatman's infectious laugh.

William Methwold – The former owner of Methwold's Estate in Bombay, where protagonist Saleem Sinai grows up. Methwold sells the four mansions that make up his estate as the British begin to exit India in preparation for independence. Saleem's parents purchase Buckingham Villa, a mansion on the estate, for a cheap price. Methwold insists that Saleem's parents, Ahmed and Amina, purchase and retain his mansion with all its contents, and he refuses to make the transaction official until India's independence on August 15, 1947. Methwold's strange requests mirror British colonialism and the European influence left behind in India, even after independence, as the residents of Methwold's Estate continue to observe his customs long after he is gone. Ironically, Methwold is also the biological father of Saleem. After Mary Pereira switches baby Saleem with baby Shiva, it is revealed that Saleem's true father is none other than Methwold, who had carried on an affair with Saleem's biological mother, the wife of Wee Willie Winkie. Following India's independence, Methwold leaves Bombay and is never heard from again.

Dr. Narlikar – A child-hating gynecologist, Ahmed Sinai's business partner, and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Narlikar owns a hospital in Bombay, and he delivers both Saleem and Shiva. With the help of Ahmed, Narlikar endeavors to design and mass produce tetrapods, physical structures built over the sea and supported by four legs. Narlikar is obsessed with the concept of tetrapods, which make it possible for him to reclaim land from the sea, and this obsession ultimately kills him. A notorious misogynist, Narlikar becomes enraged when a group of women "perform the rite of puja" near one of his tetrapods and he attacks them, causing the structure to become unstable in the chaos, pinning him underwater and drowning him. Ironically, Narlikar's heirs end up being a group of strong and independent women who move into his apartment and take over his business interests. Narlikar's women ultimately buy all of the property on Methwold's Estate

and plan to demolish it and erect a skyscraper in its place, a symbol of Bombay's modern progress.

Aadam Aziz's Mother – A traditional Kashmiri woman who must exit purdah and support her family after the death of her husband, Aadam's father. As the owner of a gemstone business, Aadam's mother must work directly with the public unveiled; otherwise, she claims, the customers will not trust her if they cannot see her face. Aadam's mother complains that her naked face causes her great pains and boils, yet she continues to work unveiled with the public. She resents Mr. Ghani and Naseem's attempts to trap Aadam into marrying Naseem, and she frequently makes Aadam feel guilty for agreeing to examine Naseem when she is herself sick with pain and boils because of her sacrifice.

Aadam Aziz's Father – The owner of a gemstone business who becomes housebound after a stroke, leaving his wife, Aadam's mother, to tend to his professional affairs. Aadam returns to Kashmir after medical school to find his father permanently afflicted by his stroke, and his mental status gradually worsens until he spends most of his time making bird sounds, calling in several types of birds on a daily basis. Aadam's father falls ill and dies early in the story, followed soon by his wife.

Rani of Cooch Naheen – A wealthy Muslim woman who finances the Hummingbird's political campaign. Her name roughly translates to "the Queen of Nothing" in English, and she is Aadam's close friend and intellectual ally when the Reverend Mother refuses to discuss politics with him. Rani provides the lawyer and mullah, an Islamic advisor, when Aadam's daughter, Mumtaz, marries Nadir Kahn, the Hummingbird's personal secretary. She also gifts the couple a beautifully ornamented silver **spittoon** as a wedding gift, which the two spend countless happy hours playing hit-the-spittoon with. Rani is described as a pale woman who grows increasingly lighter as she suffers from an unknown illness, turning completely white by the time of her death, a phenomenon mirrored by postcolonial Indian businessmen. Rushdie's depiction of modern Indians turning white underscores the lasting influence of British colonialism on postcolonial India.

Mian Abdullah / The Hummingbird – A pro-Indian Muslim politician who creates the Free Islam Convocation, a gathering of Indian Muslims who disapprove of the dogmatism and intolerance frequently present in many traditional practitioners Islam. Also known as the Hummingbird, Abdullah has the strange habit of humming, a sound that rises and falls in direct relation to his work rate. Aadam Aziz fiercely supports his attempts to influence power and religion within British India. The Hummingbird is killed by assassins following his efforts to bring his Convocation to Agra, a stronghold of staunch Muslims.

Alia Aziz – The "wise child" of Aadam Aziz and Reverend Mother. Alia initially falls in love with Ahmed Sinai early in *Midnight's Children*; however, Ahmed avoids proposing to Alia and ultimately leaves her for her sister, Mumtaz, after Mumtaz is divorced by her first husband. Alia never forgives Mumtaz or Ahmed, and she bitterly folds her jealously and resentment into her cooking, infecting all who consume it. Alia moves to Pakistan after India's independence, and she is killed in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Mr. Ghani – A blind landowner in Kashmir and Naseem's father. Ghani tricks Aadam Aziz into falling in love with his daughter by setting him up. He repeatedly summons Aadam, a doctor, to his home under the pretenses of his daughter's feigned illnesses, forcing Aadam to examine Naseem through a perforated sheet, or purdah. The sheet becomes something "sacred and magical," and Aadam ultimately falls in love Naseem, just as Ghani has planned.

Homi Catrack – A movie executive, racetrack owner, and a fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Homi is a widower who lives with his mentally ill daughter, Toxy, and he frequently has affairs with married women, including Pia Aziz and Lila Sabarmati. Saleem exposes Homi's affair with Lila to her husband, Commander Sabarmati, after Homi has an affair with his aunt and breaks her heart. Homi is ultimately murdered by Commander Sabarmati.

Evie Burns – A fellow resident of Methwold's Estate and Saleem Sinai's first love. Evie is an American who represents the European presence in postcolonial India. She is aggressive and mean, and after getting into a fight with the Brass Monkey over the cats on Methwold's Estate, Evie is sent back to America so that she doesn't have to mix with "savages."

The Widow / Indira Gandhi – The former Prime Minister of India and an actual historical figure. Gandhi is a corrupt leader, and she declares a state of emergency throughout the entire state of India simply to locate and destroy the Midnight Children's Conference. Following the climax of *Midnight's Children*, The Widow forcibly sterilizes Saleem and the other children of midnight.

Brigadier R. E. Dyer – A European officer in the British Indian Army, and an actual historical figure, responsible for the massacre in Amritsar. Dyer orders a squad of fifty troops to open fire in the middle of a peaceful protest during Gandhi's hartal, and Aadam Aziz is buried under a pile of dead bodies.

Lafifa Das – A young Hindu boy who makes a living pushing a peepshow through the streets of Agra. Lafifa is rescued by Amina Sinai when she stops an angry mob of Muslims from attacking him by announcing her pregnancy with Saleem. Lafifa repays her with the promise of a prophecy for her unborn child by his cousin, Shri Ramram Seth.

Dr. Narlikar's Women – The female heirs to Dr. Narlikar's fortune. After Narlikar's death, the women move into his apartment and take over his businesses, and begin buying up all of Methwold's Estate. The women intend to demolish the

estate and erect a large skyscraper, the evidence of India's progress as a modern country.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sanjay Gandhi – The son of Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India. Sanjay is responsible for spearheading the Widow's sterilization campaign and destroying the Midnight's Children Conference.

Rashid the Rickshaw Boy – A young boy who drives a rickshaw in Agra. Rashid helps Nadir Khan hide in Aadam Aziz's "thunderbox room" after the Hummingbird's assassination.

Oskar Lubin – A German anarchist and Aadam Aziz's classmate in medical school, Oskar believes that India was "discovered" by his European ancestors. He is killed when he is struck by a car during a protest.

Ilse Lubin – Oskar's wife and another classmate of Aadam Aziz's. Ilse comes to visit Aadam in Kashmir after Oskar is killed in a protest, and she subsequently commits suicide in the part of Dal Lake where European women are known to go to drown themselves.

Brigadier Dodson – The commanding officer of Zulfikar. Together, Dodson and Zulfikar investigate the assassination of the Hummingbird.

Emerald – Aadam Aziz and Reverend Mother's daughter, Amina Sinai's sister, and the wife of Major Zulfikar.

Zohar – Ahmed Sinai's distant cousin. Zohar is not married and relies on Ahmed for financial support. She hopes that her children will grow up to marry Ahmed's children, so that she may potentially be paid a dowry.

Mustapha Kemal – Ahmed Sinai's business partner. Ahmed and Kemal, along with Mr. S. P. Butt, collectively own a warehouse in Agra that is burned down by the Ravana, a gang of rogue Hindus who profile and destroy businesses owned by Muslims.

Mr. S. P. Butt – Ahmed Sinai's business partner. Ahmed and Mr. Butt, along with Mustapha Kemal, collectively own a warehouse in Agra that is burned down by the Ravana, a gang of rouge Hindus who profile and destroy Muslim-owned businesses in the area.

Shri Ramram Seth – A Hindu palmist and Lafifa Das's cousin. Ramram gives Amina Sinai a prophecy for her unborn child as a form of repayment for saving Lafifa from an angry mob of Muslims.

Nussie Ibrahim – Saleem Sinai's neighbor on Methwold's Estate, the wife of Ismail Ibrahim, and Sonny Ibrahim's mother.

Wee Willie Winkie – A poor accordionist and the assumed father of Shiva, the antagonist of *Midnight's Children*.

Vanita – Wee Willie Winkie's wife and Shiva's mother. Vanita has an affair with William Methwold, resulting in her pregnancy with Shiva, and she dies shortly after giving birth.

Alice Pereira – Mary Pereira's sister and Ahmed Sinai's secretary. Alice runs off with Joseph D'Costa, the love of Mary's life, prompting Mary to switch baby Saleem with baby Shiva.

Joseph D'Costa – A notorious Communist, wanted criminal, and the love of Mary Pereira's life. Joseph is killed by an escaped poisonous snake, but he continues to haunt Mary for much of her life.

Sonny Ibrahim – Saleem Sinai's best friend and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Sonny is the son of Ismail and Nussie Ibrahim.

Ismail Ibrahim – A fellow resident of Methwold's Estate, Nussie Ibrahim's husband, and the father of Sonny. Ismail is a crooked lawyer who often attends to the legal troubles of the other residents of Methwold's Estate. He suspended from practicing law after authorities discover his corruption.

Lila Sabarmati – A fellow resident of Methwold's Estate, the wife of Commander Sabarmati, and Homi Catrack's lover. Lila is shot by her husband (but survives after he discovers her affair with Homi.

Toxy Catrack – Homi Catrack's mentally ill daughter and a fellow resident of Methwold's Estate.

Old Musa – Ahmed Sinai's longtime servant. Ahmed fires Musa when he is caught stealing from Buckingham Villa. After contracting leprosy, Musa is confused for Joseph D'Costa's ghost by a distraught and guilt-stricken Mary Pereira.

Dr. Schaapsteker – The elderly founder of Schaapsteker's Institute, a facility where scientists study snakes and test anti-venom. Schaapsteker lives on the second floor of Buckingham Villa, and he injects Saleem with snake venom when he falls ill with typhoid, saving his life when modern medicine fails.

Hanif Aziz – Saleem Sinai's uncle, Aadam Aziz's son, and Pia's husband. Hanif is a washed-up movie producer who commits suicide after learning of his wife's affair with Homi Catrack.

Pia – A famous actress, Saleem Sinai's aunt, and Hanif's wife. Pia has an affair with Homi Catrack, which prompts his murder and her husband's suicide. Pia moves to Pakistan with her mother-in-law, Reverend Mother, where they are both killed in the Indo-Pakistani War.

Eyeslice – Saleem Sinai's friend and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Eyeslice is blinded early in childhood when Shiva throws a rock at him. He is the brother of Hairoil and the son of Commander Sabarmati and his wife, Lila.

Hairoil – Saleem Sinai's friend and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. He is the brother of Eyeslice and the son of Commander Sabarmati and his wife, Lila.

Cyrus-the-great – Saleem Sinai's friend and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Cyrus and his mother leave Methwold's Estate after his father chokes on an orange and dies.

Mr. Emil Zagallo – Saleem Sinai's geography teacher.

Jimmy Kapadia – Saleem Sinai's classmate. He is afflicted by heart trouble and suddenly dies of a heart seizure after Saleem dreams of his death.

Commander Sabarmati – A fellow resident of Methwold's Estate and the husband of Lila Sabarmati. Commander Sabarmati is sentenced to thirty years in prison after he murders Homi Catrack when he discovers that Homi is having an affair with his wife.

Zafar – The son of Emerald and Major Zulfikar and Saleem Sinai's cousin. Ultimately, Zafar murders his own father, slitting his throat in response to his abuse.

General Ayub Khan – The Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan after Major Zulfikar kidnaps the President of Pakistan, officially overthrowing the government.

Iskander Mirza – The president of Pakistan who is overthrown by General Ayub Khan and Major Zulfikar.

Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif / Uncle Puffs – A retired major who helps Jamila Singer become famous. He tells the public that Jamila was in a terribly disfiguring accident, and she never appears in public without her veil.

Tai Bibi – The oldest prostitute in the world, who can alter her smell to mimic anybody in the world.

The Nawab – A prince and father to Mutasim.

Mutasim – The son of a price who falls in love with Jamila Singer and vows to see her face.

The Nawab's Daughter – Mutasim's sister and Zafar Zulfikar's fiancé. She stubbornly refuses to enter puberty or menstruate so that she will not have to marry Zafar.

Brigadier Iskandar –The leader of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities in the Pakistani Army, where Saleem is a tracker.

Ayooba Baloch – One of the soldiers of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities in the Pakistani Army. He is shot and killed by a sniper during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Farooq Rashid – One of the soldiers of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities in the Pakistani Army. He is shot and killed by a sniper during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Shaheed Dar – One of the soldiers of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities in the Pakistani Army. He is blown-up and killed by a grenade during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Picture Singh – A snake charmer living in the magicians' ghetto. He is known as "the Most Charming Man in the World." His biggest competitor is Maharaja of Cooch Naheen.

Mustapha Aziz – Saleem's uncle and Mumtaz's brother. Mustapha allows Saleem to live with him and his family after the war, but he kicks him out after he discovers Saleem in bed with Parvati-the-witch.

Sonia Aziz – Mustapha's wife.

The Widow's Hand – Indira Gandhi's helper and the woman who sterilizes Saleem and the other children of midnight during the Emergency.

Durga – A washerwoman who serves as Aadam Sinai's wet-nurse. Saleem believes that she is a succubus.

Maharaja of Cooch Naheen – A Bombay snake charmer and Picture Singh's greatest competition.

TERMS

Ayah – Traditionally speaking, an ayah is a native nursemaid employed by Europeans in India. Throughout *Midnight's Children*, protagonist **Saleem Sinai** repeatedly refers to his nanny, **Mary Pereira**, as his ayah. Rushdie's use of this term reflects the influence of British culture and customs within postcolonial India, even after India's independence, and this is consistent with Rushdie's frequent references to British colonialism and postcolonialism. Saleem's family is not European, yet they still call Mary an ayah.

Hartal – A hartal is a peaceful mass protest meant to appeal to a government to reverse or eliminate controversial rulings or laws, and it often leads to the total shutdown of businesses, schools, and associated governments. The word hartal is Gujarati, the native language of the Indian state of Gujarat, and it is used to explain the closing of shops or warehouses to satisfy a demand. Mahatma Gandhi was the first to use the term to describe his anti-British general strikes, which protested the continued presence of the British in India. In *Midnight's Children*, **Aadam Aziz**, a doctor, supports Gandhi's hartal by administering medical assistance to those injured by British aggression during the protest. Additionally, Saleem refers to his grandmother **Reverend Mother**'s, refusals to speak or eat when she disagrees with her family as examples of a hartal.

Purdah – Purdah is the practice of certain Muslim and Hindu women to separate themselves from men in society by living behind a curtain or veil in their homes, and by wearing clothing that covers their faces and bodies when in public. In *Midnight's Children*, modern Indian women are encouraged to exit purdah and officially enter society; however, this is difficult for some of the characters. **Aadam Aziz**'s wife, **Reverend Mother**, resents her modern role outside of purdah, and Aadam's own **mother**, while she agrees to be seen by men in the name of running the family's gemstone business, claims that it causes her pain and boils. Purdah impacts the women of *Midnight's Children* in numerous ways, and while they are never totally accepted as equals by the men of the story, the book suggests that gender equality begins largely with exiting purdah.

Tetrapod – **Ahmed Sinai**'s business partner, **Dr. Narlikar**, encourages Ahmed to invest in and build tetrapods, elevated physical structures held above the sea by four legs. Narlikar's tetrapods effectively reclaim land from the sea through the creation of real estate, a concept in keeping with Rushdie's themes of British colonialism and postcolonialism. In this way, Narlikar is looking to reclaim land that was lost or, in a sense, what had been taken from him during British colonialism—a symbolic repatriation. Sadly, Narlikar's efforts are futile, and he is ultimately killed by his obsession when a tetrapod collapses on top of him and drowns him, leaving Ahmed financially ruined.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TRUTH AND STORYTELLING

Self-proclaimed writer and **pickle**-factory manager Saleem Sinai is dying—cracking and crumbling under the stress of a mysterious illness—but before he does, he is determined to tell his story. With the "grand hope of the pickling of time," Saleem feverishly pens his autobiography, preserving his stories like jars of chutney, searching for truth and meaning within them. Born at the precise moment of India's independence and endowed with magical powers Saleem's remarkable story begins long before his Bombay birth and spans much of the subcontinent of India. Over a period of sixty years, he highlights Indian voices and stories traditionally silenced under British rule; however, *Midnight's Children* is first and foremost Saleem's story—his own "authentic taste of truth" of postcolonial India. Through Saleem's story, Rushdie argues the power of storytelling and the importance of the preservation of stories, ultimately suggesting that genuine truth is found within personal stories—not within history books.

The importance of Saleem's story is made clear throughout *Midnight's Children*, reflecting personal truths that are often neglected in objective history books. As the narrator, Saleem directly engages with the reader. He explicitly states his intention to tell his story, even beginning with the requisite "once upon a time," and makes plain his sense of urgency. Saleem is cracking "like an old jug" while his bones turn to dust. As one of the children of midnight—children born between the hours of midnight and one in the morning on the eve of India's 1947 independence—he has been "buffeted by too much history." Because of his fateful birthday, Saleem is deeply connected to his country and it has taken its toll. According to Saleem, he must tell his story if he is "to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something." Fearing absurdity above all else, Saleem desperately wants his life to reveal a deeper meaning, or truth, which he hopes to communicate through storytelling.

Although Saleem is the working manager of Braganza Pickles, he claims a rare "mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and language." He is at once a skilled cook and a talented writer, and he is equally dedicated to both. Saleem states, "My chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings—by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving." Saleem preserves pickles and memories for posterity. As Saleem writes his story, he becomes increasingly sick and weak. Despite his failing health, he refuses to stop writing or even take a break. He claims, "My son will understand. As much as for any living being, I'm telling my story for him, so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against the cracks, he will know." As the very first citizen born in a free India, Saleem leads an extraordinary life full of magic and tragedy—but he never verbalizes what his story actually means. For Saleem, the importance of his story is in the telling.

The importance of storytelling is not limited to Saleem but is central to other characters as well. When Saleem tells the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and his Kashmiri boyhood, he speaks of Tai, the old boatman who makes his living ferrying people and goods across Dal Lake. As a personification of Old India—a time and place untouched by colonialism and Western influence—Tai is inexplicably old. His exact age is unknown, and nobody can remember him ever being young. Tai is a known storyteller, and young Aadam takes his ferry just to listen to his tales. Tai tells Aadam, "It is your history I am keeping my head. Once it was set down in old lost books." He continues, "Even my memory is going now; but I know, although I can't read." When Tai tells his stories, they live on even when they fizzle from his own mind. In this vein, storytelling outlives the confines of memory, age, and even mortal life itself. Tai's stories of Old India aren't written in books and cannot be read—they are ancient oralities which hold great cultural significance. Tai's stories are an integral part of his identity and cannot be forgotten, and these spoken stories are a means to preserve his identity—and to a larger extent, Kashmiri identity as a whole—and to preserve the cultural and historical fabric of India in the years before its independence.

Despite his dedication to storytelling, however, Saleem proves to be an unreliable narrator. Still, Saleem's story is a reflection of his personal truth, and while it may be biased, it is nonetheless valuable. As one of the children of midnight, Saleem is endowed with the supernatural power of telepathy, and he is able to enter the thoughts of others at will. He first discovers his power around the time of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and he writes extensively about Gandhi in his story. Saleem realizes, however, that Gandhi's death occurs on

the wrong date in his story. Killed in 1948, Gandhi's death was nearly ten years before Saleem discovers his magical gift, and this revelation leaves Saleem, and the reader, questioning the validity of his amazing story. However, Saleem's story still captures the importance of Gandhi's life and work despite these inconsistencies, suggesting that concrete dates are not important within the broader context of Gandhi's contributions to Indian society.

Saleem soon discovers another chronological error in his storytelling. He writes about his tenth birthday occurring on Election Day in 1957 (a particularly important election that leads to the partition of the state of Bombay); however, like Gandhi's death, Saleem realizes that the election actually took place *before* his birthday. No matter how he tries to remember correctly, his "memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events." In Saleem's story, the election of 1957 will forever occur on the wrong day because it coincides with the more memorable events of his birthday, again suggesting that concrete dates make little difference within storytelling. Because of these inaccuracies, Saleem questions if his errors "invalidate the entire fabric" of his story. He notes that inconsistencies are everywhere—even the Indian and Pakistani governments cannot agree on certain dates and events occurring during the Indo-Pakistan wars—and he is doubtful of official truth. He refuses to rewrite history just to make it fit his story, claiming "in my India" it happened precisely this way. Through Saleem, Rushdie argues that perception *is* reality, and with this insight he tells an authentic Indian story—one that is not censored by British colonialism, tainted by political corruption, or confined to the limitations of a history book. While his story is chronologically inaccurate and, at times, magical and completely unbelievable, it is nevertheless Saleem's absolute truth.

BRITISH COLONIALISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Born at exactly midnight on the eve of India's independence from British colonialism, Saleem Sinai is the first free native citizen born on Indian soil in nearly a hundred years. After a century of British rule, in addition to a century of unofficial imperialism before that, Saleem's birth marks the end of a two-hundred-year British presence in India. Using their considerable power and influence, the British impose their Western culture and customs onto the Indian people, suppressing and erasing India's own rich culture to such an extent that, even after their official exit, an undeniable Western presence remains. The postcolonial India of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* underscores the difficulties of navigating a cultural existence that has been largely erased and permanently altered by a foreign, dominant power. Through Saleem, Rushdie creates an entirely new India—one that is both Eastern and Western—in which he is able to find balance between two conflicting cultures.

When Saleem's parents, Ahmed and Amina Sinai, buy William Methwold's mansion, the strange purchase agreement is a small-scale representation of British colonialism. Methwold, a British colonizer who is leaving India after the planned independence on August 15, 1947, agrees to sell Ahmed and Amina one of the mansions on his sprawling estate; however, if they are to buy Methwold's house, they must agree to buy and keep all of the home's contents, and their transaction will not be complete until midnight on August 15. Despite the fact that it is technically Ahmed and Amina's home, they must agree to live among Methwold's belongings, which represent the trappings of Western civilization and culture—and Methwold himself won't officially leave until he is forced to by India's independence. Methwold even insists that Ahmed take a daily cocktail in the garden each evening. "Six o'clock every evening. Cocktail hour. Never varied in twenty years." When Ahmed objects to Methwold's level of involvement in his life, Methwold replies, "A whim, Mr. Sinai…you'll permit a departing colonial his little game? We don't have much left to do, we British, except play our games." Of course, Ahmed's life is not Methwold's game to play, but he acquiesces because Methwold is willing to sell cheap.

As a result, Methwold imposes his own British customs on Ahmed even after he departs, which symbolically represents the residue of British colonialism left on India after independence. Ahmed and Amina buy Methwold Manner, and they do eventually replace his things with their own; however, Methwold's presence remains in other ways. Saleem notes that many years later, cocktail hour in the garden is still observed, claiming it "a habit too powerful to be broken." Technically, cocktail hour is Methwold's habit, but it is Saleem and his family who are compelled to carry out this customary practice. Methwold has long since returned to Britain, yet he continues to influence how the Sinais live their lives, underscoring the long-term effects of colonialism.

British colonialism is also reflected in Rushdie's representation of "the other" within *Midnight's Children*. The other—generally accepted within the postcolonial milieu as the West's tendency to view anyone or anything not white, Christian, or European as savage and uncivilized—is present in a myriad of ways throughout most of Rushdie's novel. For example, Saleem's mother, Amina, an Indian with a dark complexion, is described as "the blackie" whose own mother is never able to love her because she has "the skin of a South Indian fisherwoman." Amina's mother equates lighter skin—in other words, white skin—with purity and wholesomeness, and she finds it difficult to love her dark-skinned daughter, echoing the color divide and prejudices imposed on India during British colonialism. Furthermore, as Saleem begins communicating telepathically with the other children of midnight born on India's independence, he soon finds that their association is rather

weak when the "prejudices and world-views of adults begins to take over their minds." Among other differences, Saleem notes that the "fair-skinned northerners revile Dravidian 'blackies.'" Like Saleem's grandmother, the other Midnight's Children consider light-skinned Indians from the north superior to the dark-skinned Indians of the south, reflecting the widespread prejudices present during colonial times. Similarly, when Evie Burns, a young American girl, moves to Methwold's estate, she immediately declares herself the leader of Saleem and the other children living there. Saleem falls in love with her and marvels at his vulnerability to Europeans, noting that even though Evie is American, it is the "same thing." Evie is a violent bully, and she does not live on the estate for long—her father sends her home to the United States "to get a decent education away from these savages"—but she clearly believes that she is above Saleem and the other children of Methwold Manner. Like a looming colonial power, Evie is "civilized" despite her violent behavior simply because she is from the West, whereas she views the Indian children as "the other" and in dire need of her unsolicited leadership.

In light of this prevailing European influence, Saleem's India is a hybrid mixture of both Eastern and Western cultures and values. For example, Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, travels to Germany to study medicine, and after returning to India, he attempts to "fuse the skills of Western and hakimi medicine." Aadam marries modern, Western medicine with the "superstition, mumbo-jumbo and all things magical" of traditional Indian medicine, and manages to save Saleem's life. When Saleem comes down with typhoid fever and Western medicine fails to cure him, Aadam injects him with cobra venom and Saleem makes a full recovery, suggesting that traditional Eastern medicine still has a place in modern practice—and in a modern India. Most importantly, however, Saleem himself is a hybrid. In a moment of anarchy, a hospital worker swaps Saleem just moments after his birth with another baby born to a servant of Methwold Manner. Instead of being the son of two Indian Muslims from Kashmir, Saleem is actually the illegitimate son of William Methwold and a Bombay woman. Like the new India that Saleem personifies, he is not, strictly speaking, entirely Indian; instead, an inescapable British presence is mixed with his eyes "as blue as Kashmiri sky" and his nose "comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed god Ganesh." Saleem is at once British *and* Indian, and through this character Rushdie argues that the strength of this new and independent India lies in its diversity.

SEX AND GENDER

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a harsh critique of the gender-related power struggles of postcolonial Indian society. After generations of purdah—the belief that Muslim and Hindu women should live separately from society, behind a curtain or veil, to stay out of the sight of men—postcolonial women are encouraged to become "modern Indian women" and remove their veils. Countless years in the domestic sphere has branded them as weak, demure, and dependent on men, and the women of *Midnight's Children* struggle against these traditional gender stereotypes. However, as Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's protagonist, tells the story of India's independence, it is clear that the women wield much of the power, in the domestic sphere and beyond. Rushdie's portrayal of women in *Midnight's Children* dispels the common misconception that women are the "gentler sex."

Despite new freedoms, the women of *Midnight's Children* are still treated like second-class citizens in society. When Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, is first introduced, he is described as a man with a **nose** so large it "established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch." Noses are often a phallic symbol within Rushdie's novel, and the size of Aadam's is a reflection of his supposedly God-given power over women. Additionally, Mr. Ghani, a blind landowner and Naseem's father, offers his daughter up to Aadam from behind a perforated sheet. Repeatedly claiming that his daughter is sick, Ghani frequently summons Aadam, a local doctor, to their home and forces him to examine her from behind a purdah. Naseem eventually falls in love with the man on the other side of the sheet, but Aadam's initial visits are a ploy by Ghani to marry his daughter off to a doctor. Presumably, Naseem is not given the agency to pursue a man of her choosing. Furthermore, after Aadam and Naseem are married and she turns into Reverend Mother—an unpleasant and unattractive version of herself in which she rules over her domestic responsibilities with an iron fist—they frequently argue over the best way to raise their family and run their home. When Reverend Mother disagrees with Aadam's firing of their children's religious tutor, she is "dismayed; but it is a father's traditional role, so she could not object." As the patriarch, Aadam assumes complete control of their family and does not allow Reverend Mary to teach the children her religious beliefs. Similarly, when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz, marries Ahmed Sinai, he gives her a new name. As Ahmed's wife, Mumtaz Aziz becomes Amina Sinai, and she has no say in her new identity. Likewise, when Saleem marries Parvati-the-witch, he says, "she took a name which I chose for her out of the repository of my dreams, becoming Laylah." The name Saleem selects for Parvati has meaning in his life, not hers, and when he changes her name, he assumes control of his wife's identity just like his father. As women, neither Mumtaz nor Parvati have agency over their own identities, reflecting the broader maltreatment of women in patriarchal postcolonial India.

Despite this unfair treatment, however, the women of *Midnight's Children* have a considerable amount of power in the domestic sphere and even outside the walls of the home. When Aadam Aziz fires the children's religious tutor and Reverend Mother is denied the right to teach her children her beliefs, she

says, "I swear no food will come from my kitchen to your lips! No, not one chapati, until you bring the maulvi sahib back and kiss his, whatsitsname, feet!" Aadam has crossed her, and she boldly makes him pay. She refuses to feed him, and in his own stubbornness, he refuses to eat outside the home as well and nearly dies of starvation. It is only after Reverend Mother pretends to be ill that Aadam finally begins to eat, and from her faux sick bed, it is clear that she has won the argument. Aadam again crosses his wife when he allows Nadir Khan, the private secretary of a pro-Indian Muslim politician, to hide in their basement after his employer is assassinated. When Reverend Mother objects to their secret guest, Aadam orders her, "Be silent, woman!" Reverend Mother responds with three years of literal silence, claiming, "Very well. You ask me, whatsitsname, for silence. So not one word, whatsitsname, will pass my lips from now on." In a power display of her own, Reverend Mother refuses to speak.

In another display of power, when Ahmed Sinai's failed business attempt leaves all of his assets frozen and his family broke, a very pregnant Amina sneaks off to the race track and gambles for extra money. While her husband sinks deeper into alcoholism and depression, Amina "fights her husband's fight" and keeps her family afloat, dismantling the idea that a man has to be the head of the household. What's more, at the climax of the story, it is a woman, Indira Gandhi (the corrupt Prime Minister of India whom Saleem refers to as the Widow), who declares a public emergency in an effort to destroy the Midnight Children's Conference—the 1,001 children born with supernatural powers on the eve of India's independence who serve as the metaphorical mirror of the nation—by hunting down each member and sterilizing them in a sinister attempt to control India's overpopulation. While most members are given forced vasectomies or tubal ligations, Saleem, the most powerful of the conference and therefore the most dangerous, is castrated by the Widow to ensure complete and irreversible sterility. Indira Gandhi's power is unmatched throughout the novel.

Ultimately, Saleem is emasculated by a powerful woman; yet he is strangely accepting of his sterility. Sexual impotence reoccurs throughout the story, and it seems to matter very little to those it affects, suggesting that sex is not necessarily the most important part of a relationship as far as women, the most powerful, are concerned. After all, Amina spends her life loving an impotent Nadir Khan, and it is only Reverend Mother who openly objects to their sexless marriage. Amina is willing to overlook Nadir's impotence, but Reverend Mother's tradition dictates otherwise. Similarly, Padma, Saleem's companion and audience for the writing of his story, is also accepting of Saleem's impotence. He refers to his sterility in an almost humorous way, speaking of Padma's attempts to "resuscitate his other pencil," but she nevertheless loves him and intends to marry him. Ultimately, the Widow's power does not lie solely in her ability to emasculate Saleem, it lies with her ability to completely destroy his life. According to Saleem, "women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex." He speaks of a great "cosmic energy, which is represented as the female organ" and Mother India who "there is no escape from." Despite blatant sexism, the women of *Midnight's Children* rule Saleem's world.

IDENTITY AND NATIONALITY

From the moment Saleem Sinai is born on the eve of India's independence from Great Britain, he becomes the living embodiment of his country. Saleem *is* India, and his identity metaphorically represents the identity of an entire nation; however, Saleem's identity is complicated and conflicted. A nation, generally understood as the same people living in the same place, only loosely applies to India's diverse population. Instead, multiple religions, languages, and political beliefs divide postcolonial India into a nation of very different people living in the same place, making one unifying national identity virtually impossible. Saleem—and by proxy, the country he represents—is one of many characters within *Midnight's Children* struggling with a conflicted identity, through which Rushdie ultimately argues against the creation of a single unifying national identity for the newly independent India.

In *Midnight's Children*, several of Rushdie's characters undergo a crisis of identity, suggesting that personal identity—and, on a larger scale, national identity—is multifaceted and can't be neatly shelved as one thing. For example, early in the novel, before Saleem is born and India is free, Mahatma Gandhi declares a hartal, an official moment of silence to mourn the continued presence of the British in India. Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, a Kashmiri Muslim living in Amristar, "is not sure if the hartal [...] is his fight, even though he is in occupied territory." Aadam believes "Kashmiris are different," despite also being Indian. Because of this, Aadam feels out of place mourning with his fellow Indians. Similarly, when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz Aziz, must divorce her first husband because he is unable to father children, she marries Ahmed Sinai and changes her name. Ahmed says, "Time for a fresh start. Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window, I'll choose your new name. Amina. Amina Sinai: you'd like that?" Mumtaz accepts her new identity as Amina, but she is never able to stop loving Nadir, and her new name never reflects her true identity. Additionally, Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey, transitions through several identities. She begins simply as Saleem's feisty little sister, a precocious young girl known to start things on fire. The Monkey, just like her Catholic ayah, or nanny, has a penchant for scripture and leavened bread; however, after her family moves to Pakistan, she changes her name to Jamila

Singer, and wearing a white silk chadar "heavily embroidered in gold brocade-work and religious calligraphy," she sings to a Muslim nation and becomes "Pakistan's Angel." Her identity as Jamila is short-lived, however, and in the chaos of the Indo-Pakistan War, she sneaks off and joins a convent, dedicating the remainder of her life to Christianity. Despite changing her identity, the Brass Monkey cannot resist the pull of her true calling.

Saleem likewise goes through a series of identity crises, which is reflective of his own complex identity. After a minor accident leaves a ten-year-old Saleem hospitalized, blood tests reveal that he is not actually his parents' biological son. Saleem learns that his ayah, Mary Pereira, in "her own private revolutionary act," switched infant Saleem with infant Shiva, another baby born on independence eve at the same time as Saleem to a poor couple working near the Sinais' home. Saleem's identity is further complicated when Shiva's own father turns out not to be Wee Willie Winkie, a poor accordionist, but William Methwold, the British colonizer who owns the estate where the Sinais live. Willie's wife, Vanita, has a secret affair with Methwold, and when she dies shortly after giving birth, she takes their secret with her. Ultimately, Saleem's parents accept him as their son and it "makes no difference" to any of them; however, as a one of Midnight's Children, Saleem must reconcile being the "mirror of India" with the reality of his half-British parentage. Lastly, when Saleem is living in Pakistan with his family, he is hit in the head in an air-raid (which subsequently kills most of his family) during the Indo-Pakistan war. Saleem "suffers a merely partial erasure" and forgets his name—and his moral compass. Fighting against India on behalf of the Pakistanis, Saleem is essentially fighting himself, and he makes this treason possible by hiding behind his amnesia. Saleem does eventually regain his memory and his true identity, but Rushdie makes a powerful point in the process. The very people who are so violently fighting each other because of their differences were, not terribly long ago, considered one and the same.

Saleem's identity is multifaceted, and he cannot claim one part of it over the other. He states, "Despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a Bombayite to be well up in Hindu stories, and actually I'm very fond of the image of trunk-nosed, flap-eared Ganesh." Rushdie's comparison of identity to nationality is perhaps best represented in the character of Aadam Aziz, who, after hitting his **nose** on the ground during his morning prayers, resolves "never again to kiss earth for any god or man." Instead of religion, Aadam equates his identity with his Kashmiri homeland, the northern-most part of the subcontinent of India. In a reflection of Aadam's own ambivalence, Kashmir, a territory with a largely Muslim population, is led by Hari Singh, a devout Hindu, and it remains disputed territory under the partitioning of India. Like Saleem, and much of his family, Kashmir does not fit neatly into either India or Pakistan. With these conflicts in identity, Rushdie implies that the single most unifying aspect of Indian identity is their differences, and because of this, traditional concepts of national identity do not apply. Instead, Rushdie advocates for Indians to find common ground in the very thing that divides them.

FRAGMENTS AND PARTITIONING

Following their 1947 independence from British rule, India begins to break up in a process known as partitioning. British India splits along religious lines, forming the Muslim nation of Pakistan and the secular, but mostly Hindu, nation of India. India continues to fracture even further, dividing itself based on language and class. Meanwhile, Saleem Sinai, the living embodiment of India, is also cracking—and dying. Saleem, born at the exact moment of independence, is inescapably linked to his country, and they are destined to the same fate. India's partitioning plagues Saleem's physical existence, and it is likewise reflected in his family life. Both Saleem's grandfather and his mother attempt to love fragments of another, trying in vain to piece together their desired lives. Like Saleem's country, these attempts at partitioning lead to destruction and despair. Throughout the novel, Rushdie juxtaposes the private partitioning of Saleem's family against the public partitioning of the newly independent India to argue against the partitioning of India. Instead, Rushdie implies that all things—countries and people alike—must be appreciated as a whole.

Fragments and partitioning are first referenced when Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, falls in love with Naseem Ghani through a perforated sheet. Since Aadam falls in love with a fragment of Naseem—what he knows of her through the sheet, rather than her whole self—the relationship is doomed to fail. As a young doctor living in Kashmir, Aadam is summoned to the home of Mr. Ghani, a blind landowner, when his daughter, Naseem, falls ill. A devout Muslim, Ghani refuses to let Naseem be seen by Aadam, stating, "She does not flaunt her body under the **noses** of strange men." Since Aadam is not "permitted to see her, no, not in any circumstances," he is required to examine his patient through a seven inch hole in a perforated sheet, piecing together his diagnosis. Naseem soon begins to experience new ailments weekly, and her father summons Aadam with each complaint. Moving the sheet from body part to body part, Naseem is "glued together by [Aadam's] imagination," until the "phantasm of a partitioned woman begins to haunt him." Although three years pass before Naseem complains of a headache and Aadam is able to see her face, he falls in love with each individual piece of her. Aadam and Naseem are eventually married, and they remain together for the rest of their lives; however, their relationship is difficult and strained. Naseem becomes known only as Reverend Mother, and she rules over her family like a tyrant. She imposes silence and fasting at will, and she becomes "prematurely old." Aadam and Reverend

Mother's sex life is a disaster, and it is clear that they are not compatible. He "had made the mistake of loving her in fragments," and as a whole, Aadam finds loving Reverend Mother exceedingly difficult.

Rushdie further argues against partitioning when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz Aziz, resolves—and fails—to love her second husband, Ahmed Sinai, "bit by bit." Mumtaz is forced to divorce her first husband, Nadir Khan, when it is discovered that he is impotent. Mumtaz and Nadir happily live with their secret for two years; however, when Reverend Mother finds out, Nadir leaves his beloved Mumtaz, formally declaring "I divorce three" three times, as dictated by Muslim custom. Mumtaz's divorce leaves her broken, and she continues to love Nadir even in his absence. Mumtaz soon marries Ahmed Sinai and changes her name to Amina. While she is still in love with Nadir, Ahmed is able to give her what Nadir can't. Amina's culture dictates a traditional family, and Ahmed may be her only chance for children. Amina dreams of Nadir and wakes each morning "with an unspeakable name on her lips," but she vows to *try* to love Ahmed. She selects "one fragment" of Ahmed each day, concentrating "her entire being upon it until it becomes wholly familiar." In this way, Amina slowly begins to love Ahmed Sinai. However, despite her greatest effort, "there was one part of [Ahmed] which she never managed to love." Because of her undying love for Nadir, Amina resents the one thing that Ahmed possesses "in full working order, which Nadir Khan certainly lacked." Amina detests sex with Ahmed, and this causes considerable dissent in their marriage. Ultimately unhappy, she slowly turns Ahmed into a makeshift Nadir—feeding him until he gains weight and encouraging him to grow his hair differently so that he physically resembles him—yet she remains unable to fully love Ahmed. Amina "fell under the spell of the perforated sheet of her own parents," and she is likewise unsuccessful in love.

Ultimately, the book's private family tensions reflect national ones; just as partitioning doesn't work in the characters' individual lives, Rushdie argues that Partition won't work for India. Following the initial split of India and Pakistan, India is "divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally-administered territories." Language, not geography, divides the states, and the aggressive protests of "language marchers" demanding partition means that "schools are often shut, because of the danger of violence on the bus-routes." As this small-scale partitioning unfolds, Pakistan and India continue to dispute the boundaries drawn during their own partition, leading to extensive violence and large-scale wars. Even the Midnight Children's Conference—Saleem and the other children born on India's independence who are a metaphorical "mirror of the nation"—are divided by imaginary lines based on race, religion, gender, and class, and they are ultimately unable to overcome their differences. The subcontinent is "split like an amoeba," and Saleem is "disintegrating" as his country divides itself. With Saleem's impending death, Rushdie implies that a partitioned India cannot be peacefully sustained.

RELIGION

Religion is at the forefront of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and it drives most of the narrative throughout the entire novel. Saleem Sinai, the narrator-protagonist, is born Muslim but lives most of his life in the Hindu-steeped culture of Bombay. His lifelong ayah, Mary Pereira, is a devout Catholic, and his sister, the Brass Monkey, ultimately joins a nunnery. In the religiously pluralistic backdrop of postcolonial India, Rushdie references several religions—including Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism—but he focuses mainly on Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Despite being surrounded by religion, Saleem is not a practicing Muslim, and he never visits a mosque or worships in any other way; however, Saleem is never able to fully escape religion, and as his story unfolds, it is a major cause of the civil unrest following India's independence. Suppressed under British rule, freedom of religion is a fundamental right under India's new constitution, and it has saturated society. *Midnight's Children* is centered on the dichotomy of the religious and secular within Indian society, as well as the tension between majority and minority religions present within the subcontinent as a whole. With Saleem's story, Rushdie argues that religion affects all lives, devout practitioner and staunch atheist alike, and if left unchecked, it can become very dangerous.

Midnight's Children begins as Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, abandons his Muslim faith. Aadam "hits his **nose** against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray." Three drops of blood fall from his nose and he vows "never again to kiss earth for any god or man." Aadam's character, despite turning his back on his religion, carries heavy religious connotations. His name is a nod to creationism and references Adam and Eve of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament (or Adam and Hawwa in the Quran), and his bloody nose serves the same purpose—according to the Quran, man was created from clots of blood. Aadam repeatedly states throughout the novel that he is "not much of a Muslim," despite marrying the deeply religious Reverend Mother. Aadam does not equate religion with morality as his wife does, and because of this, their marriage is quite difficult. Reverend Mother insists on religious education for their children, but Aadam goes behind her back and fires the tutor, claiming, "He was teaching them to hate, wife. He tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman?" Aadam views the religious teachings as intolerant and dangerous for his children. After India's independence and the creation of Pakistan, Aadam refuses to move to the new Muslim country despite his wife's insistence, "because that was a country built especially for God." Aadam avoids religion to the best of his ability for his

entire life, but when he grows old and senile, he "disgraces" himself "by stumbling into mosques and temples with his old man's stick, mouthing imprecations and lashing out at any worshipper or holy man within range." Aadam is resentful of religion and the violence it has brought into his life, and in his religious avoidance, he personifies the newly independent and (supposedly) secular India.

Religion is painted in a negative light throughout most of the novel. Saleem's ayah, Mary, serves as the personification of Catholicism, and she pines for Joseph D'Costa, a wanted fugitive and communist anarchist. Their names, of course, carry biblical connotations, and Mary relies heavily on her faith; however, her love for Joseph drives her to switch Baby Saleem with Baby Shiva on the night of India's independence (a private revolutionary act, switching rich for poor) and she avoids church and confession for the rest of her life on account of her guilt and sin. Despite Mary's pious and giving nature, her crime taints her character—and by proxy, her religion. Similarly, when Saleem's father, Ahmed Sinai, enters into a new business with Suresh Narlikar, a Bombay gynecologist and businessman, and the business fails, Narlikar blames religion. Ahmed is left broke with his assets frozen by the Indian government. Narlikar claims, "These are bad times, Sinai bhai—freeze a Muslim's assets, the say, and you make him run to Pakistan, leaving all his wealth behind him. Catch the lizard's tail and he'll snap it off! This so-called secular state gets some damn clever ideas." Narlikar and Ahmed believe that their business failed because they are Muslim—and the Indian government would prefer that they moved to Pakistan where they belong. Furthermore, when Saleem and his family do move to Pakistan, they find that the Pakistanis feel similarly about India. Saleem's uncle and high-ranking member of the Pakistani military, General Zulfikar, frequently yells to his family, "Let's get organized!" as a way of rallying them like troops. He states, "Let's give those Hindus something to worry! We'll blow their invaders into so many pieces, there'll be no damn thing left to reincarnate." General Zulfikar is not tolerant of the Hindu religion and he does not want any of them in Pakistan. He even mocks their beliefs when he claims there will be nothing left to reincarnate after he blows them up.

Saleem's story underscores the duality of the secular and religious within postcolonial Indian society. Even though it is technically a secular state, religion has infiltrated society to a considerable extent, and reasonably so. After all, Saleem claims to live "in a country whose population of deities rivals the numbers of its people." Like his grandfather, Saleem "fails to either believe or disbelieve in God," yet his "head is full of all sorts of religions." He even thinks that the voices he hears (which are actually his telepathic powers and his direct line to the other children born during the midnight hour on independence eve) are the voices of Archangels. Of course, his parents think he is insane, and he is punished when Mary accuses him of blasphemy, but religion is, in some way, always a major part of Saleem's life. *Midnight's Children* is Rushdie's attempt to balance the secular and the religious in postcolonial India, and while Saleem's story does not inspire much optimism regarding religious peace, Rushdie does offer some hope. Knowledge is essential to religious tolerance, and *Midnight's Children* is certainly an education.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

NOSES

Saleem Sinai's large, bulbous nose is a symbol of his power as the leader of the Midnight Children's Conference, which is comprised of all children born on the moment of India's independence from British rule. His nose makes his power of telepathy possible, and this is how he communicates with the other children of midnight (who all have varied powers of their own). Saleem inherits his rather large, and perpetually congested, nose from his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, who also uses his nose to sniff out trouble. Saleem's nasal powers begin after an accident in his mother's washing-chest, in which he sniffs a rogue pajama string up his nose, resulting in a deafening sneeze and the instant arrival of the voices in his head. Saleem's power of telepathy remains until a sinus surgery clears out his nose "goo." After his surgery, Saleem is unable to further commune with the other children. Ironically, after Saleem's nasal congestion is gone, he gains the ability to smell emotions, and he spends much time categorizing all the smells he frequently encounters.

PICKLES

Pickles are repeatedly mentioned in *Midnight's Children*, and while they are often viewed as a phallic symbol, they are generally representative of the power of preservation within Rushdie's novel. Saleem is the manager of a pickle factory, and he preserves pickles and chutneys each day. He also attempts to preserve his own life story like the pickles in his factory. Saleem largely manages to preserve his life through storytelling, offering a bit of immortality to a dying man, and he also labels and stores each chapter he writes in a pickle jar, so that they may be read later, by his son for example. This connection between pickles and the preservation of stories endures until the very end of the book, when Saleem ceremoniously labels his very last pickle jar as a way of closing out his story and his life as a whole.

SPITTOONS

In *Midnight's Children*, spittoons initially represent Old India but grow to also symbolize Saleem's identity, which is intimately linked to his country given that he is one of the children of midnight. Rani gives Mumtaz and Nadir a silver spittoon when they are married, and they frequently play hit-the-spittoon, an old-fashioned game in which they try to spit tobacco juice into a spittoon from various distances, similar to the old men in the town of Agra. After Saleem's family is killed during the Indo-Pakistani war, he is hit in the head with the exact same silver spittoon, and he instantly forgets his name and his entire identity. However, even with amnesia, Saleem knows that the spittoon is important, and he carries it with him throughout the war. To Saleem, the spittoon represents his identity, and he carries it with him until it is lost in Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Midnight's Children* published in 1980.

Book 1: The Perforated Sheet Quotes

❝ One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies. Lurching back until he knelt with his head once more upright, he found that the tears which had sprung to his eyes has solidified, too; and at that moment, as he brushed diamonds contemptuously from his lashes, he resolved never again to kiss earth for any god or man.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Aadam Aziz

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the beginning of Saleem's story as he introduces his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and it marks the beginning of Saleem's aversion to religion. Aadam "lurches" back because, metaphorically speaking, his religion has bitten him, and he won't fall prey to it again. Aadam's own aversion to religion is a more a product of his conflicted identity, but the message is still the same: Aadam rejects religion because he believes it has caused him harm. This belief stays with him through the novel, and it is passed on to his grandson. Both Aadam and Saleem actively avoid religion and are never able to completely believe (or disbelieve) in God; however, they are never able to fully escape religion either. Their Indian culture is steeped in multiple faiths and each somehow finds a way into their lives. Even as Aadam actively rejects his faith, the point is made using a religious example. Rushdie references the Quran via the three drops of blood, and in doing so proves that religion is ever-present in Indian society.

Aadam's experience praying on the Kashmiri bank also represents the future Partition of British India. Upon India's future independence in 1947, the subcontinent that is British India will divide into the three separate postcolonial countries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Each new country is represented in Aadam's drops of blood, which turn to rubies in the cold air. Within Indian society, rubies are a cherished gem and are believed to bring peace among enemies, and this represents Aadam's hope for postcolonial India.

Book 1: Hit-the-Spittoon Quotes

❝ "I started off as a Kashmiri and not much of a Muslim. Then I got a bruise on the chest that turned me into an Indian. I'm still not much of a Muslim, but I'm all for Abdullah. He's fighting my fight."

Related Characters: Aadam Aziz (speaker), Mian Abdullah / The Hummingbird, Rani of Cooch Naheen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Aadam is professing his support for Mian Abdullah (a.k.a. the Hummingbird), a pro-Indian Muslim politician, who advocates against Partition. The Hummingbird attempts to unite Indian Muslims without the traditional dogma and purity of the Muslim League, who overwhelmingly support Partition and the creation of Pakistan. Aadam adamantly opposes the creation of Pakistan and claims it is "a country built for God," and since he has turned his back on God, he doesn't want to be anywhere near him. Because of this, Aadam supports the Hummingbird's political platform.

This quote also reflects Aadam's conflicted identity. Kashmir is considered a separate entity from India, despite

being a part of it, and after Partition, it is claimed by both Pakistan and India. Aadam is now in the city of Agra, behind the imaginary line that establishes it as Indian, and his Kashmiri roots mean that he doesn't completely identify with other non-Kashmiri Indians. The "bruise" he speaks of represents the massacre in Agra, in which Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful hartal, meant to protest the continued British presence in India, is met with violence by British officers. The trauma of the massacre cements Aadam's identity as an Indian and a Kashmiri, and his diverse identity mirrors that of the diversity of postcolonial Indian society.

Book 1: Under the Carpet Quotes

"Change your name," Ahmed Sinai said. "Time for a fresh start. Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window, I'll choose you a new name. Amina. Amina Sinai: you'd like that?"

Related Characters: Ahmed Sinai (speaker), Nadir Khan / Qasim Khan, Mumtaz Aziz / Amina Sinai

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Mumtaz Aziz is forced to divorce her first husband, Nadir Khan, because he is unable to father children. Mumtaz settles for Ahmed, but her heart belongs to Nadir. In a display of his patriarchal power, Ahmed decrees that Mumtaz's former life over, and christens her new life with a new name of his choosing. Ahmed's social power over Mumtaz is such that she is forced to become a different person entirely, and she is denied the agency of personally deciding who she is.

Ahmed's actions cut straight to Amina's own conflicted identity. She desperately loves Nadir, but she is preconditioned by a sexist society to serve men through family and procreation, and Nadir does not technically qualify as a real man under the strict social code. As such, Amina begrudgingly accepts Ahmed as her husband, but she is not able to fully commit to her identity as his wife until she completely walks away from Nadir. In this vein, Rushdie criticizes the gender inequality within Indian society, and Mumtaz's transformation into Amina is proof of its destructive qualities.

Book 1: A Public Announcement Quotes

"See the whole world, come see everything!" The hyperbolic formula began, after a time, to prey upon his mind; more and more picture postcards went into his peepshow as he tried, desperately, to deliver what he promised, to put everything into his box. (I am suddenly reminded of Nadir Khan's friend the painter: is this an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality? Worse: am I infected, too?)

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Lafifa Das, Nadir Khan / Qasim Khan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

This quote introduces Lifafa Das, the young Hindu boy who pushes a peepshow through Ahmed and Amina's Muslim neighborhood in Agra after they are first married. Lifafa's peepshow represents the hybridity of Indian society secondary to European colonialism. As more and more colonists came to India, bringing with them their Western culture and customs, Indian society became a mixture of Eastern and Western influences, creating a unique hybrid that can be seen to metaphorically encompass the "whole of reality."

Lifafa's "hyperbolic formula" implies that this is an exaggeration, but this hybridity nevertheless affects his Indian identity. Lifafa is compelled to include everything and everyone in his representation of his own Indian identity (much like Nadir's painter friend), and this is a direct reflection of his own hybridity. Within *Midnight's Children*, this hybridity is viewed in a positive light, not a negative one. Rushdie argues that Indians can find common ground in their differences, and instead of dividing and portioning them, these differences can actually be the source of their unity. After all, the only thing that Indians seem to actually have in common is their differences.

Book 1: Many-headed Monsters Quotes

"It was only a matter of time," my father said, with every appearance of pleasure; but time has been an unsteady affair, in my experience, not a thing to be relied upon. It could even be partitioned: the clocks in Pakistan would run a half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts...Mr. Kemal, who wanted nothing to do with Partition, was fond of saying, "Here's proof of the folly of the scheme! Those Leaguers plan to abscond with a whole thirty minutes! Time without Partitions," Mr. Kemal cried, "That's the ticket!" And S. P. Butt said, "If they can change the time just like that, what's real any more?" I ask you? What's true?"

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Mr. S. P. Butt, Mustapha Kemal, Ahmed Sinai

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86-7

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is Ahmed's response when Amina tells him that she is pregnant with their first child, Saleem. Of course, Ahmed is not surprised by the announcement, as it has always been assumed that they would have children. This quote is important because it explains Saleem's personal concept of time, and it keeps him from being a completely unreliable narrator within the novel.

Within his own story, Saleem twice makes chronological mistakes regarding incredibly important social events. He mistakes the date of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, and he also mixes up the date of the 1957 election, a particularly important election that leads to the partitioning of Bombay. These errors have the effect of making Saleem appear unreliable, but he fails to see the significance of exact dates. Gandhi's social message is important, and his assassination is significant no matter what day it occurred on. As Saleem says in this quote, time can't be relied upon—it is abstract and easily manipulated by power—but his story can still be relied upon to carry Gandhi's message of peace and unity. Saleem considers his own story to be the genuine truth that Mr. Butt is searching for, and in this way, Rushdie argues for the importance of storytelling.

Book 1: Methwold Quotes

The Estate, Methwold's Estate, is changing them. Every evening at six they are out in their gardens, celebrating the cocktail hour, and when William Methwold comes to call they slip effortlessly in their imitation Oxford drawls; and they are learning, about ceiling fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars, and Methwold, supervising their transformation, is mumbling under his breath. Listen carefully: what's he saying? Yes, that's it. "Sabkuch ticktock hai," mumbles Methwold. All is well.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), William Methwold

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after William Methwold has sold all of the mansions on his estate (each one named after a famous European palace) to Ahmed and the other Indian tenants, and each of them has agreed to his terms of sale: that they will buy the mansions complete with all of Methwold's belongings and that their sales will not be complete until the exact moment of India's independence from Britain. Methwold's terms of sale are a small-scale representation of European colonialism, and this quote reflects his power as a colonialist. Methwold is slowly Westernizing Ahmed and the other tenants—in his own opinion, civilizing them—and this quote reflects the results of his efforts. As Methwold observes the tenants, they speak using Methwold's languate, they rely on his modern conveniences and customs, and their gardens even boast budgerigars, a bird that is native to Australia, not India. Methwold's plan to erase India's rich culture and replace it with his own is complete, and his use of the Hindu phrase, "Sabkuch ticktock hai," is a reflection of his colonial success, which will remain long after he is gone. Through the actions of William Methwold, Rushdie makes plain the insidious nature of colonialism, and exposes the European effort to forever alter Indian culture and identity.

Book 1: Tick, Tock Quotes

❝ And when she was alone—two babies in her hands—two lives in her power—she did it for Joseph, her own private revolutionary act, thinking He will certainly love me for this, as she changed name-tags on the two huge infants, giving the poor baby a life of privilege and condemning the rich-born child to accordions and poverty…"Love me, Joseph!" was in Mary Pereira's mind, and then it was done. On the ankle of a ten-chip whopper with eyes as blue as Kashmiri sky—which were also as blue as Methwold's—and a nose as dramatic as a Kashmiri grandfather's—which was also the nose of grandmother from France—she placed this name: *Sinai*.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Joseph D'Costa, Alice Pereira, Shiva, Mary Pereira

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Here is Mary Pereira's fateful switch of baby Saleem and baby Shiva on the night of British India's independence from British rule, an act which drives the entire plot of the book. Mary pulls off the switch as a testament of her love for Joseph, a notorious criminal and communist. When Mary fails to support his desire for social revolution, he leaves Mary for her sister, Alice, and she is banking on her revolutionary act winning back Joseph's love. As a communist, Joseph advocates for a classless society and works on behalf of the poor communities within India. Saleem's family is wealthy—meaning they are set firmly in the middle-class, or bourgeoisie—and Shiva's family is poor.

By switching the babies, Mary wreaks havoc on India's hierarchical social structure; she condemns baby Shiva to a life of poverty, and she blesses baby Saleem with a life of ease by comparison. Mary's revolutionary act and Joseph's communist leanings represent the social divide within India along the lines of class—a divide that is only worsened by Partition—and through them, Rushdie draws attention to the suffering present in Indian society, which often goes unnoticed by the middle-class. Rushdie's novel makes plain the inconsistencies within Indian society so that they may be overcome through unity, not Partition.

Book 2: The Fisherman's Pointing Finger Quotes

❝ "Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy accident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India, which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closet attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own."

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the letter that Saleem receives from the Prime Minister of India after his birth at the exact moment of independence. The letter sheds light on Saleem's mysterious connection to his country (he describes himself as inextricably "handcuffed to history" and the events of his country), and in it he is identified as the metaphorical mirror of the nation. Because of his historical birth, Saleem is endowed with magical powers and he serves an allegorical purpose within the text—Saleem is the personification of India, and the Prime Minister's letter legitimizes him.

The letter also foretells much about Saleem and his life. The Prime Minister's reference to the "happy accident" of Saleem's birth suggests not only the time of his birth, but the circumstances as well. After all, Mary Pereira did switch Saleem with Shiva and spare him a life of poverty. Also, as a "bearer of that ancient face of India," Saleem's own face is covered in birthmarks resembling the shape of the subcontinent of India, and since he is destined to die at an early age, he will remain eternally young. The government indeed watches over Saleem's entire life with close attention, and they are ultimately responsible for his destruction. With the Prime Minister's letter, Rushdie establishes Saleem as the epitome of India.

Book 2: Snakes and Ladders Quotes

❝ All games have morals; and the game of Snakes and Ladders captures […] the eternal truth that for every ladder you climb, a snake is waiting just around the corner; and for every snake, a ladder will compensate. But it's more than that; no mere carrot-and-stick affair; because implicit in the game is the unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil; the solid rationality of ladders balances the occult sinuosities of the serpent; in the opposition of staircase and cobra we can see, metaphorically, all conceivable oppositions, […] but I found, very early in my life, that the game lacked one crucial dimension, that of ambiguity—because, as events are about to show, it is also possible to slither down a ladder and climb to triumph on the venom of a snake.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160-1

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears in Saleem's story about his childhood and it describes his favorite juvenile game. More importantly, this quote serves as Saleem's metaphor for life, and it introduces his amazing relationship with snakes. As a child, the game teaches Saleem the important relationship of cause and effect; essentially, that for every up, there is a down. The binary lesson of the game reflects the binary nature of colonialism (East and West, black and white, and rich and poor), and it highlights the power structure within that relationship. Within the game, Saleem sees "all conceivable options," and it often explains the extreme ups and downs within his life.

The game is also the first meaningful mention of snakes in the novel and explains how Saleem, paradoxically, has triumphed in the face of their danger. When Saleem is sick with typhoid and is surely dying, it is snake venom that saves his life. And when Saleem is stuck in the Pakistani army suffering from amnesia, it is a snake bite which makes him remember his Indian story. Snakes represent eternal life and transformation in Saleem's life, and this quote explains his initial obsession with them. Snakes are also important within the Hindu faith, and their frequent appearance is evidence of India's inherently spiritual society, through which Rushdie argues there is no escaping religion.

Book 2: All-India Radio Quotes

❝ Telepathy, then: the inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience—before I began to *act*—there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the wall of my skull. Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmission—the front-of-mind stuff which is what I'd originally been picking up—language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Saleem discovers his magical power of telepathy from the accident in his mother's washing-chest. He finally understands who—or more precisely, what—the voices in his head are, and he is beginning to make sense of it all. Early on, Saleem is only a passive recipient of the voices (a magical eavesdropper, so to speak), but he soon begins to act and control the voices; however, before he does, he must deal with the language problem. India is home to over twenty languages and hundreds of dialects, and Saleem simply can't understand the voices in his head.

As the personification of India, the voices in Saleem's head represent the actual population of India, and his problems understanding the voices mirror the actual problems within society. India begins to partition along lines of language, and society fails to come together in the face of their differences. Saleem, however, is able to access "universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcend words." He moves beyond language and is able to communicate with the voices in his head. In this way, Rushdie argues that language does not have to be a dividing factor. Other meaningful forms of communication are possible, and through this quote, he argues against the partition of India.

Book 2: Love in Bombay Quotes

❝ Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the Widow, who I'm keeping for the end; and after the end, Padma, my goddess of dung. Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they were never central—perhaps the place which they should have filled, the hole in the center of me which was my inheritance from grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices. Or perhaps—one must consider all possibilities—they always made me a little afraid.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), The Widow / Indira Gandhi, Aadam Aziz, The Brass Monkey / Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch / Laylah, Mary Pereira, Evie Burns

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119-20

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Saleem enters Evie Burns's thoughts and she banishes him from the neighborhood crew, which subsequently leads to the accident that results in Saleem identifying the other children of midnight among the teeming voices in his head. In this way, Saleem credits Evie with changing his life and attributes this to the fact that she is a woman. The women in Saleem's story play pivotal roles, and he owes his life (and death) to them. However, Saleem's great love of women also comes with significant fear—he recognizes their power and respects them for it—and he is inexplicably drawn to women despite being scared of them. Saleem believes that women should be central in life, and the fact that they aren't is evidence of India's sexist society.

Through Saleem's obsession with women, Rushdie dismantles traditional notions of gender and femininity. The women in Saleem's story are independent and capable, and they challenge postcolonial assumptions of the weakness of women. They often downplay the importance of sex in defining masculinity, and in doing so, they redefine what it means to be both and woman, and a man, within Indian society.

Book 2: At the Pioneer Café Quotes

❝ And while chutney—the same chutney which, back in 1957, my ayah Mary Pereira has made so perfectly; the grasshopper-green chutney which is forever associated with those days—carried them back into the world of my past, while chutney mellowed them and made them receptive, I spoke to them, gently, persuasively, and by a mixture of condiment and oratory kept myself out of the hands of the pernicious green-medicine men. I said: "My son will understand. As much as for any living being, I'm telling my story for him, so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against the cracks, he will know. Morality, judgement, character…it all starts with memory…and I am keeping carbons."

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Aadam Sinai, Mary Pereira, Padma

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Saleem's health continues to fail on account of his connection to his country, and Padma tries to get him to see a doctor. Saleem refuses, and instead, they eat chutney and listen to his story, which he refuses to stop telling. Pickles and chutney are important symbols within Rushdie's novel. They represent preservation, a metaphor which Saleem extends to his storytelling. Additionally, chutney—and to a greater extent, food in general—represents the power of memory and emotion, which taste has the tendency to elicit, even years after the fact. Rushdie's characters frequently transmit their personal feelings to others by cooking their emotions into their food, and Saleem's chutney is full of the nostalgia of his story.

Saleem is desperate to tell his entire story before he dies. He knows that once it is preserved, it can be accessed time and time again, by his son, or anyone else for that matter. Saleem argues that everything begins with memory, including our morals and judgements. For example, one knows what is evil from past experiences with evil, and conversely, with good. In proof of this, Saleem abandons his own morals and fights in the Pakistani army when he suffers from amnesia and is without any memories. As soon as his memory is restored, he leaves the army and returns to India. Saleem's memories will help to shape the next generation of Indians, and through his story, Rushdie again emphasizes the importance of storytelling.

Book 2: The Kolynos Kid Quotes

"…Your life, which will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own," the Prime Minister wrote, obliging me scientifically to face the question: *In what sense?* How, in what terms, may the career of a single individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation? I must answer in adverbs and hyphens: I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our (admirably modern) scientists might term "modes of connection" composed of "dualistically-combined configurations" of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically, actively-metaphorically and passively-literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 272-3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote follows Saleem's realization that he is not his parents' son. Suddenly, Saleem's life makes even less sense than before, and he questions everything—starting with the Prime Minister's letter. As Saleem attempts to grasp the abstractness of his identity as the "mirror of a nation," he finds that the language to explain doesn't necessarily exist, and as such, he employs the use of hyphens. Hyphens make it possible for Saleem to explain multiple things at once, and he uses them frequently throughout his story. For example, when Saleem describes his son, Aadam, who is really the biological son of Shiva, Saleem refers to him as "my-son-who-is-not-my-son." Additionally, when Saleem goes to the movies with Evie Burns, the girl near Methwold's Estate whom he has a crush on, Saleem sits "next-to-and-in-love-with" her. Saleem's hyphens allow him to do, and be, multiple things at once.

Saleem's use of hyphens are also a reflection of the hybridity of postcolonial India. Saleem's identity as the personification of India is best understood in terms of hyphens, and the people he metaphorically represents can be seen this way as well. Actively, Saleem is the son of Indians; literally, he is the son of an Englishman. Actively, Saleem is a relatively normal kid until he sneezes and hears voices; metaphorically, he is the embodiment of India and the magical leader of a group of supernatural kids. Postcolonial India is a brand-new world, and Saleem is better able to describe this with hyphens.

Book 2: Commander Sabarmati's Baton Quotes

"Loose woman," the demon within me whispered silently, "Perpetrator of the worst of maternal perfidies! We shall turn you into an awful example; through you we shall demonstrate the fate which awaits the lascivious. O unobservant adulteress! Did you see what sleeping around did to the illustrious Baroness Simki von der Heiden?—who was, not to put too fine a point upon it, a bitch, just like yourself."

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Homi Catrack, Lila Sabarmati

Related Themes:

Page Number: 296

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Saleem has just discovered that Lila Sabarmati, his married neighbor at Methwold's Manner, is having an affair with Homi Catrack, another resident of the estate. In Saleem's obsessive thoughts, he suspects his own mother of being unfaithful to his father, and sees this as a personal insult. Saleem connects a woman's sensuality and sex outside of marriage with loose morals—a product of the sexist nature of India' patriarchal society—and he makes an example out of Lila as a warning to his own "loose" mother. Of course, Commander Sabarmati ends up killing Homi when he finds out, and he seriously injures Lila; however, Saleem's plan is successful, and his mother stops her extramarital exploits.

Saleem's actions and the language he uses in this quote are a perpetuation of the misogyny that kills Homi and disrupts so many lives. When Saleem refers to Lila (and by extension, his own mother) as loose, he projects the worst opinion imaginable onto her. What's worse, he compares her to his fake-pedigree dog (who dies of a venereal disease) and calls her a "bitch." Saleem presumes to meddle in Lila's marriage, he manipulates his mother, and he clearly believes that he has the right, or power, to interfere with the personal lives of women. Saleem claims to love and respect women, but his actions tell a very different story, and this a direct result of postcolonial India's sexist society.

Book 2: Revelations Quotes

What leaked into me from Aadam Aziz: a certain vulnerability to women, but also its cause, the hole at the center of himself caused by his (which is also my) failure to believe or disbelieve in God. And something else as well—something which, at the age of eleven, I saw before anyone else noticed. My grandfather has begun to crack.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Aadam Aziz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears when Aadam Aziz believes he has seen God. Of course, he has really seen Ahmed's servant, old Musa, who is suffering from leprosy, and his grandson thinks that he has lost his mind. To Saleem, his grandfather's metaphorical "crack" parallels his own cracks—the result of his connection to his country and the sure cause of his certain death—and he notes their other similarities as well. Saleem's story begins with Aadam, and they have a powerful bond. After striking his nose on the ground bowing to pray, Aadam turns his back on his Muslim faith and it creates a hole in his soul that never resolves. Even though Aadam walks away from his faith, he still has lingering questions about God's existence, and religion is such a large part of his Indian culture that it is impossible to escape.

Saleem inherits Aadam's ambivalence towards religion, and faith plays an equally central part in his own life. His life-long ayah is a devout Catholic, and she raises him with her beliefs. Furthermore, Saleem is born a Muslim, and even though he neglects to practice his religion, he insists that his Hindu wife convert to Islam before their marriage. Through Aadam and Saleem, Rushdie implies that religion can never truly be avoided—it will always find a way into life. Rushdie argues the presence of religion, even in the most secular life. India, after all, is a secular nation; however, its culture and customs are infused with the multiple religions that call the country home.

Book 2: Movements Performed by Pepperpots Quotes

❝ Midnight has many children: the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos, greed and pepperpots…I had to go into exile to learn that the children of midnight were more varied than I—even I—had dreamed.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Saleem has moved to Pakistan and his uncle, Major Zulfikar, is prepping him for war. Zulfikar and his military cronies are planning a coup, and Saleem helps by moving pepperpots around a table, the metaphorical movements that will bring even more violence to the people of India. Saleem has found that he can't commune with the Midnight Children's Conference from across the imaginary boundaries of Pakistan, but in the land of the "pure" he finds a whole new breed of India's children of midnight. With independence, occurring at midnight on August 15, 1947, British India divides into three countries, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, based mostly on religion, and the Partition leads to considerable social unrest. This quote highlights the other figurative "children" born of this split. The divided countries further separate along lines of language and class, and corrupt governments and sinister individuals take advantage of the more vulnerable. The Partition of British India is responsible for wide-spread death and despair, and in this way, Rushdie advocates against the portioning of India.

Book 2: Jamila Singer Quotes

❝ Saleem's parents said, "We must all become new people"; in the land of the pure, purity became our ideal. But Saleem was forever tainted with Bombayness, his head full of all sorts of religions apart from Allah's (like India's first Muslims, the mercantile Moplas of Malabar, I had lived in a country whose population of deities rivalled the numbers of its people, so that, in unconscious revolt against the claustrophobic throng of deities, my family had espoused the ethics of business, not faith) […].

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Saleem has just moved back to Pakistan a second time, this time with his father, who starts up a new business manufacturing and selling towels. Saleem's father, Ahmed, hopes that their new life in Pakistan will be a new beginning for all of them, but the family is out of place in the devout Muslim country. Saleem's family is technically Muslim, but they don't practice or observe their religion much, and Saleem in particular is not wholly convinced that God even exists. Saleem is also highly influenced by the Hindu culture of his native Bombay, and he is not exactly what the Pakistanis would describe as pure. Still, they are committed to a new life in Pakistan, and when they don't

commit to their religion, Ahmed dedicates his family to their new business.

This quote reflects Rushdie's greater argument of the role of religion within a culture. Bombay's Hindu influence has become part of Saleem, despite the fact that he is a non-practicing Muslim, and the religiously-saturated society of postcolonial India makes Saleem feel overwhelmed and religiously exhausted. As a result, Saleem's family avoids religion and focuses on business and money, and this is a reflection of India's own secular identity.

Book 2: How Saleem Achieved Purity Quotes

❝ What my aunt Alia took pleasure in: cooking. What she had, during the lonely madness of the years, raised to the level of an art-form: the impregnation of food with emotions. To whom she remained second in her achievements in this field: my old ayah, Mary Pereira. By whom, today, both old cooks have been outdone: Saleem Sinai, pickler-in-chief at the Braganza pickle works...nevertheless, while we lived in her Guru Mandir mansion, she fed us the birianis of dissension and the nargisi koftas of discord; and little by little, even the harmonies of my parents' autumnal love went out of tune.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Mumtaz Aziz / Amina Sinai, Mary Pereira, Alia Aziz

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 378

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Saleem's family has moved to Pakistan and are living with Alia, the sister of Saleem's mother, Amina. Alia and Amina have a sordid history, and this quote reflects Alia's revenge. Many years before, when the sisters were still young, Ahmed pursues Alia, and she is sure that they will marry. Ultimately, Ahmed marries Amina instead, and Alia never forgives her sister or Ahmed. Saleem's parents have a rocky relationship, but as the years go on, they do develop an understanding that resembles love, and Alia sabotages their relationship with her rage-infused cooking.

With Alia's cooking, Rushdie highlights the ability of food to elicit certain emotions and memories, and this serves as an important parallel in Saleem's life as the manager of Braganza's pickle-factory and his efforts to cook nostalgia into his chutney. Furthermore, Saleem's ayah, Mary Pereira, cooks her guilt for switching Saleem with Shiva into her food, and Reverend Mother, Saleem's grandmother, cooks her own anger and disappointment into the food she serves her family. Food is at the center of Rushdie's story, and it central to the character of Alia as well.

Book 3: The Buddha Quotes

❝ So, apologizing for the melodrama, I must doggedly insist that I, he, had begun again; that after years of yearning for importance, he (or I) had been cleansed of the whole business; that after my vengeful abandonment by Jamila Singer, who wormed me into the Army to get me out of her sight, I (or he) accepted the fate which was my repayment for love, and sat uncomplaining under a chinar tree; that, emptied of history, the buddha learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), The Brass Monkey / Jamila Singer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 403

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after the first Indo-Pakistani war, when in an air-raid, Saleem is hit in the head and suffers amnesia, forgetting his true identity. Technically an adult and drafted into the Pakistani army, Saleem's amnesia means that he has forgotten his Bombay roots, and he is thereby cleansed, or purified, by Pakistani standards. Saleem is convinced that his stint in the military is punishment for falling in love with his sister—a sort of penance for his forbidden feelings—but there is no real evidence of this. Rather, Saleem's amnesia makes it possible for him to witness and carry out the horrific actions of the Pakistani army. He forgets his Indian identity as a result of his amnesia, and this is the only way he is able to become a Pakistani. His fellow soldiers refer to him only as "the buddha," and he knows very little about himself. This quote is important in the development of Saleem's character and the lessons he learns because of his complicated identity. Saleem allegorically represents the country of India; however, he becomes a citizen of Pakistan. This reflection of Saleem's conflicted identity metaphorically mirrors the complex and diverse nature of the national identity of India.

Book 3: In the Sundarbans Quotes

❝ In the aftermath of the Sundarbans, my old life was waiting to reclaim me. I should have known: no escape from past acquaintance. What you were is forever who you are.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 423

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Saleem has finally regained his memory and his true identity, and he abandons the Pakistani army and returns to India. As a Pakistani, Saleem has witnessed horrific things, and he won't soon forget them. He nearly dies in the thick rainforest of the Bangladeshi Sundarbans trying to escape the army, and he has watched his closest childhood friend die as a casualty of war. Saleem is forever changed by his time in Pakistan, but he easily slips back into his Bombay life. Saleem can't escape who he was before the war and his amnesia. He is still the same person he always was, and this passage reflects that.

Saleem's quote also makes an important point about his time in Pakistan. Despite his amnesia, Saleem is still the same person who fought on behalf of Pakistan against India, and he is complicit in the atrocities they have committed. Saleem never questions his military orders when he is told to track down the leader of the Bangladeshi resistance, and he unflinchingly maneuvers the pepperpots that metaphorically represent a military coup. Saleem will forever be *that* person as well, and this passage draws attention to this important development in the character of Saleem.

Book 3: Sam and the Tiger Quotes

❝ Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come. Nor am I particularly exceptional in this matter; each "I," every one of the now-six-hundred-million-plus of us, contains a similar multitude. I repeat for the last time: to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Padma

Related Themes:

Page Number: 440-1

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes after Saleem returns to India following his time in the Pakistani army. Saleem's amnesia and his conflicted identity have left him questioning who he really is, and this is his explanation to Padma. Saleem's identity is complicated, and it has been influenced by all of his previous experiences. What's more, Saleem's identity is based in part in ancient tales and his own biographical stories, and each of these narratives feed into who he is as well. Saleem is European and Indian, and Muslim and Hindu-inspired, and he is an undeniable product of postcolonial hybridity. He is the actions that he has participated in and the pain that he has caused. Like Lifafa Das's peepshow, Saleem encompasses the whole of his reality, and this passage highlights this. However, Saleem recognizes that he is not unique—there is an entire subcontinent of Indians just like him, each the same in their differences—and this, Rushdie argues, is India's common ground.

Book 3: A Wedding Quotes

❝ "Women have made me; and also unmade. Form Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex. It is, perhaps, a matter of connection: is not Mother India, Bharat-Mata, commonly thought of as female? And, as you know, there's no escape from her."

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Naseem Ghani / Reverend Mother, The Widow / Indira Gandhi, Padma

Related Themes:

Page Number: 465

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Saleem defends the presence of the many women in his life to a jealous Padma who claims, "that's too much women!" According to Saleem, the numerous women in his life have been unavoidable, and they also have a surprising amount of power. Rushdie's novel is a harsh critique of the status of women in postcolonial India, and the women in Saleem's life disrupt the status quo of this typically sexist society. Saleem's mother and great-grandmother are strong women who have no problem stepping into a traditionally male role to support their families financially. Saleem's grandmother, Reverend Mother, exercises her own power within the domestic

sphere, and Dr. Narlikar's women take the Bombay real estate scene by storm. The Prime Minister of India is woman, and she has the power to absolutely destroy Saleem—and the entire country, which also happens to be historically depicted as a female. In Saleem's story, women are not the weaker sex, and in this way, Rushdie advocates for their social equality.

❝ Parvati's formal conversion to Islam (which irritated Picture Singh, but on which I found myself insisting, in another throwback to an earlier life) was performed by a red-bearded Haji who looked ill-at-ease in the presence of so many teasing, provocative members of the ungodly; under the shifting gaze of this fellow who resembled a large and bearded onion she intoned her belief there was no God but God and that Muhammed was his prophet; she took a name which I chose for her out of the repository of my dreams, becoming Laylah, so that she too was caught up in the repetitive cycles of my history, becoming an echo of all the other people who have been obliged to change their names...like my own mother Amina Sinai, Parvati-the-witch became a new person to have a child.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Mumtaz Aziz / Amina Sinai, Picture Singh, Parvati-the-witch / Laylah

Related Themes:

Page Number: 477

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which appears as Saleem gets ready to marry Parvati-the-witch, lends important insight into Saleem's identity and two of its major components: religion and his relationship with women. Saleem claims not to completely believe in God, and he doesn't actively practice his Muslim religion (a trait he has inherited from his grandfather, Aadam Aziz). He resents the Partition of India that religion has prompted after independence, and he gauges his morals on something other than the Quran. For all intents and purposes, Saleem lives a secular life; however, he still insists on Parvati's conversion (she is a lapsed Hindu) before they are married. Despite all efforts to the contrary, Saleem is never able to remove religion from his life, and various aspects of it are sprinkled throughout his identity.

Additionally, the fact that Saleem has the power to insist on Parvati's conversion is evidence of his authority over her, and his changing of her name represents his ultimate control over her identity. Saleem's own mother's name is changed by Saleem's father after they are married. Amina, Saleem's mother, marries Saleem's father out of desperation to have a child when her first husband turns out to be impotent, and Saleem's marriage to Parvati has similar overtones. Saleem, who is also impotent, initially refuses to marry Parvati because of his sterility. When she is impregnated out of wedlock by Shiva, and subsequently shunned by Shiva and the entire ghetto, Saleem marries her to save her honor—so that she may have her child and Saleem may also have a son. Saleem's power to change Parvati's name is a reflection of India's sexist society, and the need for their marriage in the first place is evidence of its misogyny.

Book 3: Midnight Quotes

❝ [T]he Emergency had a black part as well as a white, and here is the secret which has lain concealed for too long beneath the mask of those stifled days: the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a State of Emergency was the smashing, the pulverizing, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight. (Whose Conference had, of course, been disbanded years before; but the mere possibility of our reunification was enough to trigger off the red alert.)

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), The Widow / Indira Gandhi, Aadam Sinai

Related Themes:

Page Number: 492

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Saleem notes that his son, Aadam Sinai, is one good thing that has come out of Indira Ghandi's Emergency. Like the ancient magic Parvati-the-witch practices, Aadma's birth is the white, or good, side of the Emergency, while Mrs. Ghandi's true motivations for declaring martial law are black, or evil—she wants to destroy Saleem and the other children of midnight. The Midnight Children's Conference—a group of magical children born during the midnight hour of India's independence—serve as a metaphor of the entire nation. They are young, strong, and diverse, and they are the first generation of the infant country. The children represent hope of a better future—a unified India that respects each other's differences instead of persecuting them. Of course, the Conference falls victim to the very same troubles that plague society and they are torn apart by their differences, but their survival is threat enough for Mrs. Gandhi. Indira Gandhi ultimately destroys the Conference through her forced sterilization campaign during the Emergency, and they are officially put out of

business, the true purpose of their existence unrealized. This quote explains the reason behind the Emergency, and it also explains the extent by which it affects society.

Book 3: Abracadabra Quotes

❝ I understood once again that Aadam was a member of a second generation of magical children who would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in prophecy or stars, but forging it in the implacable furnaces of their wills.

Related Characters: Saleem Sinai (speaker), Aadam Sinai

Related Themes:

Page Number: 515

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of Saleem's closing quotes, and it perfectly explains the magical existence of his son, Aadam Sinai.

Saleem's own existence as a child of midnight will forever remain a mystery to him. As the first child to be born during the midnight hour of India's independence, Saleem is among the most powerful of a defunct group of magical children all born on that fateful night between midnight and one, a metaphorical "mirror of the nation," and he searches in vain his entire life for their purpose. As a midnight's child, the events and people of his life and country passively unfold onto Saleem, and it appears that he is powerless to change them. As such, Saleem and the other children fail to affect any real change.

Aadam, on the other hand, is an entirely new generation, and with him comes renewed purpose and hope for the unity Saleem sought but ultimately could not inspire. Aadam's generation is not a passive bunch; rather, their purpose is active and will be "forged in the implacable furnaces of their wills." Aadam will not settle for obscurity, and if need be, he will create his own purpose. Aadam represents a much-needed change in India; however, his own specific purpose remains to be seen.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1: THE PERFORATED SHEET

Born in Bombay at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947—the exact moment of India's independence from British rule—narrator Saleem Sinai is writing the story of his life. Saleem's historical birthday means that he is inescapably linked to his country, and after being "heavily embroiled in Fate" for thirty years, Saleem is now dying. Fearing absurdity, he claims he must work faster than Scheherazade if he is to mean something.

Saleem's desire to tell his story is reflected in his reference to Scheherazade, a female character in the Middle Eastern folktale, One Thousand and One Nights. *As the story goes, after the King's wife is unfaithful, he beheads her, and proceeds to take a new wife each day only to behead her as well. When the King marries Scheherazade, she saves her life through storytelling. Each night, she begins a new story, withholding the ending until the next night—ensuring a stay of execution. Scheherazade runs out of stories by the end of one thousand and one nights, by which time the King has fallen in love with her and spares her life. As the personification of India, Saleem is hoping his own life—and by extension, India—will be saved through his storytelling.*

Saleem is full of the stories of his ancestors and has too many to tell, but he begins with the story of a blood-stained bedsheet with a single circular hole cut in it—his "talisman"—which represents the beginning of his life, "some thirty-two years before …" Saleem notes that the sheet is stained with precisely three drops of blood, reminding the reader that according to the Quran, man was created from drops of clotted blood.

Saleem's life and culture are rooted in stories, and the story of the bedsheet is the most important one—it is the beginning of his life, some thirty years before *his birth, suggesting that the span one's life exceeds actual years lived. Saleem's mention of the Quran reinforces the cultural significance of religion on his identity, despite not actively believing in God.*

Saleem's story flashes back to Kashmir, 1915. His grandfather, Aadam Aziz, kneels to pray, and after striking his **nose** on the ground, three drops of blood fall onto his prayer-mat. The cold air transforms Aadam's blood into rubies and his tears into diamonds, and he vows never again to bow to any god or man. He rolls up his mat and looks out at his Kashmiri homeland.

Aadam's renunciation of his religion mirrors the secular nature of the independent India of the future. The three drops of blood which fall from his nose represent the partition of British India into the three separate counties of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh after independence. Rubies, the most precious of gems according to the Indian people, are believed to enable their owners to live in peace amongst enemies—Saleem's hope for his country.

Saleem notes that during his grandfather's time, Kashmir had hardly changed since the Mughal Empire—there is no military presence and few Englishmen. As Aadam looks around the Kashmiri valley, his **nose** begins to itch.

Saleem's caveat is a direct reference to the effects of British colonialism. The beautiful land that was untouched for hundreds of years has been ruined by a foreign power, and Aadam's nose, which often serves as a harbinger of danger, foretells future trouble.

Aadam is twenty-five and has been away at a German medical school for five years. Now, he feels caged-in by the traditional Old World ways of his country and senses the resentment of others because of his Western education. This early Kashmir is a "Paradise"; yet to Aadam's "travelled eyes," it feels narrow and sad.

Aadam's European education has Westernized him. Western ideals dictate that Old India is viewed as uncivilized and antiquated, and Aadam now shares these sentiments, which makes him incapable of appreciating Kashmir's beauty.

Aadam reflects on college and his friends, Ingrid, Oskar, and Ilse, German anarchists who mock his religion and believe India was "discovered" by Europeans. His European friends credit their own ancestors with Aadam's creation, and knowing this, it is difficult for him to return home and pray. Aadam is stuck between believing and disbelieving his religion and God, and as he abandons his religion, he is permanently altered in the form of a hole in his soul.

Aadam's college friends reflect colonial ideals of European superiority. To his friends, India only began to exist when it became British India*—before that it was nothing. Aadam's country and culture are not respected by his classmates, and since both his country and identity are so deeply rooted in religion, he has difficulty praying. The hole in his soul made by this admission reflects the level of importance of religion in Indian culture and identity.*

Upon his return to Kashmir, Aadam finds his father housebound after a stroke and his mother, having exited purdah, running the family's gemstone business. Now, his father sits at home in a fog, making bird-noises and calling in over thirty different species of birds. Saleem gives a physical description of Aadam, who notably has a large bulbous **nose**, which "established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch."

In many ways, Rushdie's novel empowers women, and Aadam's mother is a prime example. She upends gender expectations by doing her husband's work when he is unable. However, despite this representation of a powerful woman, Aadam's nose—a phallic symbol—reflects the ultimate power of the patriarchy.

As Aadam rolls up his prayer-mat, he sees Tai, the old boatman, approaching on his ferry from across Dal Lake. Aadam is fond of Tai and the endless stories he has gathered taxying people and goods across Dal and Nageen Lakes. Tai is extremely old (no one knows just how old) and has many stories.

The character of Tai underscores the importance of storytelling in Indian society. As a ferryman, he comes into contact with countless others through his stories. Tai is viewed as ancient like his stories because stories never die—they live on through those who retell them.

Aadam daydreams, recalling his childhood when he once asked Tai how old he really was. Tai had replied that he is old enough to "have watched the mountains being born" and to "have seen the Emperors die." Aadam remembers Tai telling him unbelievable stories, including one about meeting Christ when he visited Kashmir once long ago. As a child, Tai's stories taught Aadam the secrets of the lake, including where to swim, how to avoid snakes, and where the English women go to drown. Tai also taught Aadam about **noses**, "the place where the outside world meets the inside you," instructing him to always trust his nose and heed its warnings.

Again, Aadam's interaction with Tai highlights the importance of storytelling as a means to preserve history. Tai, who is the embodiment of stories, is as old as his oldest tale—dating back to the beginning of time. Aadam's mention of the lake's secrets and drowning English women foreshadow Ilse's upcoming suicide, and Tai's attempts to teach Aadam about the powers of his nose explain and foretell the symbolic significance of noses within Saleem's story.

Aadam is roused from his daydream as Tai approaches shore. Tai tells Aadam that the daughter of Mr. Ghani, a local landowner, is sick and in need of a doctor. Aadam quickly runs to fetch his medical bag, happy to see a new patient and begin establishing his medical practice.

Aadam hopes to start a modern medical practice, one that does not rely solely on Old Indian concepts of medicine, which he views as mere quackery. This eagerness reflects Aadam's Western education and views.

Aadam arrives at home, where his mother complains of a headache and rash. Embarrassed about removing her purdah and working with the public in the family's gemstone business, Aadam's mother has broken out in boils. Aadam quickly examines her and suggests that she put her purdah back on; she refuses, claiming nobody would buy gemstones from a woman hiding behind a black hood. She states, "So they must look at me; and I must get pains and boils."

To Aadam's mother, being seen by strange men in public without her veil causes her deep shame that manifests as physical boils; however, she is committed to saving her business and becoming a modern Indian woman. The exit of purdah represents a step towards gender equality, and Aadam's mother endures her pain and boils as an expense of her freedom.

Breaking away from his mother, Aadam returns to Tai's boat to be ferried to his new patient. Tai appears upset, and calling Aadam a "big shot," he notices his new leather bag "full of foreigners' tricks." Tai ignores Aadam's attempts to make small talk and is obviously angry. To Tai, Aadam's new bag represents progress and the West, and he asks Aadam if he has "one of those machines that foreign doctors use to smell with." Aadam realizes that Tai is speaking of a stethoscope, and when he says yes, Tai responds, "I knew it. You will use such a machine now, instead of your own **nose**."

Tai represents Old India and he resents Aadam's Western education and ideas. Tai's India is vulnerable to European powers through colonialism, and since his return from Germany, Tai views Aadam as just another European who will undoubtedly change and influence his Indian way of life to align with European culture and ideas. This passage also underscores the symbolic importance of noses and their ability to divine trouble, which Aadam disregards in favor of his Western stethoscope.

When Aadam arrives to examine his new patient, Naseem, Mr. Ghani tells him that his daughter's usual doctor, a woman, is sick. Aadam realizes that Mr. Ghani, a widower, is blind and this makes him increasingly uncomfortable. Aadam's **nose** begins to itch, and he considers running away, but a large, muscular woman appears and leads him into a bedchamber where two additional (and equally muscular) women are holding up a large bedsheet like a curtain. Aadam notes a small hole, about seven inches in diameter, in the center of the sheet.

Aadam's irritated nose is a warning he ignores—just as Tai predicts. Ghani is interested in finding a suitable husband for his daughter, not a suitable doctor, and Aadam and Naseem's future marriage will be a source of pain for both of them. Presumably, Naseem is not involved in selecting her own suitor; rather, Aadam is selected and summoned by her father, reflecting Naseem's powerlessness to make her own decisions.

Mr. Ghani states that the women are his daughter's protectors and orders Aadam to examine Naseem through the hole—from the other side of the sheet. Ghani claims that Naseem is a "decent girl" and that strange men are not permitted to see her. At first confused, Aadam agrees and examines Naseem's upset stomach through the perforated sheet.

Naseem's usual doctor is a woman because she is not allowed to be viewed by strange men, hence the large bedsheet, or purdah. The purdah symbolically represents the confines of India's patriarchal society, and the power of Naseem's female "protectors" is reflected in the women's masculine description.

BOOK 1: MERCUROCHROME

Saleem introduces his companion, Padma, an uneducated and illiterate woman. Padma, whose name roughly translate to "The One Who Possesses Dung," works as a cook, and she spends much time cooking for Saleem and urging him, unsuccessfully, to eat. Padma is independent and direct, and fiercely loyal to Saleem, who describes her as a "bitch-in-the-manger."

Like all the women in Saleem's life, Padma is controlling and independent; however, Saleem continues to exercise power over her by calling her a bitch. Ultimately, Saleem has the upper hand, which he uses to devalue and marginalize Padma.

Saleem continues writing his story, again making reference to Scheherazade. He begins with Aadam and his mother, who resents her son's visits to examine Naseem. Mr. Ghani has taken to summoning Aadam weekly to assess his daughter's myriad of minor complaints—such as constipation, an ingrown toenail, and a twisted ankle—and Aadam's mother believes she is sick only because she is spoiled. She attempts to make Aadam feel guilty for running to Naseem so frequently—and ignoring his own sick mother in the process.

Aadam's mother—covered in painful boils on account of exiting purdah—senses Mr. Ghani's plan to marry Naseem and Aadam, and she is not prepared to share her son with another woman. She wants to be Aadam's first priority. After all, his mother's sacrifice (made on behalf of her family) is what is making her sick, and Aadam is constantly leaving her, running to the aid of a veiled woman. Aadam's mother is unable to trust a woman who hides behind a veil.

For three years, as the Great War rages on far away from Kashmir, Aadam falls in love with Naseem through the perforated sheet, despite his mother's protests. Aadam's mother is convinced that Naseem's illnesses are Mr. Ghani's attempts to marry his daughter to a doctor, but Aadam is helpless. Naseem soon complains of breast lumps and a pulled muscle in her upper thigh, and Aadam must examine these intimate areas via the hole in the sheet. He knows that his feelings are unprofessional, but the perforated sheet has become "something sacred and magical," and his love for Naseem begins to fill the hole created when he hit his **nose** on the prayer-mat.

Aadam falls in love with Naseem one piece at a time; however, as a whole, Aadam and Naseem are completely incompatible. Aadam falls under the spell of a partitioned woman, yet in their future marriage, he is unable to love her in her entirety. In this same vein, Rushdie argues against the partitioning of India. Since Aadam falls in love with individual pieces of Naseem, their relationship is doomed to fail. Similarly, a partitioned India is likewise doomed.

On the day World War I ends, Naseem complains of a headache, and Aadam is finally able to see her face through the perforated sheet. When Aadam lays eyes on Naseem's face, his "fall is complete." Naseem comments only on the size of Aadam's **nose**, and Mr. Ghani smiles, pleased with himself.

Saleem frequently mentions world events in the telling of his story, and this serves to highlight how Eastern societies are sidelined on the world stage. Aadam is not affected by this large-scale war, cementing the East and West as two separate entities.

In the meantime, Tai, the old boatman refuses to bathe or change his clothes. He repeatedly floats his boat past the Aadam's home, causing the flowers to die, and when the villagers who hire his services ask him to bathe, he tells them to ask "that German Aziz." The villagers begin to blame Aadam for Tai's offensive odor, and his business suffers because of it. Aadam begins to believe that Tai is trying to chase him out of town.

Tai's refusal to bathe reflects the West's opinion of the East as savage and uncivilized, and this is how he punishes Aadam for becoming Westernized. Furthermore, as over one million Indians were forced to fight on the Western front by British colonizers during WWI, many of whom were killed or injured, Tai's reference to Aadam as a German carries a highly negative connotation.

Aadam's father falls ill and dies, and his mother follows shortly after. Ilse Lubin comes to Kashmir to visit Aadam and tells him that her husband, Oskar, was stuck by a car during a protest and killed. Aadam is awarded a job at Agra University, and he sells his family's home and the gemstone business.

Aadam easily walks away from a home and business built by his parents—one which his mother suffered to save—and this reflects his commitment to his new, modern life, and his rejection of Old India. Oskar's death foreshadows the price to be paid for Old India's transition into New India.

Aadam asks Mr. Ghani for Naseem's hand in marriage, and he is happy to oblige. Aadam runs to tell Ilse the good news but can't find her. She has taken Tai's ferry to the part of Dal Lake where foreign women go to drown and is soon found dead. Aadam blames Tai, who quickly falls ill (and refuses to be examined by Dr. Aziz).

The trope of a man asking a woman's father for her hand in marriage further reflects the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Both Aadam and Mr. Ghani deny Naseem the agency to decide her own fate, and her husband is chosen for her, rather than by her. Tai's ferrying of Ilse to the deadly part of Dal Lake represents his bitterness towards the West; however, his illness is a reflection of his guilt for playing a part in the young girl's death.

Aadam and Naseem are married, and the perforated sheet is utilized on their wedding night, providing proof of their union during the consummation ceremony the next day in the form of three drops of blood. Aadam and Naseem begin to ready themselves to move to Agra for Aadam's new job. As Saleem writes, he recalls finding the perforated sheet in a trunk while searching for a ghost costume as a child. He puts on the sheet, and both Aadam and Naseem respond angrily. Padma insists that Saleem read his story out loud to her as he writes.

Islamic tradition often dictates that marital consummation is publicly confirmed by presenting the wedding-night sheets the next morning. Often hung like a flag for all to see, blood on the sheet is viewed not only as proof of the couple's sexual union, but also as an indication of a woman's virginity and purity. Culturally, the sheet is significant to both Aadam and Naseem's identities, despite their unhappy marriage, and this is evident in their anger when Saleem uses it as a costume.

Saleem flashes back to 1919, where Aadam is in the city of Amritsar. The busy city streets are a far cry from the quiet Kashmiri village, and Naseem is having a difficult time adjusting. Aadam's **nose** begins to itch, and he senses something is wrong.

Despite Aadam's desire to live a modern and more Westernized life, he still suffers from culture shock once he leaves Kashmir and arrives in a large city. Again, Aadam's nose alerts him to the danger and violence that will accompany India's continued move towards independence.

Aadam and Naseem are stuck in a hotel in Amritsar because the trains are not running on account of Mahatma Gandhi's hartal, and Naseem is growing increasingly irritated with the inconvenience. Aadam notices a young Indian soldier taking part in the hartal and comments that the Rowlatt act (which declared a state of emergency in British India) is a mistake. He reflects on his Kashmiri identity, noting that he feels differently than other Indians, and he is unsure if the hartal is his fight.

Naseem's indifference towards Gandhi's hartal is evidence of her indifference towards politics and society. She cares nothing about independence, and she sees the suffering of other Indians as an inconvenience. Aadam's reluctance to join the hartal is evidence of his crisis of identity—as a Kashmiri, he feels disconnected from other Indians.

Meanwhile, Naseem is upset because Aadam has asked her to "move a little" during sex and has told her to come out of purdah. Naseem views her husband's sexual desires and his support of unveiling as a direct result of his Western education. Angrily, Aadam gathers all of Naseem's veils and sets fire to them in a garbage can, setting much of the hotel room ablaze. After the fire is out, he tells Naseem to stop being "a good Kashmiri girl" and start "being a modern Indian woman."

Aadam's insistence that Naseem perform sexually is, to her, another product of his Western exposure and education. She values Old India and has no desire to move forward. She also values purdah, and unlike Aadam's mother, is resistant to unveiling for any reason. Aadam's burning of her veils symbolically represents Naseem's new freedom and identity as a woman; although, ironically, he gives her no choice and forces this decision onto her.

During the hartal, Aadam remains in Amritsar treating those injured by rioting mobs in the street. He bandages wounds and applies Mercurochrome, which stains his clothes red. Naseem mistakes the Mercurochrome for blood, and when Aadam corrects her, she becomes irritated, claiming that she isn't stupid and has read several books.

As a doctor, Aadam participates in the hartal in a more indirect way. This allows him to support other Indians without actually taking up their cause completely. Naseem believes that Aadam tricks her with the Mercurochrome on purpose as a way to prove his superior intelligence—he assumes that she won't know any better and will think him covered in blood.

As public tension rises in Amritsar, Martial Law is declared and Aadam refuses to leave in case more people need his help. He happens upon a peaceful protest, and his **nose** begins to itch. Brigadier R. E. Dyer arrives at the protest accompanied by fifty troops, and Aadam feels a sneeze forming. As Aadam sneezes, he loses his balance and drops his medical bag, the contents spilling onto the street. Aadam crawls around, attempting to save his equipment, as Brigadier Dyer orders his troops to open fire on the protestors.

As Aadam continues to ignore his nose and its warnings of danger, but his sneeze essentially saves his life. Brigadier R. E. Dyer is one of a few historical characters in Rushdie's novel, and the massacre in Amritsar is an actual historical event. Indians were enraged by Dyer's unjustified use of force, and when Britain failed to fully condemn him, it became a turning-point in India's move towards independence.

As bodies fall dead onto Aadam, the metal clasp of his bag digs into his chest, leaving a severe bruise that Saleem notes does not fade until after his grandfather's death many, many years later. When the shooting stops and Aadam is able to return to Naseem, he is covered in blood—which she mistakes for Mercurochrome. Naseem faints when Aadam corrects her and tells her it is blood.

Aadam's nonfading bruise serves as a constant reminder of the massacre and the British Raj (Britain's rule over India). The fact that Aadam's bruise does not fade until after his death suggests that he is not truly free of British power until his death.

Saleem notes that his skin is beginning to crack, and he knows that his death is near. He thinks about Tai, who recovered from his mysterious illness only to be shot dead years later while protesting India and Pakistan's dispute over the territory of Kashmir in 1947.

Saleem's skin cracks as a result of India's partitioning and social dissention. As the country metaphorically cracks and separates, Saleem, as the personification of India, begins to literally crack.

BOOK 1: HIT-THE-SPITTOON

Saleem is falling apart, literally cracking "like an old jug" under the stress of his historical birth and his connection to his country. He claims to be breaking into "six hundred and thirty million particles of dust," and he urgently continues his story. Saleem cooks condiments for a living, preserving jars of chutney and **pickles**, and he writes his story at night, dedicating his remaining life to the "great work of preserving."

Saleem is breaking into six hundred and thirty million particles of dust as this is roughly the population of India, further representing his connection to his country. Saleem's job preserving pickles and chutney mirrors his desire to preserve his own story for posterity, in hopes that his divided country can find some common ground within his message.

Padma is hooked on Saleem's story, and she has stopped nagging him to eat and sleep. Padma too senses that Saleem's time is short, and she refuses to leave his side. Saleem remarks on his surprise that she remains so loyal to him despite the fact that he is "unmanned." Saleem is impotent, and no matter how hard he tries, he can't seem to "hit Padma's **spittoon**."

Padma's captivated attention of Saleem's story mirrors that of the King in One Thousand and One Nights, *and her indifference to sex is proof of her love for him. Saleem's questions his masculinity because of his impotence; however, Padma's acceptance of this suggests that sex is not as important to women as men, or least Saleem, assume.*

Saleem's story flashes back to Agra in 1942, where his grandfather, Aadam, has come down with the "virulent disease" of optimism, begun in the name of Mian Abdullah, also known as the Hummingbird, an Indian politician who creates the Free Islam Convocation, a gathering of Muslim Indians against the religious dogmatism of traditional Islam. Aadam claims that even though he is a Kashmiri and "not much of a Muslim," he still supports the Hummingbird. Aadam says, "He's fighting my fight."

This passage is another reflection of Aadam's conflicted identity. Despite attempting to break from his own Muslim identity, Aadam still feels connected to the Hummingbird's fight on behalf of India's non-traditional Muslims. As religion is such a large part of Aadam's identity, he is unable to completely break from it, even though he is ambivalent towards God's existence.

Aadam's optimism fades in the presence of Naseem, who has morphed into an exceedingly unpleasant woman now referred to as Reverend Mother. In her home, Reverend Mother runs a tight domestic ship, and her command is unchallenged. She continues to resent sex and coming out of purdah, and she has no interest in politics. When Aadam wishes to discuss political happenings, he must go visit his friend, Rani of Cooch Naheen. Saleem notes that as his grandmother begins to age, she repeatedly refers to things and people as "whatsitsname," a habit, he claims, that worsens with time.

Naseem's transformation into Reverend Mother represents her dedication to her Muslim religion. Additionally, her unpleasant personality mirrors the loathing she feels for her modern Indian life outside of purdah. Reverend Mother fiercely rules over the domestic sphere because she finds comfort in this traditional role. She is resistant to the idea of a New India, and as such, she refuses to discuss politics. She cares so little for her changing world that she doesn't even bother to remember the names of things or people.

Saleem tells of an argument ten years earlier in 1932, when Aadam goes behind Reverend Mother's back and fires their children's religious tutor because he is "teaching them to hate." Enraged, Reverend Mother vows not to cook for Aadam until he brings the tutor back. Aadam refuses and stubbornly declines to eat any food, prepared by anyone, until he nearly dies of starvation. Alia, Aadam and Reverend Mother's "wise child," suggests that Reverend Mother fake an illness to get Aadam to eat. Her act is successful, and while she recovers from a mysterious pain she refuses to let Aadam examine, he begins to eat.

Saleem's aside is another reflection of the gender power imbalance within India society. As the patriarch, Aadam refuses to allow his wife to teach her religious beliefs to their children, since her Islamic beliefs don't align with his own. However, Reverend Mother is not completely powerless, and through her traditional role, she is able to gain the upper hand and punish her husband for disrespecting her and her religion by withholding food.

Saleem returns to 1942, to the Hummingbird's optimism and the streets of Agra, where old men sit and play **hit-the-spittoon**, attempting to spit tobacco into a receptacle from increasing distances. Saleem describes an old photograph of Aadam and Rani meeting the Hummingbird, along with his personal secretary, Nadir Khan, who enjoys writing poetry and playing hit-the-spittoon. Saleem tells of the Hummingbird and his strange habit of humming constantly—a hum that would rise and fall in direct relation to his work rate. Nadir shares Aadam's optimism, and they both oppose the Muslim League, a political party that advocates for the partitioning of India.

Within Rushdie's novel, spittoons symbolically represent Old India, just like the old men who play hit-the-spittoon in the streets of Agra. As Aadam has abandoned his Muslim faith, he is against the partitioning of India along religious lines, thereby separating Muslims from Hindus, and instead supports the formation of a secular state. The Hummingbird's political platform rejects Partition, and as such, Aadam supports him over the staunch Muslim League. He also finds an ally in Nadir, whose love of poetry is another echo of storytelling.

With the creation of the Free Islam Convocation, the Hummingbird invents an alternative space for Indian Muslims to unite without the dogmatism and partition talk of the Muslim League, and a second convocation is set to take place in Agra—a stronghold of the Muslim League.

The Hummingbird has made a poor choice bringing the Convocation to Agra. As the city is largely populated by supporters of the Muslim League and Partition, his unifying attempts will not be well received.

As the Hummingbird and Nadir work late at the Convocation offices, a mob of assassins close in. Nadir answers a knock at the door and is met by six masked men in black wielding crescent shaped knives. As the men make their move, the Hummingbird begins to hum at such a high frequency that thousands of nearby dogs ascend the Convocation office and begin ferociously tearing apart the assassins. Sadly, the Hummingbird is already dead, but Nadir is able to escape out of a window, the glass broken from the Hummingbird's high-pitched hum. Knowing his story is unbelievable, Saleem insists, "It is well known that this is true."

The Hummingbird's assassination is a prime example of Rushdie's use of magical realism. The Hummingbird's supernatural ability to attract a band of killer dogs with only his hum is clearly farce, yet it successfully represents the very real political upheaval and violence present in Indian society in the years leading up to Partition. This passage also brands Nadir as a coward. Instead of trying to help the Hummingbird, he waits for his chance to escape and save his own life.

Running through the streets of Agra, Nadir hides in a cornfield near Aadam's house and is discovered by Rashid, the rickshaw boy. Rashid recognizes Nadir as the Hummingbird's assistant, and Nadir asks Rashid if he knows where he can find Dr. Aziz. Eager to help, Rashid leads Nadir to a door in the side of Aadam's house, and breaking the lock, shows Nadir inside, swearing secrecy on his "mother's gray hairs."

Nadir seeks out Aadam because he knows that he supports the Hummingbird politically. In the Muslim town of Agra, Nadir is sure to find little help otherwise. Rashid, a rare Hindu in a Muslim city, is also willing to help Nadir.

BOOK 1: UNDER THE CARPET

India's optimism epidemic dies with the Hummingbird, and after the dogs finish their work, the authorities are unable to identify the assassins, or their pay-masters. Aadam is summoned to the university by Major Zulfikar, Brigadier Dodson's A.D.C., to write the Hummingbird's death certificate, and when he is through he is compelled to blow his **nose**. The Convocation is broken and Rani falls ill, taking to her bed. The Muslim League secretly celebrates the fall of the Convocation, and Aadam endures a terrible bout of constipation—an unfortunate side effect of his "Indianized" diet.

Aadam is compelled to blow his nose after completing the death certificate because he suspects Brigadier Dodson and Major Zulfikar of organizing and ordering the Hummingbird's assassination. Zulfikar is a Muslim, and since both he and Dodson are in favor of partitioning India, the Hummingbird's optimism is potentially harmful to their own political agenda. Aadam's constipation is more evidence of his conflicted identity—his own body is unable to tolerate Indian food.

Saleem's story continues with Aadam sitting on his "thunderbox"—his personal term for his toilet—considering a laxative. Suddenly, a "cowardly" voice comes from the laundry chest in the corner, and Aadam is so startled that his bowels suddenly evacuate. Rashid has hidden Nadir away in Aadam's thunderbox room, and he meekly begs for asylum. Aadam silently resolves to hide Nadir at all costs.

Aadam spends so much time on his toilet on account of his inability to tolerate his "Indianized" diet that he has a special name for it, and this is further proof of his conflicted identity. Furthermore, Nadir's refuge in Aadam's laundry chest echoes Saleem's own hiding place in his mother's laundry chest.

Reverend Mother immediately objects to Nadir's presence in their home. Thinking of their three daughters, Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald—collectively known in town as the "three bright lights"—she forbids Aadam to hide Nadir away in their home. Aadam yells, "Be silent, woman!" and proceeds to hide him in the spacious rooms underneath their floorboards. Infuriated, Reverend Mother vows silence, claiming "not one word, whatsitsname, will pass my lips from now on," and a "rotting" silence soon descends over the entire house.

Once again, Reverend Mother is without a say in the running of her own home—the space that she has fiercely claimed as her territory. Aadam makes a one-sided decision to allow Nadir into their home and then silences his wife in a display of his power. Not to be outdone, Reverend Mother enforces her own power through silence. Rushdie's use of the word "rotting" to describe this silence reflects the scope of Reverend Mother's power and her ability to make her family miserable.

Major Zulfikar comes to call on Aadam to "tie up a few loose ends." He is suspicious of Nadir's disappearance after the Hummingbird's assassination, and he assumes that the silence in Aadam's house is a sign of mourning. As Nadir hides beneath his feet, Major Zulfikar falls in love with Emerald and silently vows to marry her. Alia begins seeing Ahmed Sinai, a young, divorced merchant. Reverend Mother is sure that Ahmed intends on marrying Alia and she distrusts him, but because of her vow of silence, she is unable to voice her concerns. The silence of the Aziz home unnerves Ahmed, and the question remains unasked.

Nadir is a "loose end" as far as Zulfikar is concerned, and he is a presumed threat to the Muslim League as long as he is alive and unaccounted for. Reverend Mother's refusal to warn Alia of her distrust for Ahmed Sinai because of her vow of silence is evidence of her selfishness. She is perfectly willing to risk her daughter's happiness and allow her relationship with an undesirable man in the name of keeping her vow and maintaining her power.

Mumtaz, Aadam's favorite daughter, takes to silently caring for Nadir in the basement, and while they never speak, she tends to his every need. Reverend Mother, who possesses witch-like powers, begins to invade her daughters' dreams at night to spy on them and learns that Emerald has fallen in love with Major Zulfikar. When she invades Mumtaz's dreams, however, Reverend Mother finds that her daughter has fallen in love with Nadir, who soon asks Aadam for Mumtaz's hand in marriage.

Mumtaz tends to Nadir as a service to her beloved father, but even she refuses to speak, and Reverend Mother's witch-like abilities are further evidence of her power. Emerald's love for Major Zulfikar is sure to add more stress to their lives. After all, if they are to marry, it will be impossible to keep Nadir a secret, and Aadam is sure to be held legally responsible for harboring a wanted man. This is further complicated by Mumtaz's feelings for Nadir.

Saleem's story skips to 1943, and his grandfather's home is still in the grips of Reverend Mother's silence. Aadam tries to convince Nadir that he is no longer in danger, but Nadir refuses to believe him. While Reverend Mother stays silently locked in her room, a lawyer and a mullah (a Muslim schooled in Islamic theology and sacred law) provided by Rani arrive in Aadam's living room. In a secret ceremony, Mumtaz and Nadir are married. The basement is converted into a comfortable living space—a makeshift palace Nadir refers to as "Mumtaz Mahal"—and the newlyweds begin their lives together.

By this point, Reverend Mother has not spoken for an entire year, and she shows no signs of wavering. She is opposed to Mumtaz and Nadir's marriage, but her desire to exercise her power again keeps her silent. Interestingly, despite Aadam's aversion to religion, he still arranges for a mullah to preside over his daughter's marriage, again highlighting the cultural significance of religion in even a secular life. Nadir's reference to the basement as "Mumtaz Mahal"—a play on the Taj Mahal, a Mughal emperor's gift to his favorite wife—is a reflection of his deep love for her.


Mumtaz begins a "double life." She continues to attend university during the day, pretending to be her parents' single daughter, learning the "hallmarks" of life, "assiduity, nobility, and forbearance," but at night, she is Nadir's wife, and he "loves his wife as delicately as a man ever had." Mumtaz's time in hiding with Nadir is the happiest time of her life. The two spend countless hours playing **hit-the-spittoon**, using a beautifully ornamented spittoon given to them as a wedding gift by Rani, who is now dying. Reverend Mother continues her angry silence and begins to grow fat, her "unspoken words inside her blowing her up."

Mumtaz's formal education reinforces her domestic duties and her expected dedication to men in Indian society. She is taught the hallmarks of a good wife, not any real marketable skill or scholarship, and this perpetuates the subordinate position of women to men. However, Mumtaz loves Nadir and she happily fulfils this traditional role, which is echoed in the couples love for the traditional, Old India game of hit-the-spittoon.

Saleem's story again skips to 1945, to the very day that atomic bombs are dropped on Japan. Rani has since died, turning so pale and white that she could not be seen in her sheets. Mumtaz too falls ill, and Nadir fears that she may have pneumonia. Worried, Aadam gives Mumtaz a thorough exam and is shocked to discover, after two full years of marriage, that his daughter is a virgin. Aadam runs to the living and tells the whole family of his findings. Reverend Mother, breaking her three-year silence, asks Mumtaz if it is true; she nods.

Rani's illness that turns her skin white is symbolic of the whitewashing of Indian society secondary to British colonialism, and Saleem again makes note of a world event that fails to affect Indian life. Aadam's "thorough" examination of Mumtaz is a violation of her privacy and her body, although he views it as his right as a patriarch—Mumtaz is only afforded the privacies that Aadam allows.


As Mumtaz defends Nadir, insisting that a good marriage does not depend on sex, Reverend Mother unleashes three years of pent-up silence, blaming Aadam for bringing Nadir into their home and allowing this sham marriage. As she yells, Emerald suddenly stands up and runs out of the door, directly to Major Zulfikar's office, and tells him that Nadir is living in her father's basement. Zulfikar is still searching for Nadir after the Hummingbird's assassination, and he is eager to find him. As Zulfikar storms the basement with the assistance of fifteen men, Reverend Mother consoles a heartbroken Mumtaz, "Women must marry men," she says, "not mice."

Again, Rushdie implies that sex is not the sole indicator of a successful marriage, but Reverend Mother disagrees. To her, Nadir's impotence is a direct indication of his lack of masculinity and his failure to be real man. A sexless marriage is after all a childless marriage, and this goes against tradition. Emerald sees this has her chance to finally out Nadir to Zulfikar, and in doing so, hopefully secure her own marriage to a real man. Without these extreme circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that Reverend Mother's three-year vow of silence would have lasted much, much longer.

Major Zulfikar finds the basement empty, and the only trace of Nadir is a letter left for Mumtaz, which reads, "*Talaaq! Talaaq! Talaaq*!"—translation: I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee. Zulfikar is enraged.

Nadir's letter to Mumtaz is a legally binding divorce within Islamic society. As a man, Nadir has the power to dissolve his own marriage simply by speaking (or writing) "I divorce thee" three times. As a woman, Mumtaz is not afforded this right, and she is not permitted to object.

Major Zulfikar agrees not to press charges on Aadam for harboring Nadir if he agrees to allow him to marry Emerald. Aadam agrees, and his youngest daughter is set to be married. Alia, however, continues to wait for Ahmed to propose.

Major Zulfikar is able to marry Emerald only because he blackmails Aadam. Aadam knows that if he refuses Zulfikar, he will likely be charged with harboring Nadir.

In January 1946, Zulfikar and Emerald are married, and at the wedding, Ahmed falls in love with a very depressed Mumtaz, much to Alia's dismay. Ahmed and Mumtaz are married by June, and Ahmed changes Mumtaz's name to Amina. "Time for a fresh start," he says, "Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window." Amina agrees, and they begin their life together.

Ahmed's insistence on Mumtaz's new name and identity is another example of female oppression in Indian society. Ahmed selects Mumtaz's new name and identity, and she is given no say whatsoever in the matter. As a woman, Mumtaz has absolutely zero agency over her own identity.

BOOK 1: A PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

1947 begins quietly; however, British viceroys move behind the scenes, making decisions and political maneuvers that will lead to India's partition (which, Saleem says, will begin in just six short months—"tick, tock"). Saleem interrupts his own story to complain about a doctor Padma recently called on to examine the cracks in his skin. Padma shoos the doctor away after he declares Saleem whole, and he is convinced Padma's doctor is "a quack."

Instead of Indians making their own decisions regarding independence and possible partition, the British impose their own ideas onto the Indian people without their knowledge. Saleem's interruption to talk about Padma's "quack" doctor parallels Aadam's own belief that traditional Indian medicine is quackery.

Saleem continues his story with Amina, who having moved to Delhi with Ahmed, wakes for the first time in a new city and thinks that the sun has come up in the wrong place (her new home faces east towards the sun). Amina has been suffering from insomnia and is uncomfortable in her new life and identity, and she can't stop thinking about the bag full of money Ahmed snuck under their bed when he thought she wasn't looking. Nevertheless, in their new marriage, Amina gives "Ahmed the gift of her inexhaustible assiduity."

Amina is completely out of place in her new life. She is used to living in a dark basement in an entirely different city, and she is not in love with her new husband. Amina knows that Ahmed is keeping secrets from her—the bag of money is proof of that—yet she continues to dedicate herself to him despite her true feelings. She views her dedication to her husband as her sworn duty, and she is determined to uphold it.

Amina diligently tends to her new home, decorating and settling in, but she fails to love Ahmed. She had married him for children, and since they don't have any yet, Amina is silently miserable and thinks mostly about Nadir. Amina resolves to *try* to love Ahmed and begins to "train herself to love him." Each day, she focuses on one small part of him until he becomes familiar.

Amina's attempts to love Ahmed by partitioning him and focusing on individual parts is reminiscent of Aadam and Reverend Mother's introduction through the perforated sheet. However, just like her parents, Amina and Ahmed's relationship based on fragments is doomed from the beginning.

As Amina silently picks him apart, Ahmed slowly begins to resemble Nadir—he gains weight and his hair turns thin and greasy. Amina turns their home into a replica of "Mumtaz Mahal," covering the windows with thick draperies and shutting out all the light. Their life together is silent and dark, and both Amina and Ahmed are keeping secrets from each other.

Amina is trying to replicate her life with Nadir—a time of true happiness and love—in her marriage to Ahmed. Amina finds Ahmed easier to love when he physically resembles Nadir, and she is more comfortable in their home when it looks like "Mumtaz Mahal." Amina's former life with Nadir is in keeping with her true identity.

Later, Amina is irritated as she cooks for Ahmed. His distant cousin Zohar is visiting, and Amina, who has special news to share and needs household money, is annoyed with the lack of privacy. (Whenever Amina needs money to buy groceries or pay bills, Ahmed makes her "ask nicely" by sweet talking him and sexually caressing him until his "table napkin begins to rise in his lap.") Ahmed allows Zohar to listen to All-Indian Radio—something that he denies Amina—and the two talk about the merits of "lovely pink babies" over "blackies," since to be black is "proof of inferiority."

Amina is not free to listen to radio programs of her own choosing, and it bothers her that Ahmed allows his cousin to partake in this forbidden activity. Ahmed further exerts his power by making Amina earn money through sexual favors—a particularly deeming practice that she would rather not perform in front of company. Furthermore, Amina is also marginalized on account of her dark complexion, and this echoes the color divide and prejudices imposed on the Indian people by British colonialism.

Suddenly, Ahmed's business partners, Mustapha Kemal and Mr. S. P. Butt, arrive excitedly at the Sinais' and inform them that the complex which houses their rather large warehouse is on fire. The fire, started by Ravana—a crew of Hindu "incendiary rogues" named for a many-headed demon—is burning an unknown warehouse, and the three men fear for their inventory. Ahmed provides leather for military jackets, Kemal deals in rice tea lentils, and Mr. S. P. Butt manufactures matches—and his stockpile is sure to go up quickly. Ahmed is convinced that their warehouse is safe, claiming that "they still have time to pay."

The burning warehouse is the first clue as to the reason for Ahmed's secret stash of money that he keeps hidden under the bed. As a Muslim, Ahmed and his business partners must pay-off the local Hindu gang to spare their business, a direct reflection of the religious conflicts brewing within Indian society. Ahmed has been given a specific amount of time to come up with the money, and since this time has not yet passed, he is sure that the burning warehouse does not belong to them.

The Ravana gang, a fanatical anti-Muslim movement, is active in Delhi, which is home to a large Muslim population—including Amina and Ahmed. They hang signs near mosques demanding, "NO PARTITION OR ELSE PERDITION! MUSLIMS ARE THE JEWS OF ASIA!" The gang extorts money from Muslim business owners through threats of arson, and most pay rather than involve the police, who cannot "be relied upon by Muslims." Ahmed runs to check his warehouse with Kemal and Mr. Butt, and the three businessmen find their own warehouse intact, a Muslim-owned bicycle warehouse burns instead.

Many Muslim Indians support the partitioning of India and the formation of Pakistan (an official Islamic state), and this creates tension with the Hindu population, who overwhelmingly oppose Partition and instead advocate for a secular state with religious freedom. The signs hanging near the mosques and threats of violence by the Ravana are proof of the deep-seated religious bigotry within the country, and even the police cannot be trusted to be impartial.


Outside Amina's home, Lafifa Das, a young Hindu boy, pushes his peepshow cart through the Muslim neighborhood, entertaining people with his picture postcards. Lafifa Das endeavored "to put everything in his box"—including pictures of holy temples, the Taj Mahal, and European actresses—a practice that Saleem considers "an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality." The Muslim neighborhood quickly turns on Lafifa Das when a young boy identifies him as Hindu, and they corner him against a door, calling him a "mother raper" and "violator of daughters." The door suddenly opens and Lafifa Das falls back, looking up at Amina.

Lafifa Das's peepshow and his "Indian disease" of trying to capture the whole world in his box echoes Saleem's (and India's) hybridity. India's already varied population is further diversified by British colonialism and Western influences until, in itself, Indian culture seems to capture "the whole of reality." As a Hindu, however, Lafifa is not welcome in the Muslim neighborhood, and this is reflected in the deplorable names wielded at the young boy.



Amina chases off the mob, yelling out that she is pregnant and if they wish to kill the Hindu boy, they will have to kill her, a pregnant Muslim as well. Carrying a baby Saleem, Amina's announcement saves Lafifa Das's life, and he repays her with the promise of having her unborn child's fortune told by his soothsayer cousin. Amina accepts, and Zohar declares her "crazy as an owl."

As Amina rescues Lafifa Das, this action parallels her father's own rescue of Nadir Kahn. More importantly, Amina's actions prompt the prophecy that foretells the significance of Saleem's birth and his connection to India.

BOOK 1: MANY-HEADED MONSTERS

In the days following the burning of the Muslim bicycle warehouse, Ahmed uncharacteristically stays at home, and Amina is unable to take Lafifa Das up on his fortune-telling offer, which she wishes to keep secret from her husband. One evening, Ahmed claims he has business to tend to and leaves Amina alone, the bulky bag of money hidden conspicuously under his long coat. She quickly runs to find Lafifa Das.

This is further evidence of the secrets kept between Amina and Ahmed and the dysfunctional state of their marriage. Ahmed is clearly going to pay the Ravana to spare his warehouse, yet he tells Amina nothing of this dangerous endeavor.


Unbeknownst to each other, both Ahmed and Amina take separate taxis to Old Fort—an ancient part of the city of Delhi which is home to a large population of Hindus—Ahmed to pay an anonymous Ravana member to spare his warehouse, and Amina to visit a fortune-teller. Amina is taken aback by the amount of poverty and suffering in the Hindu neighborhood, and she becomes frightened and uncomfortable in the presence of begging and hopelessness.

Old Fort is a stark reminder of the differences in social class between Delhi and Old Fort, and to a larger extent, India as a whole. Amina is so removed from such poverty and suffering in her own privileged life that she becomes physically uncomfortable at the sight of it. Delhi is already unofficially partitioned based on social class as well as religion—the poor Hindus are relegated to the old part of town while rich Muslims enjoy the comforts of New Delhi, a modern addition to the ancient city and the capital of India.


Lafifa Das lives at the very top corner of a tenement building with his cousins, and he leads Amina to the top of a dark stairwell to meet Shri Ramram Seth, a Hindu palmist. Placing his hand on Amina's pregnant belly, Ramram declares, "A son." To a confused Amina, Ramram foretells a child who will never be older than his motherland," will have "two heads—but you will see only one," and will be raised by two mothers only to die "*before he is dead*." He tells her there will be **noses** and knees and suddenly, Ramram falls to the floor and begins to foam at the mouth—a side effect of too much prophesy.

Ramram's prophecy predicts Saleem's link to his country. Amina's son will never be older than his motherland because he is to be born on the eve of India's independence. Ramram's reference to two heads foretells Mary Pereira's switch of Saleem and Shiva, who serves as Saleem's alter ego, essentially making Saleem and Shiva each two halves of a whole. Lastly, Ramram's prediction that Amina's child will "die before he is dead" references Saleem's physical condition and his impending death more than thirty years later, the untimely consequence of his connection to his nation.

Meanwhile, as Ahmed, Mr. Butt, and Kemal place their bags of money in the designated Ravana tenement, the three business men, instead of immediately leaving as they are ordered to do, remain in the shadows, watching. Old Fort is teeming with scores of wild monkeys, and the men watch as the human-like animals dismantle the ancient buildings, stone by stone. Suddenly, a Ravana collector appears to gather the money and finds the bags destroyed by the monkeys and the money strewn about. He angrily vanishes, and Ahmed and the other businessmen begin to quickly recover their discarded money.

As the three Muslim businessmen watch the monkeys destroy Old Fort, the animals' behavior echoes that of the Ravana in New Delhi, as both the monkeys and the Ravana are intent on trashing the respective neighborhoods. When the Ravana collector arrives to gather the money and finds it strewn about the street, he doesn't even attempt to collect it. The three men are greedy and retrieve their money from puddles of rainwater and urine, and in that moment, the fate of their business is sealed.

Amina returns home from Old Fort and decides to keep her son's fortune a secret from Ahmed. Ahmed arrives later, covered in soot and crying, his warehouse having been torched` by the Ravana after the monkeys sabotaged his ransom drop. Ahmed informs Amina that he is done manufacturing military jackets, and instead of moving to the future country of Pakistan with Emerald and Zulfikar, he has decided to go to Bombay, where according to his close friend, Dr. Narlikar, the British are quickly exiting, and property is selling for cheap.

In another display of gender inequality and the trappings of the patriarchy, Ahmed does not consult Amina in his decision to move their growing family to Bombay; instead, he simply tells her what to do and where to live. He is more committed to money and business than he is to his marriage or his religion, and he prefers to abandon Pakistan (and by proxy, his religion) and strike while the iron is hot in Bombay.

Amina is unhappy at the prospect of moving to Bombay, but Ahmed collects his insurance money from the destroyed warehouse and begins to finalize the arrangements. He sells his leather business and readies himself to break into the real estate business, while Amina continues to focus on small parts of him, trying in vain to love him. Despite her efforts, Amina is not able to love the part of Ahmed that Nadir had "certainly lacked," and by early summer, a very disheartened Amina moves to Bombay with her husband.

Ahmed is not at all concerned with Amina's feelings, and she is denied a voice in their relocation. Of course, Amina's attempts to partition Ahmed and love him bit by bit are unsuccessful, and she grows to resent having sex with him, the thing that Nadir "certainly lacked"—and, ironically, the very reason why she married Ahmed in the first place.

BOOK 1: METHWOLD

Saleem tells of ancient fishermen, known as Kolis, the first inhabitants of a specific part of India who worshipped the goddess Mumbadevi. The Kolis referred to their land as Mumbai, a variation of the goddess' name, until it was later invaded by the Portuguese and renamed Bom Bahia, in reference to the harbor. In 1633, Methwold, a British Officer of the East India Company, arrived in Bom Bahia and "envisioned a British Bombay," and so it was born, passing from generation to generation of Methwolds. In August of 1947, the last Methwold prepares to leave Bombay.

Saleem's story of the Kolis establishes their right to the land as native Indians. Not only are the Kolis invaded by the Portuguese, and later the British, but they are even denied the right to dictate the name by which their land is known. Unlike Mumbai, Bombay is not an Indian word and it is not rooted in any Indian significance; rather, it is a British mispronunciation of a Portuguese word, and it underscores the oppression of the Indian people under British rule.


William Methwold is selling the individual homes that make up his estate—four sprawling mansions named for European palaces, including Versailles Villa, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa, and Sans Souci—for ridiculously cheap, and Ahmed is interested in buying one with his insurance money. However, Methwold will only sell his homes if two conditions are met: that the houses are bought with their contents (which must be retained by the new owners), and that the sale will not be official until midnight on August 15.

Methwold's Estate is a small-scale representation of British colonialism. Methwold quite literally brings Europe to India by naming his mansions after famous European palaces, and Ahmed is interested in buying Buckingham Villa, a reference to British royalty and the most important of the villas. What's more, Methwold refuses to leave before he is forced to by India's upcoming independence on August 15.

Despite Amina's objections, Ahmed decides to purchase one of Methwold's mansions (Versailles Villa and Sans Souci have already been sold), and he agrees to the Englishman's terms "lock, stock, and barrel." Methwold, who tells Ahmed about his ancestor who "had the idea of building this whole city," is disappointed to be leaving India. With independence approaching, the colonists have been given seventy days to exit the country.

Methwold's belief in his superiority is on full display as he tells Ahmed, a native Indian, how his own European ancestors are responsible for the creation of Bombay. Methwold believes, much like Aadam's college friends did, that India ceased to exist until Europeans arrived and "discovered" it.

Methwold invites Ahmed to have a cocktail in the garden, an evening tradition that has occurred every night for twenty years. When Ahmed questions the delay in sale, Methwold claims to have "a very Indian lust for allegory." Instead of selling now, he prefers to wait until independence, at which time he will hand over the mansion in "tiptop working order," or in Hindustani, "Sabkuch ticktock hai. Everything's just fine." The Sinais are welcome to move in whenever they please, as long as they agree to keep his stuff.

Methwold's insistence on a delayed sale and the retention of his personal belongings represent the trappings of Western civilization and culture. A true colonialist, Methwold imposes his own culture onto Ahmed and Amina in an effort to civilize them, thereby erasing their own rich culture and further marginalizing them.

Ahmed and Amina move into Buckingham Villa (Escorial Villa has been turned into flats). The future owners of all the other mansions and flats move onto Methwold's Estate as well, living amongst his things, waiting for independence. Each evening, the tenants gather in the garden for cocktail hour, as is the custom, and speak in "imitation Oxford drawls." They are slowly becoming used to the modern conveniences of the estate, including ceiling fans and gas stoves, and as Methwold looks on at the new (future) owners of the estate, he quietly mumbles to himself, "Sabkuch ticktock hai."

Methwold is pleased with himself because his plan is coming to fruition. His Indian tenants are becoming more British and less Indian by the day. They begin to speak like Methwold and they come to rely on the comforts his modern conveniences afford. They are becoming Westernized, and in Methwold's biased opinion, this is the "tiptop working order" he intended.

Amina reads an article in the *Times of India* which announces a prize to any Bombay mother who gives birth at the exact moment of independence. Nussie Ibrahim, Amina's neighbor in Sans Souci, is also pregnant and looking to deliver an independence baby; however, thanks to Ramram, Amina knows that she will be the first to give birth in the new India. Amina figures that if that part of the soothsayer's prophecy comes true, the rest will be accurate as well.

The Times of India *article puts Saleem on the map. Because of the publicity of his historic birth, it is widely known that Saleem is an independence baby, and he becomes a bit of a local celebrity. Nussie Ibrahim doesn't give birth until several days after independence, and Ramram's prophecy is proven true.*

One evening during cocktail hour, an entertainer by the name of Wee Willie Winkie arrives on Methwold's Estate, with his pregnant wife in tow, to play his accordion and make a bit of money. Willie jokes that his wife will win the *Times of India* prize with their own baby, and Methwold and the others listen to his jokes and songs. What Willie is not aware of, however, is that nine months earlier, while running an errand for Methwold, the Englishman seduced Willie's wife, Vanita, with his irresistible "center-parting" hair. It is Methwold, not Willie, who is the biological father of Vanita's baby.

Since Vanita is seduced by William Methwold's center-parting hair and it is the cause of their affair, this makes the realization that Methwold's wears a hair-piece all the more powerful. Methwold deceives Vanita, and this is evidence of his dishonesty. Methwold is a con, and by extension, European colonialism is a con as well—a ploy used to gain control over large populations of people.

In the meantime, Mary Pereira goes to Catholic confession. Mary, a midwife at the local hospital, is in love with Joseph D'Costa, an orderly employed at the same facility. Joseph has recently run off with Mary's sister, Alice, and she is heartbroken. Joseph, a communist, believes "independence is for the rich only; the poor are being made to kill each other like flies." When Mary fails to support Joseph "in his patriotic cause of awakening the people," he leaves her, and she is determined to get him back.

Mary Pereira is incredibly devout and serves as a personification of the Catholic faith. Rushdie's representation of Joseph D'Costa as a communist further underscores the social divide within India and the unofficial partitioning of society, as communism seeks to place the rich and the poor on a level playing field. Together, Joseph and Mary represent the poor working class.

BOOK 1: TICK, TOCK

Saleem continues his story for an eager Padma; but before he does, he quickly recaps how far he has come. He flies through thirty-two years of history and stories, reminding Padma, "To understand just one life, you have to swallow the world." Ending his summary with Mary Pereira just days before his birth, Saleem says, "all these made me, too."

Saleem is an accumulation of the stories and people who came before him. To understand Saleem, Padma must also understand William Methwold and Mary Pereira, along with their Western customs and Christianity, as they all have had a hand in shaping who Saleem has become.

Saleem begins on August 13, 1947, and Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus are all "moving into the most ill-favored house of all," Karamstan. With trouble in the heavens, Earl Mountbatten, the last British viceroy of India, prepares to exit the country, and M. A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, is sure his own country will be born a full day before India.

As independence draws near, British India prepares for its first act of Partition through the creation of the new country of Pakistan. The fact that Pakistan is formed a full day ahead of India echoes their self-proclaimed purity and perceived importance over the secular nation.

Amina, terribly pregnant and miserable, takes a fitful nap. As she dreams, Ahmed visits with Methwold in the garden. Waxing nostalgic and short on time, Methwold reminisces about his ancestors "who dreamed the city into existence." Feeling the need to compete, Ahmed (in an Oxford drawl) tells Methwold about his own distinguished—albeit fictional—ancestors of the Mughal Dynasty, who passed down an ancient family curse, which "hasn't been used since an ancestor quarreled with the Emperor Babar and put the curse on his son Humayun."

The lies that Ahmed tells Methwold about his ancestors meant to prove his Indian identity has lasting effects on Ahmed's true identity. Through telling Methwold this fictional story, Ahmed begins to truly believe that his origins lie with the Mughal Dynasty (Indian royalty for all intents and purposes), and he is unable to distinguish his true identity from his story. In this way, Ahmed becomes his story, and this highlights the power of storytelling.

On the last night before independence, alone in Agra, Aadam Aziz is compelled to open an old tin trunk, which contains old magazines and Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* along with an old prayer-mat and the blood-stained perforated sheet. As he removes the sheet, Aadam discovers that (because Reverend Mother forgot the naphthalene balls) moths have thoroughly eaten it, and the infamous hole, now indistinguishable, is one of many.

Aadam has long since dreamed of a secular state, and with independence, his dream is about to come true. Sadly, the perforated sheet, which serves as a metaphorical symbol of Adam and Naseem's early love, has not endured the passing of time, much like Aadam and Reverend Mother's actual love and marriage.

As Saleem counts down the hours until his birth, he briefly acknowledges what others were doing on that star-crossed night. As the Muslim nation of Pakistan is born, Vanita endures "protracted, unproductive labor" at Dr. Narlikar's hospital, and countless Indians celebrate in Bombay streets. At the same time, Punjabi Indians "wash themselves in one another's blood" as they war over partitioned land, and Mahatma Gandhi takes a "long pacifying walk." With twelve hours to go before independence, Amina wakes from a nightmare, and at eight hours, William Methwold arrives at his estate for the last time, stands in the center of the property, and salutes.

As the Muslim nation of Pakistan is metaphorically born, Vanita, a Hindu-Indian woman, finds her own literal labor stalled, and this highlights the social and religious dissent between the two countries. The death of the Punjabi Indians and Gandhi's non-violent protest further depict the social unrest that is the result of independence and the subsequent Partition, and Amina's nightmare is another omen of the trouble yet to come.

With six hours to go, the residents of Methwold's Estate gather in the garden for cocktail hour, and stare disbelievingly at the Englishman who still stands stiffly in the center of the property. Suddenly, a strange and disheveled—yet obviously holy—man wanders onto the estate and claims he has "come to await the coming of the One," and at that exact moment, Amina yells out in pain.

By this point, Methwold has been standing in the center of the property for two full hours, and he is drawing increased attention as he bids a final farewell to his beloved estate. Like Ramram, the homeless stranger also prophesizes Saleem's upcoming arrival, along with the significance of his fateful birthday.

Ahmed rushes Amina to Dr. Narlikar's hospital, where Vanita continues to strain with the assistance of Mary Pereira. In the commotion of Amina's labor, just as the sun sets on Methwold's Estate for the last time in British India, William Methwold stands at its center and removes a perfectly parted hairpiece—the very hair that had seduced Vanita. He turns and leaves and is never seen again.

Methwold's hairpiece is evidence of his deception. The part of him that Vanita finds irresistible is a lie, just as his presence in India is rooted in deception. Methwold claims a desire to better the lives of the Indian people by bringing them European government and Christianity; however, colonization is simply a ploy to gain power and control over the Indian people.

At twenty-nine minutes to midnight, Amina's labor picks up and Vanita's drags on. Meanwhile, the Bombay police are hunting through crowds of celebrating Indians looking for a dangerous criminal, Joseph D'Costa. With two minutes to go, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, begins a speech, Amina begins to crown, and Vanita enters the terminal stage of her labor.

Both Amina and Vanita enter the final stage of labor as the Prime Minister Nehru begins his speech, indicating that both babies will be metaphorically connected to India, just as Ramram's prophecy indicated.

Having paced for hours, Ahmed looks for a chair, and finding one, he carries it back to the waiting room. A few seconds after midnight, Dr. Narlikar bursts into the room and tells Ahmed that he has a son, causing him to drop the chair and shatter his big toe. The loud banging noise draws the minimal staff of the hospital to the waiting room to investigate, and they all fuss about Ahmed's broken toe.

The independence celebration has caused the hospital to be short-staffed, and the available staff is busy worrying about Ahmed's toe. They fuss over Ahmed because as a wealthy man, he takes precedence over everyone else, and they neglect Vanita to ensure that his toe is cared for.

With the staff engaged with Ahmed, Mary Pereira is left alone with the two midnight babies, Vanita having finally given birth at the exact same time as Amina. Heartbroken and thinking about Joseph, in "her own private revolutionary act," Mary swaps the nametags on the cribs, switching rich with poor, and prays, "Love me, Joseph!" A moment later, at three minutes after independence, Vanita hemorrhages and dies, as the hospital staff tends to Ahmed's broken toe.

Mary's revolutionary act is a direct reference to Joseph's communist leanings. Communism encourages the lower class to rise up against the oppression of the upper class, and Mary's swap of the children is her own attempt at anarchy. In the aftermath, Vanita dies because the hospital staff places more value on Ahmed's toe than her life.

Three days later, Mary is racked with guilt. Joseph is still in the wind, and he has left Alice too. In an attempt to atone for her sinful secret, Mary quits Dr. Narlikar's hospital and offers her services to Amina as an ayah, which Amina accepts. The *Times of India* interviews Amina and takes photographs of Saleem, running them under the headline: MIDNIGHT'S CHILD. She is awarded a scant one hundred rupees. Five days later, on August 20, Nussie Ibrahim gives birth to her own son, little Sonny, who, requiring the assistance of forceps, is left with permanent shallow dents beside each temple.

Mary's revolutionary act has done nothing to get her Joseph back, and all she has is her guilt. Rushdie's reference to Mary as the Sinais' ayah is another example of the lasting effects of British colonialism. Traditionally, an ayah is an Indian nanny employed by British colonizers, and even though the Sinais are not British, they still refer to their nanny as an ayah.

BOOK 2: THE FISHERMAN'S POINTING FINGER

Saleem continues his story and tells Padma about a framed painting hanging on his bedroom wall in Buckingham Villa, left over from the days of Methwold. In the picture, a fisherman extends his arm and points at the sea, towards the horizon. Following the fisherman's pointing finger, he appears to also be pointing at a framed letter also hanging on the wall, addressed to Saleem from Prime Minister Nehru, in which he congratulates Saleem on the "happy accident" of his birth. The Prime Minister says, "We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own."

As the picture of the fisherman hanging on Saleem's wall once belonged to William Methwold, it serves to further represent the trappings of Western culture. The Prime Minister's reference to Saleem's birth as a "happy accident" suggests that Saleem's connection to his country is a random coincidence, not a predestined role to be fulfilled. Despite his use of the word "happy," the Prime Minister's words also imply a greater misfortune, as accidents are rarely considered happy.

The Prime Minister's message unnerves an already paranoid Mary, who wonders if the government knows about her secret. Saleem also considers that the fisherman in the painting is pointing past the picture and his room, to the actual sea and horizon. Or perhaps, Saleem thinks, it may be a warning, an attempt to draw attention to itself.

Saleem has no idea what the picture, if anything, is trying to tell him. Like the man and culture that it represents, the painting is completely foreign. Mary's paranoia is a direct reflection of her guilt, and she is growing convinced that her secret—and Saleem's true identity—will be discovered.

Amina and Ahmed bring baby Saleem home from the hospital, including his umbilical cord in an old **pickle**-jar. Saleem is an incredibly large baby, who drains both his mother and wet-nurse of milk, and like Aadam Aziz, he has a large, bulbous **nose** (which constantly drips "goo"). His skin is fair and birthmarks cover his face. Strangely, Saleem makes very little noise and doesn't blink. Amina and Mary, who have since turned into "a two-headed mother," take turns opening and closing his eyes, which are an amazing "Kashmiri-blue."

Ahmed and Amina preserve Saleem's umbilical cord in the pickle jar, just like Saleem later preserves Mary's chutney and his own stories in pickle jars. Ironically, despite not being Amina's biological son and being half European, Saleem physically resembles Amina's father and his face, in an outward refection of his national identity, resembles a map of the subcontinent of India.

Amina and Mary fuss over baby Saleem and love him fiercely. They are secretly competitive of each other, each somewhat resentful of the other. Secretly, Amina continues to love Nadir Khan, and she frequently dreams that is was really Nadir who fathered Saleem. Her dreams are so realistic that she begins to become confused as to Saleem's true parentage. In this way, Saleem considers himself the son of four fathers; Nadir, Willie, Methwold, and Ahmed Sinai.

In this passage, Amina and Mary become the two mothers to Saleem that Ramram's prophesy foretells. Additionally, Saleem's complicated and diverse parentage is a reflection of India's own diversity—Saleem comes from both wealth and poverty, and he is as much British as he is Indian.

Willie continues to frequent Methwold's estate, entertaining the residents with his songs of nostalgia. Instead of his wife, Willie now brings with him a rather large baby with "menacingly knocking knees" named Shiva, after the god of procreation and destruction.

Shiva' name is a reflection of his own Hindu faith, and his big knees are also part of Ramram's prophesy. Willie's nostalgia can also be viewed as an effect of colonialism. Willie longs for a time before the oppression of colonialism, and his nostalgic songs, yet another form of storytelling, represent this desire.

Most of the residents of Methwold's Estate are enamored with Saleem as well (except for Dr. Narlikar, who hates children and advocates for public birth control), and they take turns "borrowing" him. As Saleem is passed around the estate, he learns about each of his neighbors. Old man Ibrahim worries about governments nationalizing his native Africa, and his son Ismail, Sonny's father, is a highly crooked lawyer. Lila Sabarmati (who lives in a flat) is continually unfaithful to her husband, and Homi Catrack, film-magnate and race-track owner, lives with his daughter, Toxy, an inbred "half-wit," in Versailles Villa.

Ironically, Dr. Narlikar, who is a gynecologist, hates children, and his desire for mass birth control foreshadows Indira Gandhi's sterilization program implemented during the Emergency. In this passage, the other tenants of Methwold's Manner are introduced, and Saleem's understanding of his surroundings at such a young age is evidence of the magical powers his fateful birth has bestowed upon him.

Ahmed, a "self-important man," never forgives Saleem for breaking his toe, and he resents the attention that Amina gives the baby (she no longer sweet talks him for money, and the napkin in his lap remains still). Methwold's cocktail hour has led to Ahmed's full-blown alcoholism, and since Bombay is a dry state, he must see a doctor every month to get his allotment. When that fails to be enough liquor, Ahmed orders Mary and old Musa, his long-time servant, to obtain alcohol from a doctor as well.

Ahmed's self-importance is a result of his presumed significance and power as the patriarch of his family. He is so self-absorbed that he blames a baby for his trivial injury, and he forces his servants to lie and secure even more alcohol for his selfish consumption—another display of his power. Furthermore, as Ahmed's alcoholism is the result of Methwold's custom, colonialism is directly to blame for his downward spiral.

An intoxicated Ahmed fears getting lost in the city streets, so he works from his home office. Disillusioned with his family, he hires "Anglo" girls as secretaries and takes to flirting with them until they are forced to quit. Unable to pronounce their Western names, Amina refers to Ahmed's secretaries as "Coca-Cola girls," and considers them "cheap type females."

Amina views Western women as impure compared to Indian women, and she is clearly resentful of their presence despite not loving Ahmed. Ahmed's white secretaries represent one of the primary causes of Amina's oppression as an Indian woman, and Ahmed is insensitive to her feelings.

One evening, Dr. Narlikar comes to visit Ahmed and together they drive out to the seaside. There, Narlikar pitches Ahmed a business idea in which they mass produce standing tetrapods to place over the water, thereby reclaiming the land beneath the sea. Ahmed agrees, and he begins writing and cashing many checks, and soon the State Secretariat gets the "whiff of a Muslim who is throwing his rupees around like water."

Dr. Narlikar's desire to build tetrapods over the ocean can be viewed as a form of compensation for lost Indian land and culture during British colonization, and Ahmed's money draws the attention of the Indian government. The government secretly prefers all Muslims relocate to Pakistan, and they intend to use his money to force him to move.

Ahmed receives a letter from the State alerting him that all of his assets have been frozen. Ismail Ibrahim offers Ahmed his legal services free of charge, stating, "I have heard about these freezings—only well-off Muslims are selected, naturally. You must fight." Ahmed laments that the government has "shoved his balls in an ice-bucket," and soon after he conceives his second child with Amina, he is struck impotent, his "little cubes of ice too frigid to hold."

Ahmed equates his financial success with his masculinity, and his money is a direct reflection of his status as a man. Now that he is bankrupt, Ahmed ceases to be a real man. Furthermore, the freezing of Ahmed's assets represents the wide-spread oppression of Muslims by the secular Indian government and their attempts to rid the country of the Islamic faith.

BOOK 2: SNAKES AND LADDERS

In February of 1948, all the snakes escape from Schaapsteker Institute, a facility where scientists study snakes and test anti-venom. Rumors spread that a Bengali snake-charmer is to blame; a tall blue man who is Krishna himself, punishing Indians for renouncing their Hindu faith and becoming a secular state.

In addition to the cultural connection between snakes and the Hindu people (snakes are an important in their religion), snakes are also well known for their ability to shed their skin, making them a symbol for transformation. In this same vein, snakes are symbolic of the transformation of Old India into New India after independence.

As the Bombay streets teem with snakes, Dr. Schaapsteker, the eighty-one-year-old man who founded the institute, moves into the top floor of Buckingham Villa. Ahmed's frozen assets make living difficult, and to help ends meet, Amina allows him to move into the house.

As Ahmed fades deeper into financial despair and alcoholism, Amina begins to the make the decisions that keep their family afloat. Just like her grandmother, Aadam's mother, Amina is willing and able to assume her husband's duties to benefit her family.

With Ahmed sinking further into alcoholism and depression, Amina writes her parents for advice and three days later, Aadam and Reverend Mother arrive in Bombay from Agra. Reverend Mother is not impressed with Amina's city life, and she encourages them all to move to Pakistan. Emerald has already moved there with Zulfikar, along with Alia as well, who is teaching at a Pakistani school.

Reverend Mother is not impressed with Amina's city life because she sees it as another result of Western invasion and influence. As a devout Muslim, Reverend Mother prefers to live in the Islamic state of Pakistan, and Zulfikar, a long-time supporter of Partition, has wasted no time relocating.

Reverend Mother takes over Amina's kitchen and begins cooking all the meals. Ahmed makes slight improvements eating Reverend Mother's cooking (which is "imbued with the personality of its creator), and the same food fills Amina with rage. Mary begins cooking chutneys and kasaundies of her own, into which she stirs her guilt and fear of discovery. Mary's preserves are delicious, and they counteract the unpleasantness of Reverend Mother.

Reverend Mother cooks her anger into the food that she serves her family, which in turn influences their behavior. Reverend Mother has been perpetually angry since Aadam forced her to exit purdah and her country became secular, and she makes sure to spread her unhappiness around. While this technique is beneficial to Ahmed's weak health, it only serves to fill a much stronger Amina with anger.

Ismail, despite waiving his own fee, still requires money to fight Ahmed's case in court, and Amina, now pregnant with her second child, secretly frequents a local horse-racing track to earn money. Using her dowry money, Amina, who knows nothing about horses, places her bets based on the jockeys' smiles—and wins big. She is, however, fraught with guilt over the sin of gambling, but she nevertheless "fights her husband's fight."

Again, much like Aadam's own mother, Amina upends gender roles within Indian society and goes out and provides for her family while Ahmed is unable to. Amina's actions dismantle the idea that men alone are capable of providing for their families, and she is empowered by her ability to support herself.

Saleem stops his story to mention his love as a child for the game Snakes and Ladders. He notes that the moral of the game teaches children that for every snake lurking is a ladder to compensate, and likewise, for every ladder, there is the danger of snakes. Moreover, Saleem notes that the game underscores the "unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil." This metaphor, he claims, is present in his mother's own story. Despite Amina's victory at the racetrack, snakes are still waiting to strike.

Saleem's mention of the game Snakes and Ladders reinforces the fact that Amina and her family are not safe simply because she has solved their financial problems for the time being. Saleem's note of the "unchanging twoness of things" mirrors the binary nature of colonialism and the subsequent social unrest that it leads to, including the concepts of East and West, rich and poor, and man and woman.

Not all of Amina's siblings immigrate to Pakistan, and her brother, Hanif, soon moves to Bombay with dreams of becoming a film producer. He marries a beautiful actress, Pia, and stars her in his first film, *The Lovers of Kashmir*. Hanif's film becomes an instant classic, in which he invents "the indirect kiss." Men and women were not permitted to touch or kiss on-screen, and as such, Hanif writes a script in which actors sensually kiss things (such as fruit), instead of each other.

Hanif's film and the iconic "indirect kiss" play an important role in upcoming events. As Amina sneaks out to visit Nadir, the two share their own indirect kiss, which, of course, is invented by Amina's own brother. Hanif's desire to forgo Pakistan in favor of Bombay and his film career is a reflection of his father, Aadam's, anti-religious beliefs.

As Ahmed and Amina accompany Hanif and Pia to the theater to see *The Lovers of Kashmir*, the theater manager interrupts the film to alert the crowd to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Hanif quickly whispers to Amina, "Get out of here, big sister—if a Muslim did this thing there will be hell to pay."

Mahatma Gandhi, an Indian activist and leader of the movement for independence from British rule, was a famous Hindu, and Hanif is concerned about the social unrest that is sure to develop if his assassin is found to be a Muslim.

Once Gandhi's assassin is proven not to be a Muslim and it is again safe to leave the house, Amina secretly returns to the racetrack. She continues to gamble until her pregnant belly no longer fits behind the steering wheel of the car and she is forced to stay home. At Buckingham Villa, Mary and old Musa are constantly fighting. Musa, resentful that Mary sleeps in Saleem's room while he is stuck in the servants' quarters, is offended by her constant prayers and counting of rosary beads, and it is during one such fight that Amina discovers the house has been burgled.

The religious unrest in Amina's home mirrors the religious unrest of the nation. As Muslims and Hindus fight in the streets, old Musa, whose name is Arabic for the prophet Moses, resents Mary Pereira and her Catholic faith. Mary's religion is yet another example of European colonialism, as Eastern lands were often colonized in the name of bringing Christianity to "savages."

The missing silver and gold is soon found amongst old Musa's things (despite his earlier denials). He is convinced that his constant fighting with Mary is about to cost him his job, and he didn't want to be put out empty-handed. Amina refuses to press charges, but old Musa leaves Buckingham Villa anyway, and as he goes, he places a curse upon the house.

Old Musa's curse is an important development in the story. When Ahmed tells Methwold about his imaginary Mughal ancestors, he tells of an ancient family curse. Ahmed's story foretells the actual curse that Musa places on Ahmed's home.

In the days following old Musa's departure, Mary notices a strange figure running around the broken clock tower near Methwold's Estate. Frightened, Mary and Amina call the police. An inspector arrives and shoots at the dark figure, who ends up being the wanted criminal Joseph D'Costa. The bullet misses just as an escaped snake bites Joseph, and he immediately falls down dead. Mary faints to the ground, and the inspector informs Amina that Joseph has wired the entire tower with multiple bombs and explosives, enough "to blow this hill into the sea!"

Joseph's death by a snake bite parallels Saleem's own upcoming experience with snake venom. Of course, Saleem is saved by venom whereas Joseph is killed; however, snakes are associated with immortality and the renewal of life, and Joseph D'Costa's ghost will live on at Methwold's Manner, haunting Mary until she confesses her sin.

About the time Amina goes into labor for the second time, Saleem falls ill with typhoid. Aadam treats his grandson the best he knows how, but his Western medicine fails to make the slightest difference, and he fears Saleem will soon die. Dr. Schaapsteker suggests injecting the baby with cobra venom, an intervention known to work. As Aadam injects the poison into his baby grandson, his fever begins to break.

Again, snakes are associated with the renewal of life, and Saleem's life is saved by the venom. More importantly, however, Saleem's grandfather, who is a doctor of Western medicine, fails to save his grandson with his modern medicine and instead relies on Eastern "quackery." This implies that Eastern medicine is more valuable than Aadam initially thought, and that it has a place in modern Indian medicine.

In the commotion of Saleem's illness, Amina gives birth to a daughter, who comes to be known as the Brass Monkey on account of her red hair. The birth goes largely unnoticed in the excitement of Saleem's near-death experience and the news that Ismail has finally won Ahmed's court case.

The Brass Monkey spends much of her childhood in Saleem's shadow, and her birth is the first example of this. Ahmed, relieved that his legal troubles are over, has no idea how Amina saved their family, and she says nothing, keeping her power a secret.

BOOK 2: ACCIDENT IN A WASHING-CHEST

Before Saleem continues his story, he notes that Padma has been gone for two whole days, following her unreasonable and angry outburst at his implications that she loves him. "Love *you*," she cries, "what use are you […] as a *lover*?" Without Padma, Saleem is lost and lonely, but he will not be kept from his storytelling.

Padma's insult is a direct reference to Saleem's impotence. Padma is reluctant to admit her love for Saleem out loud, and she becomes angry when Saleem suggests it. Padma's insult mirrors Reverend Mother's insults of Nadir, and both men are considered less masculine because of their inability to have sex.

Saleem's story jumps to 1956, the year in which the Brass Monkey develops the habit of catching shoes on fire—while others are wearing them. The Brass Monkey, starved for attention in the shadow of a brother who has Prime Ministers sending him letters, has become a problem child. Her manners are poor and she tramples over flower beds, but she is beautiful and builds a fierce alliance with her brother.

Saleem and the Brass Monkey are another reflection of the "unchanging twoness of things," and the two siblings are polar opposites of each other. For example, the Monkey is beautiful while Saleem is ugly, and while Saleem is kind and agreeable, the Monkey is argumentative and precocious.

Amina, who refuses to hit her unruly child, sentences her to days of silence—a form of punishment which the defiant Monkey ignores. The Brass Monkey, however, has a softer side and spends countless hours talking to birds and cats (dogs, too, until she is bitten by a rabid stray), and becomes the unwilling object of Sonny Ibrahim's affection.

Amina's choice of punishment is a reflection of Reverend Mother's silence. Also, the Monkey's love for the birds on Methwold's Manner mirrors that of her grandfather, Aadam's father, who, in his infirm state, often called to birds.

Despite his own unattractiveness, however, Saleem is the family favorite. He is adored by his father and neighbors, and even Reverend Mother, who tells him, "Just pull up your socks, whatsitsname, and you'll be better than anyone in the whole wide world!" Saleem doesn't share his family's high opinions of himself and, fearing that he will never live up to their great expectations, he takes to hiding in his mother's bathroom washing-chest, lost under a pile of dirty clothes and towels.

Saleem is constantly the center of attention in his family and on Methowold's Estate, and their high expectations create an extreme amount of anxiety within Saleem. Even Reverend Mother, in all her unpleasantness, is exceedingly fond of Saleem. He is unsure of his identity and purpose, and he does not feel worthy of their admiration.

At "nearlynine" years of age, Saleem begins to attend a local boys' school along with the other boys of Methwold's Estate, including Sonny Ibrahim, Cyrus Dubash, and Eyeslice and Hairoil Sabarmati. Saleem's friends lovingly refer to him as "Snotnose," on account of the copious amounts of snot that drips from his humongous and forever-congested **nose**.

Saleem's snot, or "nose goo," serves an important purpose that is about to be revealed. His nasal congestion is his direct link to the other children born at the hour of India's independence, and his large nose, much like Aadam's, is a symbol of his power.

Amina begins to grow prematurely old, Saleem notes, "like all the women in our family," and the Brass Monkey's poor behavior and Ahmed's obsession with Narlikar's tetrapods wears her down. She develops terrible corns on her feet, and "every step is like walking on razor blades." In her guilt, made worse by Reverend Mother's cooking, Amina believes her corns to be punishment for her sinful gambling. She begins to take on the worries and sins of the other residents of Methwold's Estate, and they are strangely compelled to share their problems with her. Even Mary is tempted (but resists) to tell Amina her sins.

Since Amina is unwilling to confess her own sins, she willingly takes on those of others. The premature aging of the women in Saleem's family is a reflection of their oppression and inequality. Amina is exhausted from caring for her family and ensuring their survival, and like Aadam's own mother, can do nothing but endure her pain.


During that same summer, the Sinais' telephone rings most days in the afternoon. Amina, with aching feet, limps to the phone, and each time, after a silence that is just a bit too long, she responds, "Sorry. Wrong number." Saleem and Monkey are suspicious (of what they aren't sure) and determined to solve the mystery of the afternoon phone calls.

Like Aadam's mother's boils, Amina's aching feet are a physical manifestation of her guilt for loving Nadir and gambling to save her family. Each time the phone rings in the afternoon, Amina hobbles to answer it on painful feet.


One day, when Amina is out visiting Nussie, the phone rings and Monkey races to answer. On the other end, inquiring about a rental truck, is the "soft and fleshy" "voice of a poet." The calls continue, and Saleem and Monkey repeatedly dispatch imaginary trucks to different locations. "Doesn't the guy ever wonder why the trucks don't *arrive*?" Saleem questions. The Monkey responds, "Man, do you suppose…maybe they *do*!"

Nadir Kahn is the "fleshy" and poetic voice on the other end of the telephone, although Saleem and the Brass Monkey know nothing of their mother's first marriage. The fact that Nadir continues to call when the children answer the phone is proof of his love for Amina and his determination to talk to her.


Later, looking to escape his family, Saleem slips into his mother's washing-chest. As he relaxes in the dirty laundry, the phone begins to ring. After the usual "sorry, wrong number," Amina enters the bathroom. Frozen in the washing-chest and fearing discovery, a rogue pajama-cord begins to tickle Saleem's **nose**.

Saleem's hiding place in Amina's washing-chest parallels Nadir's own hiding spot in the washing-chest of Aadam Aziz's "thunder-box room." Just as the love of Amina's life sought refuge in a laundry basket, so does her son.

Amina begins to cry and, repeating the name "Nadir" over and over again, starts to sensually caress her body as a mortified Saleem looks on. Suddenly struck with the urge to use the commode, Amina removes her clothes, and as they fall to the ground, she bends over to retrieve them, exposing her large, dark bottom to Saleem hiding in the washing-chest. Just then, an unavoidable "*sniff*" sends the pajama cord up into Saleem's substantial **nose**. Immediately, pain consumes Saleem's head and a deafening sneeze gives away his treasured hiding spot.

Witnessing his mother's sexual attention to her own body and her bare backside as she attempts to use the commode is a representation of Saleem's fall from innocence. He suspects that his mother is thinking about another man, but he is unfamiliar with the name she repeats. Saleem now views his mother in a sexual light, as a woman with desires instead of merely his mother, and he finds it impossible to forget this.

Amina punishes Saleem with a day of silence and, alone in his room, he is bombarded with a head full of incomprehensible voices. The voices soon become clearer, and Saleem discovers that he can control them. He can turn them up or down like a radio, and even isolate certain voices. He begins to believe that they are a holy sign, and he, a messenger of god. He even tells his family (after his punishment is over, of course) that "Archangels have started talking to me." His parents think him insane ("Oh Saleem, has your brain gone raw?") and Mary accuses him of blasphemy. Ahmed reaches out and strikes Saleem in the side of his head, deafening his left ear for life.

Saleem's accident in the washing-chest prompts his telepathy. From the moment he sneezes and is caught by Amina, he hears the mysterious voices of the other children of midnight, although he has not yet made this connection. Ironically, despite not living a religious life and claiming to neither believe nor disbelieve in God, Saleem assumes that the voices are heaven-sent, underscoring the importance of religion in even a secular society. Ironically, as Saleem develops this paranormal sense, Ahmed's punishment robs him of his external hearing, leaving him alone with the voices in his head.

Later that night, alone with her thoughts, Amina thinks of Ramram Seth and his prophesy. "Washing will hide him…voices will guide him." In the following days, she asks Saleem about the voices. He lies, claiming, "A stupid joke, like you said."

Amina knows deep down that Saleem is telling the truth about the voices in his head; however, he lies to her, afraid that she won't love him if she knows the truth or thinks him mentally ill.

BOOK 2: ALL-INDIA RADIO

Padma has not returned, and Saleem is still feeling her absence. Alone at the **pickle** factory with only his employees ("an army of strong, hairy-armed, formidably competent women") to keep him company, Saleem's condition is worsening. He can no longer distinguish between the odors of lemon and lime, and his cracks are spreading all over his body. What's worse, he's discovered an error in his storytelling. Saleem realizes that Gandhi was not assassinated shortly after he was born; however, he can't reconcile the actual date within the story of his life. In Saleem's India, "Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time."

Saleem's mistake in storytelling affects his reliability as a narrator; however, this mistake also makes a valuable point. Gandhi's impact on Indian society is not lessened in Saleem's story because of an arbitrary date. This implies that concrete dates are not important within the broader context of Gandhi's contribution to society, and to some extent, within the broader context of storytelling as a whole.

Back in his childhood, Saleem abandons his Archangel explanation and finally realizes that the voices he hears are some form of telepathy. He hears multiple languages in his head, most of which he doesn't understand, and as "language marchers" fill the Bombay streets demanding partition based on language, Saleem finds new ways to understand the voices in his head. Soon, language fades always, and he is able to understand through what he calls "universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcend words." Saleem is even able to pick out the voices of his own family and Mary Pereira.

Rushdie's depiction of Saleem's telepathy and his trouble with language mirrors the language troubles that plague India as a whole. While the country divides itself based on the different languages spoken, Saleem is able to unite the voices in his head by moving beyond language and transcending words. This implies that there is hope for India to come together despite the multiple languages spoken.

Saleem atones for his blasphemy by washing his own mouth out with soap, and he quickly becomes the favorite child again. The Brass Monkey soon sets fire to Amina's slippers, and all is right again in the Sinais' home. No one mentions the voices again. Saleem notes that mental illness "is a source of deep family shame," and worrying that he will again be received as crazy, he decides to keep his new powers a secret.

Saleem's willingness to punish himself for his blasphemy underscores the importance of religion in the Sinai home, despite the secular nature of their lives. Saleem has sinned and must atone—even if his beliefs are shaky. This underscores the role religion plays in the greater context of culture. Religion affects even those who don't necessarily believe.

Saleem begins to use his gift to his advantage, cheating on tests and improving his grades by entering the thoughts of the class genius, Cyrus-the-great. He is suddenly privy to surprises and knows what's inside wrapped presents, and through entering Ahmed's thoughts, he sees the latest Coca-Cola girl naked. He enters Amina's thoughts, filled with household tasks and pieces of her husband, and she keeps repeating the same name, "Nadir, Nadir." Mary, who Saleem has taken to dreaming with, dreams each night about a man named Joseph D'Costa. Her thoughts are consumed by a guilt that Saleem can't quite understand (she keeps it at the very back of her mind), but it is the same guilt that he feels each time he eats her chutneys.

Like Reverend Mother, Mary Pereira cooks her emotions into the food that she serves Saleem and his family, and they are all subconsciously aware of the guilt they feel when they eat her cooking. Rushdie's depiction of the women in the story cooking emotions into food highlights the nostalgic qualities of food and its ability to elicit certain emotions or activate memory. In this way, cooking is a form of storytelling in itself, and this is in the same vein as Saleem's attempts to pickle his story at Braganza's Pickle-factory.

Unable to return to the solitude of Amina's washing-chest and looking to escape the thoughts of his family, Saleem begins hiding in the broken clock tower that Joseph D'Costa had attempted to blow up. In the clock tower, Saleem enters the thoughts of all of India, travelling in his mind to New Delhi, Calcutta, and Cape Comorin. He enters the thoughts of movie stars, famous athletes, politicians, and finally, the Prime Minister himself. Saleem believes that there is nothing he can't know.

Ironically, as Saleem believes that there is nothing that he can't know, he remains unable to access Mary's thoughts that reveal his true identity. The fact that the clock tower is broken and fails to keep time implies, much like Saleem's chronological mistakes in his storytelling, the overall insignificance of keeping formal time, especially in storytelling.

Despite having his assets unfrozen, Ahmed never regains life below the belt, and "his sex lays dormant, a woolly elephant in an iceberg, like the one they found in Russia in '56." Having married him for children, Amina feels her womb begin to rot, and she takes to cooking her own disappointment into the hot lime chutney. Ahmed has replaced sex with the tetrapod business, which is about to take off. He has kept his name off of the books this time, in order to protect his assets; however, when Narlikar dies unexpectedly, there is no record of Ahmed's contribution.

When Ahmed replaces sex with the tetrapod business and Amina's womb rots in response, this parallels Narlikar's own dislike for children and his desire to impose birth control on the public. Ahmed's obsession with the tetrapods leads to his continued abstinence and Amina is denied a child—yet another major decision that Ahmed makes without her input.

According to the rumor, while out visiting friends, Narlikar decided to walk down by the sea where the city had arranged for one tetrapod to stand in the water. Once there, he finds several beggar-women surrounding the tetrapod "performing the rite of puja." He tries to run the women off, shouting at them and pushing them. Suddenly, nearby language marchers hear his shouts and turn to riot. He runs to the sea, clinging to the tetrapod. The language marchers knock the tetrapod into the sea, killing Narlikar instantly.

In addition to hating children, Narlikar is also a misogynist, and his hate for women directly leads to his death. The rite of puja is a simple ritual in which offerings are given to an image of a god. In this case, the women present their offerings around the tetrapod, and this symbolizes the secular state of India. Instead of making offerings to a god, they worship the tetrapod, which represents their devotion to business and money rather than religion.

Not long after his death, a steady stream of female heirs arrives on Methwold's Estate to manage Narlikar's affairs. Narlikar, who hated women and children, is surrounded in death by strong women who assume his business dealings and move into his apartment. They take over the running of his hospital and cut Ahmed out of the tetrapod business. Once again, on account of Narlikar's tetrapods, Ahmed is left broke.

Again, the fact that Narlikar's heirs are a hoard of strong and independent women is ironic considering his misogyny. Furthermore, Narlikar's women are incredibly proficient, and they successfully take over his business interests, again upending the idea that men are more capable than women.

BOOK 2: LOVE IN BOMBAY

During the month of fasting, Ramzàn, Saleem and the Brass Monkey go to the movies as often as they can. Sitting in the dark with their gang of friends from Methwold's Estate, Saleem sits "next-to-and-in-love-with" Evie Burns, an American, while Sonny Ibrahim sits "next-to-and-in-love-with" Monkey, who sits next to the aisle thinking of food.

The fact that Saleem and the Brass Monkey spend Ramzàn at the movie theater is a reflection of their secular lives. As one of the Five Pillars of Islam, observance of Ramzàn is incredibly important in the Muslim faith, yet the Sinais fail to observe its significance. Additionally, Saleem's reference to the month of fasting as Ramzàn is a Romanized form of the Arabic word Ramadan. This too is evidence of Western influence as Saleem speaks the Latin form of the word instead of the original Arabic.

Evie lives with her widower father in a segregated area of the city just below Methwold's Estate, and the first time Saleem meets her, he is playing cricket with the Monkey and the other children of Methwold's. Riding a mint condition Arjuna Indiabike and packing a Daisy air pistol, Evie pedals into their lives, bossy and insulting. "From now on, there's a new big chief around here. Okay, Indians? Any arguments?" In that moment, Saleem falls in love.

Evie's takeover of Saleem's crew is another small-scale example of European colonialism. She assumes that she is superior to the other children and she attempts to rule over them. Additionally, the games the children play are also evidence of colonialism and subsequent hybridity. They play cricket, the national sport of England, Evie's air pistol is an American invention, and her bicycle is Indian-made.

Sonny is in love as well, and he is open with the Monkey about his feelings. Unfortunately, "the soft words of lovers roused in [Monkey] an almost animal rage," and she repeatedly makes him pay for his admiration. She makes up tales to tell his mother to get him punished and pushes him into mud puddles, and still he pursues her. One day, the Monkey attacks Sonny, and with the help of her school friends, she strips him naked and leaves him crying in the street. "Why she do it man?" Sonny asks Saleem. Forever loyal to the Monkey, Saleem shrugs. "She does things, that's all."

Sonny's affection for the Monkey is another example of gender inequality. She makes it clear that she is not interested in Sonny's advances, yet he ignores her wishes and pursues her anyway. She is powerless to stop him, so she attempts to get him into trouble with his mother and responds with physical violence. By stripping him naked, the Monkey humiliates Sonny as his advances humiliate her.

Saleem convinces Sonny to talk to Evie on his behalf. As a nervous Saleem looks on, Evie shuts him down ("Who? *Him*?") and instead falls for Sonny. "Now you, f'r instance: you're *cute*." Despite his bad luck, Saleem still agrees to appeal to the Monkey on Sonny's behalf, and he is equally (again) shut down. "Don't make me sick, Allah," she responds.

Despite their close relationship, Saleem does nothing to stop Sonny's advances on the Monkey. Quite the opposite, he even assists Sonny in pursuing his sister, and this is further evidence of the Monkey's oppression as a woman—she is not given the choice regarding her suitor and it matters very little how she feels.

In an attempt to win Evie's affection, Saleem vows to share her interests, which he currently doesn't. He has never liked guns nor does he ride a bike (he doesn't even have one), but he decides to begin with bike riding. Evie often teaches the other kids of Methwold's Estate her bike-riding tricks, and on one such day, Saleem joins them. Without a bike of his own, Evie allows him to use hers.

Much like Sonny, Saleem knows that Evie is not interested in him, but this makes little difference regarding his behavior. He pursues her against her wishes and does not respect her choice not to become romantically involved. As a man, Saleem assumes this power over Evie, and it is evidence of their social inequality.

After Evie gives Saleem a healthy shove to start him off, he is coasting uncontrollably on her mint condition bike—heading straight for Sonny, who is riding his own bike as well. Unable to avoid each other, the two bikes collide, followed by their heads. Saleem's bulging forehead fits perfectly into Sonny's forceps dent, and they are both left ringing. As the other children run to see if they are okay, Saleem, for the first time, clearly hears the voices which have long since been trying to make their way to front of his mind. The other children of India born during the midnight hour of independence are sending him "here-I-am signals," and he hears each individual "I," "I," "I," "I."

Just as Saleem is destined upon his birth to be the leader of the children of midnight, Sonny is destined to make this role possible. Sonny's own birth, just five days after Saleem's, is difficult and protracted, and the forceps needed to coax him out of the birth canal have left permanent dents in his head—creating the perfect cradle for Saleem's bulging forehead. Without Sonny's forceps dent, Saleem would never be able to hear the other children of midnight, and his destiny would remain unrealized.

That fall, October 1955, India is officially partitioned across language lines. The subcontinent is divided into fourteen states and six centrally administered "territories." Still, Bombay remains intact, and the language marchers continue to march. One day, the longest parade of marchers yet passes by Methwold's Estate, and the children, having been forbidden to approach the parade, ease closer.

As one of the only states left to partition, Bombay is at the center of the language marches, and they can quickly turn violent. After all, one of their riots has already led to the death of Dr. Narlikar, and now they march right past Saleem's house. This is a stark representation of India's social division and unrest.

Saleem is still unable to get Evie to pay attention to him, and after learning to ride bike during a family reunion in Agra, he attempts to show off his skills. Saleem rides around and around Evie, trying to get her attention, but she remains focused on the parade. Out of more reasonable options, Saleem decides to enter her thoughts.

Again, Saleem completely disregards Evie's wishes and still *continues to pursue her. He puts a tremendous amount of thought and energy into gaining her affections, yet he never once thinks to simply respect her. Instead, in an incredible display of disrespect, he invades her mind.*

Saleem dives deeper and deeper into Evie's thoughts, and she begins to hold her head and scream, "Get out! Get out!" He continues, going even deeper, and sees Evie standing in an unknown room while holding a blood-soaked knife. At that moment, Evie becomes even angrier and shoves Saleem's bicycle down the hill—and straight into the parade of language marchers.

Inside Evie's mind, Saleem discovers that Evie is evil (she later stabs an old woman and is sent to reform school), and she seems to know that Saleem has violated her thoughts. Evie's character is allegorical, and she represents the individual European colonialist. She is considered civilized by Western standards, yet she is violent and evil.

Saleem is stuck in the angry mob, each of them speaking a different language. He hears Marathi, Kathiawar, and Gujarati—none of which he is able to speak well, if at all. The mob demands he speak to them in Gujarati, so he recites the only thing he knows, a school-yard rhyme: "Soo ché? Saru ché! Danda lé ké maru ché!" ("How are you? I am well! I'll take a stick and thrash you to hell!"). The marchers begin to chant the meaningless rhyme and, thankfully, leave Saleem alone. That same afternoon, the marchers collide violently in Bombay, rioting and killing, chanting "Soo ché? Saru ché!" Three hundred people are wounded and fifteen are killed. The state of Bombay is set to be partitioned in the wake of the language riot, and Saleem, suddenly, is no longer in love with Evie Burns.

India is linguistically diverse, and has over twenty spoken languages, thirteen scripts, and some seven hundred various dialects. It is impossible to know them all, and Saleem only knows trivial rhymes. When the marchers adopt Saleem's rhyme, Rushdie implies that spoken words are essentially arbitrary, just as chronological time is within Saleem's story. The marchers' message is clear in any language—Bombay must be partitioned. Ironically, despite proving that they don't really need a unifying language to come together, they are still divided, and Saleem feels personally responsible.

BOOK 2: MY TENTH BIRTHDAY

Padma has finally returned, and she is full of apologies for Saleem. For the past week, Saleem has been ill and delirious. Padma confesses that she recently visited a holy man who taught her to "awaken Saleem's manhood from its sleep" using a "lusty herb," which she then secretly mixed into his food. The preparation nearly killed him, but now that he is better, he doesn't blame Padma for her actions. Although he remains "unmanned," he is happy to have his companion back.

Of course, Padma is not aware that her preparation could kill Saleem, but it makes an important point. Padma is loyal to Saleem despite his impotence, yet she deceives him and nearly kills him trying to correct it. Her actions pose important questions about the significance of sex and its symbolic role within the text. As a whole, Rushdie's text argues that sex in a relationship is somewhat overrated, or at least that its absence can be overcome in meaningful ways; however, Padma's actions suggest otherwise, and she goes to great lengths to fill this void.

Having lost an entire week of writing, Saleem is eager to continue his story. He begins in 1957, as he is nearing his tenth birthday, when, thanks to knocking heads with Sonny, he becomes aware of the existence of the other children of midnight. On the eve of independence, one thousand and one children were born into the new country of India between midnight and one, and each has a supernatural power. Of course, not all survive, and after four hundred and twenty of the children (the number "associated with fraud, deception, and trickery") die early in childhood, five hundred and eighty-one children remain. With the exception of a set of twins in Baud, all of the children are unaware of each other.

The numbers of children that Rushdie chooses to incorporate into his novel have important connotations. Initially, one thousand and one children are born during the hour of India's independence, and this references the Middle Eastern folktale One Thousand and One Nights. *Additionally, Saleem notes that four hundred and twenty children die, the number associated with trickery, deception, fraud, and this represents the fraud of their magical births. They were destined to be the metaphorical "mirror of India"; however, they were deceived.*

The powers of the children of midnight are great and varied. A boy from Kerala can step in and out of mirrors and other reflective surfaces, and a Goanese girl can multiply fish. Some can transform their human figure; there is a werewolf in Nilgiri Hills, and a boy in Vindhyas who can shrink and grow at will. There is even a child in Kashmir who can, by entering water, alter their sex to either male or female, and a girl in Calcutta who can inflict physical wounds with her words.

Saleem's descriptions of the other children are full of literary references as well. The girl who can multiply fish has biblical connotations, and the werewolf and boy who can shrink and grow brings to mind traditional fairytales known all over the world. The girl who can inflict pain with her words, while not necessarily a literary reference, also relies on the power of words.

Saleem claims that the closer the child's birth to the midnight hour, the greater their magical gift. In fact, those born in the final minutes and seconds of the hour, according to Saleem, are "(to be frank) little more than circus freaks." The children born near the half-hour mark are also specially endowed. For example, a girl in the Gir Forest can heal with the laying-on of hands, and a boy in Shillong is incapable of forgetting anything that he has ever seen or heard.

The children of midnight are hierarchical, with Saleem at the top, followed by Shiva, Parvati, and so on, down to the insignificant "circus freaks." In this sense, Saleem and the other children are the mirror of India—meaning they sideline and marginalize those they believe inferior. Saleem especially takes part in this and fails to recognize it as a potential cause of the Conference's failure.

The children born at the top of the hour have the greatest gifts of all. A boy born at twenty-one seconds past midnight has completely mastered the art of alchemy by nearly ten years old, and a girl born at seventeen seconds past can fly by simply closing her eyes. Another boy born at twelve seconds after can travel through time. Parvati-the-witch, born seven seconds after midnight in the same Old Delhi slum as the Hummingbird, has been given the powers of the illuminatus, "the genuine gifts of conjuration and sorcery."

Parvati's connection to the Hummingbird through the magician's slum they were born into represent their magical abilities. The Hummingbird's supernatural humming is explained by his birthplace, and Parvati is a genuine witch, able to conjure spells and incantations. Parvati, however, is a witch of white magic, not black, which firmly cements her as a good witch—and by association a good woman.

Saleem and Shiva are both born at the stroke of midnight; however, Saleem's power is greater than Shiva's. Midnight has given Shiva the gift of war; he is, after all, named after the god of destruction. Saleem, however, is given the greatest gift—"the ability to look into the hearts and minds" of others.

The fact that Saleem's power is viewed as greater than Shiva's represents the hope for peace and unity that Saleem, and arguably Rushdie, has for postcolonial India. This power has the ability to save them all from Partition.

Meanwhile, in the weeks following Dr. Narlikar's death, Ahmed sinks deeper into alcoholism and seclusion. He stops coming to the table for meals, and he rarely tells Saleem and the Brass Monkey bedtime stories like he used to. He escapes to his home office each day before anyone else is awake and locks himself away, "the old aroma of failure which had hung about him from the earliest days" permeates from under the door. Despite being constantly drunk, Ahmed cleans up on the stock market, buying and selling long and short, and "in a streak of good fortune comparable only to Amina's success on the horses," he manages to turn things around.

The fact that Saleem and the Brass Monkey miss their father's stories more than any of the other things he no longer does in his drunken and depressed state reflects the importance of storytelling within their lives. Ahmed vacillates between rich and poor throughout the entire story, and in doing so, Rushdie underscores the instability of social class. One day, Ahmed is wealthy, and the next he is poor.

Even in the midst of his winning streak, Ahmed continues to drink. The last of the Coca-Cola girls quit, leaving him without a secretary. Mary convinces Alice to come and work for Ahmed. She has long since forgiven her sister for running off with Joseph D'Costa, and since Alice has "an almost infinite tolerance of men," it seems a good match.

Money fails to solve all of Ahmed's problems, and even with plenty of money, he can't keep a secretary, or any other house servant for that matter. Of course, even Alice's tolerance of men fails her, and she too leaves Ahmed before the end of the novel.

In a drunken stupor, Ahmed attempts to place a curse on Sherri, Saleem's mongrel dog—the very same curse he had invented years ago for the benefit of William Methwold. In his intoxicated state, Ahmed believes the curse to be real, and he becomes increasingly upset when the dog fails to drop dead or break into boils. He orders Amina to drive him and the entire family (including Sherri) to Hornby Vellard, the causeway connecting the islands of Bombay, and after walking around a bit, he orders everyone back in the car, except for Sherri. Ahmed leaves the dog behind, and after running behind the car for some time, "she burst an artery as she ran and died sprouting blood from her mouth and her behind, under the gaze of a hungry cow."

Ahmed's attempts to curse Saleem's dog and his lies to William Methwold about his ancestors represent Ahmed's struggle with his identity in postcolonial Indian society. He is compelled to prove to Methwold just how Indian he is, and in the process, he forgets his true identity. Additionally, Ahmed's insistence that Amina chauffer him around when he's drunk, and his attempts to curse the dog just to prove his identity, is evidence of his presumed superiority. He tells Amina what to do and when to do it, and he does whatever he wants to the poor mongrel dog.

Meanwhile, Joseph D'Costa continues to haunt Mary's dreams, and she begins forcing herself to stay awake. In her sleeplessness, Joseph begins haunting Mary while she's awake, and she knows the only way to get rid of him for good is to confess her crime. She fails, however, to come clean. Her love for Saleem is too strong, and she is sure that her confession will cause him pain. She continues to keep her sin and guilt locked away in the back of her mind.

Mary's guilt is eating her alive. She refuses to confess her sin, even to her priest. As long as she keeps her secret, she will never find relief. Joseph's ghost represents Mary's punishment for her sins.

On the day of Saleem's tenth birthday, Amina throws him a party; however, none of the children of Methwold's Estate show up—except for Sonny and, of course, the Brass Monkey. Sonny gives Saleem a message from Evie Burns: "Tell Saleem he's out of the gang." Without his friends, Saleem is left with his parents, the other adults on the estate, and his uncle Hanif, who arrives with his wife, Pia.

Saleem's friends completely ostracize him on Evie's orders, and this is too is a reference to colonialism. Evie uses her power to punish Saleem for invading her thoughts. Pia, Hanif's wife is also ostracized by her family; Reverend Mother disapproves of her acting career and has likewise sidelined her within the family.

Hanif makes himself "excessively unpopular" at the party by loudly yelling, "Elections coming! Watch out for the communists!" Saleem notices that Amina blushes after Hanif's comment, and she has been mysteriously disappearing lately, supposedly going on "shopping trips." Saleem, still suspicious of the afternoon caller, remains dedicated to discovering his mother's secret.

Amina blushes because Nadir now supports the communist cause, and Saleem takes note of her reaction. Hanif's comment also serves to identity communism as an undesirable political belief in the opinion of Saleem's wealthy family.

BOOK 2: AT THE PIONEER CAFÉ

Saleem tells Padma of a strange dream he had while delirious. In the throes of fever—which he assures Padma is not from her herbs, as he has felt this fever before—Saleem shivers and speaks of a Widow, who with the help of the Hand, has come to destroy the children of midnight. It makes very little sense to Padma, but she is eager to continue the story.

Saleem's fever is a physical response to his connection to his country. When India is in turmoil, Saleem becomes ill. Saleem's dream foreshadows the entrance of Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, whom Saleem refers to as the Widow, into his story.

Saleem is in the office of the **pickle**-factory, and his son has come to visit. He is accompanied by a caretaker whom Saleem refuses to identify—yet. Padma hints that Saleem should see another doctor, but he refuses. He must continue to work if he is to finish his story in time. Saleem says, "My son will understand. As much as for any living being, I'm telling my story for him, so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against the cracks, he will know."

Saleem is determined to finish telling his story so that his son will know his own history and identity. Saleem desperately wants his story to have some deeper meaning, or purpose, beyond the pain it has caused. Since Saleem doesn't yet know his purpose, he hopes that he will find it in the telling of his story.

Evie Burns and the rest of the Methwold's Estate children have taken over the clock tower, and since Evie has kicked Saleem out of the gang, he no longer has a private place to commune with the other children of midnight. He begins communicating with them "only at midnight, during the hour which is reserved for miracles" and "is somehow outside time."

Saleem isn't safe from Evie's wrath anywhere, and this represents the far-reaching effects of colonialism. She gets to him in even in the broken clock tower, which similarly to the midnight hour, "is somehow outside of time."

Meanwhile, Saleem continues to suspect Amina of keeping secrets and makes a plan to stow away in the trunk of her car when she goes on one of her shopping trips. Saleem enlists the help of Sonny, a master at picking locks, to teach him how to break the lock from the both the outside and the inside of the trunk. Within thirty seconds, Sonny shows Saleem how to pop the trunk using only a small strip of pink plastic.

Saleem is highly suspicious of his mother, and his mind turn obsessively to thoughts of infidelity. Saleem sees his mother's presumed unfaithfulness to his father as a slight on his own relationship with her, and he becomes increasingly resentful of his mother.

It is not long before Amina must go on another shopping trip (which, Saleem notes, always occur after a wrong number phone call), and he slips unnoticed into the trunk of her car. As she drives, he enters her thoughts to follow their route and finds "an alarming degree of disorder" in her "habitually tidy mind." They arrive at the Pioneer Café, and Saleem slips undetected out of the trunk.

Amina's cluttered mind is a reflection of her broken heart and conflicted emotions. She desperately loves Nadir, but she is dedicated to her role as Ahmed's wife. She has been taught her entire to serve her husband, and her true feelings, sadly, do not factor into her choices or marriage.

During morning hours, the Pioneer Café is the daily meeting spot for film extras; but in the afternoon, the Pioneer Café turns into a Communist hangout. Now, in the afternoon, Saleem watches his mother meet a man with "poetically long hair."

By simply going to the café, Amina becomes, at the very least, a communist sympathizer. Saleem's family does not support the communist efforts in India, and this negatively affects how Saleem sees his mother.

Amina sits down at a table across from her first husband, Nadir Khan. Nadir has since changed his name to Qasim Khan, and he is an official candidate of the Communist Party. Through the crowded café, Saleem watches his mother and Qasim share an "indirect kiss" via a drinking glass, and he immediately wishes he hadn't come.

Amina and Qasim's "indirect kiss," created by Amina's brother, Hanif, is sensual and heartfelt—it is also incredibly sad. This is yet another example of Amina's social oppression as a woman in Indian society. She is not permitted to decide on her own when, and to whom, it is appropriate to show affection.

Saleem slips back into the trunk and vows never to stow away in his mother's trunk again. Instead, he follows Amina by entering her thoughts. There, he witnesses additional meetings with Qasim in which his mother, working on behalf of the Communist Party, gives aid to the poor.

Amina very clearly supports the communist cause and works on its behalf. After her horror at the poverty of Old Fort, Amina has been compelled to act on behalf of the less fortunate.

During his nightly visits with the other children of midnight, Saleem officially forms the Midnight Children's Conference. Instead of using words and language, Saleem communicates with the other children through pictures, and it is not long before he meets Shiva again. Shiva hasn't been to Methwold's Estate since he threw a rock at another kid, blinding him (hence the name Eyeslice) and his father, Wee Willie Winkie has long since died. Saleem immediately takes note of Shiva's knees, "two of the biggest knees the world has ever seen."

Shiva's aggression and violent tendencies are established early on when he blinds Eyeslice in their childhood, and there is tension between Shiva and Saleem from the very beginning. Saleem's ability to communicate with the other children without language further argues the arbitrary nature of language and the possibility of uniting in the absence of unified language.

Shiva is mean and aggressive, runs a gang, and frequently threatens to squeeze people between his knees. After reminding Saleem that they were both born at the stroke of midnight, Shiva suggests that they be "joint bosses of this gang." Saleem sees the conference as more of a "loose federation of equals," but Shiva is determined to be the boss.

The children exist in a hierarchical fashion, despite Saleem's protests otherwise, and Shiva is not happy with second place. Like Saleem, he wants to lead the children, but they are divided—Saleem is at the top and everyone else comes after him.

Saleem's story jumps back to the 1957 election, in which Qasim Khan is nearly elected and the Communist Party becomes the single largest opposition to the All-India Congress. On polling day, Shiva and his own gang, The Cowboys, are hired by an unknown paymaster to stand outside polling stations armed with sticks, rocks, and knives. Padma interrupts Saleem to ask about the date, and he suddenly realizes that he has again made an error in his storytelling. The 1957 election took place before Saleem's tenth birthday, not after.

Shiva's presence outside the polling stations and the close result of the race suggests that the All-India Congress is not the true winner of the election. Presumably, Shiva is there to intimidate voters into casting their votes against communism, and since Qasim is only narrowly defeated, this implies that communism has a large support base in Postcolonial India.

BOOK 2: ALPHA AND OMEGA

As Saleem continues his story, he describes the civil unrest present in Bombay after the election. Riots are frequent, and the language marchers continue chanting his nonsensical rhyme. The state of Bombay will soon be partitioned, and several prostitutes are found dead, murdered by strangulation. The newspapers report that instead of thumbprints, the corpses have much larger bruises around their necks—bruises which Saleem claims are "wholly consistent" with the marks left by "a pair of giant, preternaturally powerful knees."

Saleem suspects Shiva of murdering the prostitutes. Shiva is named after a god of procreation, and as such, he is known to frequent brothels. Why Shiva murders the prostitutes is not clear; however, this violence is a clear representation of Shiva's power over women.

Bombay is rocked by a severe drought, and Methwold's Estate is invaded by countless cats in search of water. After many failed attempts to rid them from the property, Evie Burns appears with her Daisy pistol. As she opens fire on the unwanted cats, killing them left and right, the Brass Monkey appears and knocks her to the ground.

The Brass Monkey has been waiting for the right moment to make Evie pay for all she has done, and when she kills the cats (another animal that the Monkey is able to talk to) it is the last straw. When the Monkey stands up to Evie, she is metaphorically standing up to European colonialism.

Evie and the Monkey roll around, flailing and kicking, until the gardener finally separates them by spraying them with a garden hose. As the dust settles, it is clear the Monkey has bested Evie, "her spirit and her dominion over us broken for once and for all." Shortly after, Evie's father sends her back to America "to get a decent education away from these savages."

Evie is the one killing cats and planning physical assault within her mind, yet her father considers the Monkey a "savage." Clearly it is Evie who is a savage; however, her status as an American (the same thing as a European in Saleem's eyes) means that she is the civilized one.

The more Saleem communicates with the Midnight Children's Conference, the more he dislikes Shiva. Shiva continues to insist that he is the true leader of the children, and Saleem suspects him of murdering the prostitutes (although he doesn't have any proof—Shiva can close him out of his thoughts). Saleem discovers, in addition to his telepathy, that his mind can serve as a forum for the other children to communicate with each other. Every night after, from midnight until one, the Midnight Children's Conference meets inside Saleem's head.

The fact that Shiva is impervious to Saleem's power suggests that they are more equally matched than Saleem would like to admit. Whether or not Shiva is the true leader of the Midnight Children's Conference is never answered, and Shiva is never made aware of his true identity. This creates doubt as to Saleem's claim to be the rightful leader of the conference.

The other children elect Saleem as their leader, and his first order of business is to figure out their collective purpose. "We must think," he says, "what we are for." Some believe they should use their skills to assist the government, while others suggest that they invade Pakistan. One girl even suggests that they offer themselves up to science to be studied. Overall, Saleem is disappointed with their ideas and becomes increasingly distracted by his school's upcoming dance with the girls of their sister institution.

Saleem is ultimately selected as the leader democratically. He is their leader not because he has declared it so, but because they have selected him. The conference has become a "loose federation of equals." In short, the Conference is a classless, or communist, society. In this way, Rushdie implies that communism may be a suitable solution to India's social problems.


Later at school, Saleem attends his dreaded geography class taught by Mr. Zagallo, an unpleasant Anglo man who refers to his students as "sons of baboons." The topic of the day is "human geography," and when none of the students are able to provide a definition, Zagallo begins to aggressively twist the ear of a student named Jimmy Kapadia. "Heroism gets the better" of Saleem and he objects, telling Zagallo to stop on account of Jimmy's heart condition.

Like Evie and Methwold, Mr. Zagallo, a white European, believes that he is superior to his Indian students. He insults them and calls them animals, and he even physically assaults them as a form of punishment. Mr. Zagallo abuses his power as a teacher, and this represent the exploited power of European colonialists.

Zagallo pulls Saleem out his chair by his hair and brings him to the front of the class. Laughing, Zagallo points to the birthmarks on Saleem's face, and comparing them to a map of India, declares Saleem "human geography." He then points to a smaller birthmark just under the larger, and referring to it as a stain, declares it Pakistan. "Remember, stupid boys: Pakistan is a stain on the face of India!" Just then, a large glob of snot drips from Saleem's nose, landing on Zagallo's hand. Enraged, he again lifts Saleem by a handful of hair, ripping it clean out of his head, resulting in a "monkish tonsure."

Just as Saleem's identity is a metaphor for India, his face is a literal representation of the county's geography, and this serves to deepen his connection to his nation. Mr. Zagallo's reference to Pakistan as a "stain" suggests that holds them in even lower regard than Indians. Saleem's "monkish tonsure" represents his forced obedience to Mr. Zagallo, and by extension, his obedience to Western culture and ideas. Saleem's hair doesn't grow back until after he falls in love with Parvati.


Later, at the school dance, two bullies approach Saleem, mocking him because of his bald spot and calling him "map-face." They give chase, and Saleem runs, slamming his hand in a door in the process. The top of his middle finger is severed, and he is quickly rushed to the hospital. As Saleem awaits surgery, the doctor asks his parents to donate blood for a transfusion.

The school bullies make fun of Saleem's face, and by extension, they also insult India, and they are a small-scale representation of the country's social unrest. Saleem's severed finger means that Mary's secret is about to come to light, and they all remain oblivious.

Amina and Ahmed learn that Saleem's blood does not match their own. Type A and O respectively (and rhesus positive), Saleem is neither A nor O—and is rhesus negative. Ahmed immediately accuses Amina of cheating, and as they leave the room to fight in private, Saleem hears the unmistakable sound of a slap. Sitting alone, Saleem comments to himself, "Most of what matters in your life takes place in your absence."

Ahmed's first reaction is that his wife has been unfaithful—despite the fact that she can't be his mother either—and this is evidence of his general disrespect and dislike for women and a reflection of India's sexist and patriarchal society. Saleem's comment represents his lack of control in determining his own destiny, and that of his country.


BOOK 2: THE KOLYNOS KID

After he is discharged from the hospital, Saleem is picked up by his Uncle Hanif and Mary Pereira. He is told that he is not returning to Buckingham Villa; instead, Saleem and Mary are exiled to Hanif and Pia's apartment. Saleem notes that his life is moving too fast, and he still doesn't know who he truly is. Driving in his uncle's car, he notices a billboard advertising Kolynos Toothpaste in which a young boy squeezes toothpaste from a never-ending tube. Saleem thinks of himself as an "involuntary Kolynos Kid, squeezing crises and transformations out of a bottomless tube."

Ahmed and Amina's treatment of Saleem after discovering that he is not their son is awful. They ship him off—out of sight, out of mind—and don't even bother to make sure that he is okay. Saleem's identity has been transformed, and he has no idea into what. Like snakes, the Kolynos Toothpaste kid represents transformation, and this parallels the transformation of Old India into New India.


Saleem's exile to Hanif and Pia's ends up being quite enjoyable. His aunt and uncle treat him like the son they never had, and Mary constantly feeds him baked goods and fresh green chutney. Unfortunately, Hanif's film career has steadily declined over the years. He insists on writing only realistic scripts, which are often depressing, and he fails to sell a single one. Despite his failures, however, Homi Catrack continues to pay Hanif a studio salary, and he is feverishly writing a script about a **pickle**-factory run entirely by women.

Saleem has collects father figures throughout Midnight's Children, *and Hanif is among many, including (thus far) Ahmed, William Methwold, and Wee Willie Winkie. Hanif's preference for depressing and realistic films mirror India's current social climate, and, ironically, are rejected by the Indian people. Hanif's addition of a pickle-factory run by women foreshadows Saleem's own experience at Braganza Pickles.*

Pia is growing unhappy in her life. Hanif insists that they continue living in the small apartment despite his earlier success, and her advancing age is affecting her acting career. Pia complains that Reverend Mother, who has long since disapproved of acting, has begun harassing her to "acquire the concession on a good petrol pump." To Reverend Mother, "that is proper work."

Reverend Mother disapproves because of Pia job because it makes her fully visible to strange men everywhere, and she still resents having to exit purdah. Pia's willingness to be seen by men is, according to Reverend Mother, proof of her loose morals and impurity, and this reflects the oppression of women within Indian society.

Despite his "bare knees" and short pants (the markings of a child), Saleem enters premature puberty and his testicles "drop into their little sacs." He begins to notice Pia's beauty and her voluptuous breast, and she frequently hugs him and holds him close—which he rather enjoys. Meanwhile, Mary, having just returned from a trip to Methwold's Estate, informs Saleem that "the country is in the grip of a sort of supernatural invasion." Citizens report seeing gods and chariots, and even a bleeding tombstone. Most curious of all, Mary claims cows are disappearing into thin air, "poof!"

The "supernatural invasion" that Mary speaks of is the wrath of Hindu gods—punishment for India's conversion into a secular state. In Amina's absence, Saleem projects his mother obsession onto Pia. Saleem has a history of inappropriate feelings towards the women in his family; his relationship with his own mother is almost oedipal in nature, and he later falls in love with the Brass Monkey. Not being of blood relation to his own family wreaks havoc on Saleem's identity, and his unsure who to love or how.

Regardless of his professional failures, Hanif and Pia's apartment is a popular meeting place for others in the film industry and they frequently host parties. During one such party, Homi secretly slips Saleem a folded note and asks him to give it to his aunt. Homi says, "And keep mum; or I'll send the police to cut your tongue out!"

As Homi and Pia have been having an affair, the letter represents Homi's attempt to break it off. Homi's letter also represents his disrespect for Pia; after years of intimacy, he doesn't give her the courtesy of personally speaking to her or offering any explanation, and this is a reflection of the patriarchy.

That night, unable to get Pia alone, Saleem goes to sleep with the letter still in his hand. He wakes screaming after a nightmare—in which his classmate, Jimmy, is murdered—and Pia invites him to sleep with her and Hanif. Once in bed, Saleem slips the note silently into Pia's hand.

The boy who dies in Saleem's nightmare is the same boy Saleem saves from Mr. Zagallo on account of his heart condition the day they study "human geography" in school. Saleem's dream serves as an omen and affords him the chance to give Pia the note.

The next day after school (where Saleem learns that his classmate, Jimmy, has died of a sudden heart seizure), he arrives home to find Pia gone. She returns later, obviously upset, and Saleem enters her thoughts to spy. He learns that Homi Catrack, after years of a secret affair, has suddenly lost interest in her. Saleem attempts to comfort Pia, and before he knows it, he is caressing her body. She reacts badly, pushing him away and calling him a pervert, just as Mary enters the room holding a pair of pants. "You are a big man now," she says, "look, your mother has sent you two pairs of nice, white long trousers."

Sadly, despite Saleem's "heroic" efforts that day in class, Jimmy is still dead. Even though Saleem is now considered a man, he still has difficulty understanding his conflicted identity and his supernatural powers, and he has no one to turn to, other than Mary Pereira. The lack of attention paid to Saleem, in part, fuels his inappropriate interaction with Pia, and it has damaged their relationship as well.

Amina soon arrives to bring Saleem back to Buckingham Villa, and she offers no explanation as to why he was sent away in the first place. She warns Saleem that Ahmed has not been happy lately and that terrible things have been happening. When he mentions that Mary has already told him about the strange occurrences, she becomes upset with Mary in the backseat, crying, "What have you been saying?" She quickly calms herself, stating, "Everything will be all right. You just wait and see." Saleem is not convinced.

While the reason Amina becomes upset with Mary for telling Saleem about the mysterious occurrences is never exactly explained, Amina and Ahmed seem to make a concerted effort to keep religion out of their children's lives. They never visit a mosque and they never once pray, and this is a reflection of India's secular state. Amina's negative reaction suggests that she believes her actions are the cause of the occurrences, and she is frightened of what's to come.

BOOK 2: COMMANDER SABARMATI'S BATON

After they return to Buckingham Villa, Mary discovers that the ghost of Joseph has decayed. He is missing an ear and a toe, most of his teeth had fallen out, and a large hole takes up his entire stomach. Joseph tells Mary that he is being held "wholly responsible" for her crime until she confesses.

In addition to her guilt and being haunted by Joseph, Mary Pereira is forced to watch the man she loves decay before her eyes, and this is nearly too much for her to endure. Furthermore, by allowing Joseph to pay for her crime, Mary continues to sin in the eyes of Christianity.

Meanwhile, Saleem finds that he is no longer his parents' favorite child. Both Ahmed and Amina plainly favor the Brass Monkey, and she, unsuccessfully, "does her best to fall from grace," including converting to Christianity. When even that fails, both Saleem and Monkey begrudgingly accept their new roles.

The Brass Monkey's conversion to Christianity is a reflection of her conflicted identity. She is raised by non-practicing Muslims in a secular nation that is overwhelmingly Hindu, and her ayah is Catholic. The Monkey's religious influences are also another example of hybridity in postcolonial Indian society.

On the day that the Chinese armies make their way across the Himalayas and into India, the Midnight Children's Conference begins to fall apart. The "prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds," and they begin quarreling. The children divide themselves according to race, class, and religion, and the poor are increasingly pressured by Communism.

The beginning of the fall of the Midnight's Children coincides with China's invasion of India, and this is evidence that Saleem and the others are "handcuffed to history." As India is further divided when China attempts to claim a portion for themselves, the Conference begins to divide as well.

Saleem tries to unify the children and pleads with them not to "permit the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labor, them-and-us" to come between them. He calls on them to be a "third principle," one that does not fall to social pressures. Sadly, most of Saleem's words fall on deaf ears, except for Parvati-the-witch, who continues to support him. Shiva, on the other hand, does his best to pull them further apart, telling Saleem his calls for unity are "all just wind." According to Shiva, "there is no third principle; there is only money-and-poverty, and have-and-lack, and right-and-left."

Shiva's response to Saleem's unifying cries are proof of his belief in the randomness of life. To Shiva, Saleem's search for meaning and togetherness is "wind," essentially nonsense, and his opinion serves to further divide them. Interestingly enough, there are vague communist undertones to Saleem's rallying speech, and in this way, Rushdie again suggests a communist approach to solve India's social problems.

Saleem begins avoiding the Midnight Children's Conference and spends most of his time in the quiet darkness of Mr. Schaapsteker's upstairs apartment. There, the ninety-one-year-old man becomes another father to Saleem, "instructing him in life." During one of their lessons, Mr. Schaapsteker tells Saleem, "Be wise, child. Imitate the action of the snake. Be secret; strike from the cover of a bush."

Mr. Schaapsteker becomes yet another father-figure to Saleem. As he is unaware of who his real father is, Saleem compensates by collecting fathers, and he takes on a little piece of each one of these men, making them a part of his identity.

Saleem takes Mr. Schaapsteker's advice. When he discovers that Homi Catrack is having an affair with Lila Sabarmati, he decides to strike, fueled by his "mother's hypocrisy and Pia's inconsolable grief." Calling Lila a "loose woman," he enters her thoughts and discovers that she meets Homi every Sunday at an address just off of the Colaba Causeway. He sends an anonymous letter to Lila's husband, Commander Sabarmati, asking why his wife goes to Colaba Causeway on Sunday mornings.

Saleem hates Homi for the pain that he has caused Pia, and he again projects his feelings for his mother onto another woman. As Saleem has long since suspected his own mother of being a "loose woman," he decides to make an example out of Lila Sabarmati, who will forever serve as a warning to his mother concerning her own infidelities. Saleem's treatment of all of these women reflects the trappings of the patriarchy. Instead of respecting these women, Saleem believes that it is his right to meddle in their lives and teach them lessons on morality, as he believes in his own superiority as a man.

The following Sunday, Commander Sabarmati goes to the naval arsenal and obtains a long-nose revolver, and after taking a taxi to the Colaba Causeway, he knocks on the door indicated in the anonymous letter. As Lila opens the door, he shoots her twice in the stomach before moving to Homi, whom he murders with three shots; one to the genitals, one to the heart, and one straight through his right eye.

Saleem's plan has backfired in a major way. Of course, he succeeds in setting an example for his mother, but his belief in his own superiority has led to Homi's death and Lila is severely injured. While Saleem does admit to being "horrified" by what he has done, he makes no effort to confess or atone.

After smiling to himself, Commander Sabarmati goes directly to a police officer directing traffic and turns himself in. Startled by his revolver, the officer immediately runs away, causing traffic to back-up. When a group of officers return to arrest him, they find the Commander directing traffic using the smoking gun as a baton.

While Commander Sabarmati's surrender is depicted in a humorous way, it nevertheless represents the serious problem of domestic violence within sexist societies. The Commander believes that this degree of power over his wife is his inherent right, and he acts on this belief.

Saleem's "revenge participates a national crisis," and Commander Sabarmati becomes exceedingly popular. Married men defend his actions, including Ismail Ibrahim, who defends him in court. Faithful women also support him, and even Lila's own sons take their father's side. All the newspapers "agree on his upstandingness" and that he is an "undeniably attractive chap." Despite the prosecutors "open and shut case," public opinion is that Sabarmati is a good guy.

The public's support of Commander Sabarmati is evidence of the extent to which the patriarchy has affected society. He is clearly guilty, but he is still considered a good guy. His gender gives him a pass on his awful crime, and the fact that even other women and Lila's own sons support his actions is a stark look at India's social inequality.

The jury finds Commander Sabarmati not guilty; however, the judge reverses the "absurd verdict." The public is outraged, and Ismail Ibrahim appeals the case all the way to the President of India. At first, it is unclear if "India will give her approval to the rule of law, or to the ancient principle of the overriding primacy of heroes" but in the end, the President refuses to pardon the Commander.

This social inequality has even infiltrated the local courts, and the President's delay in supporting the judge's decision to overrule the "absurd verdict" is proof that he secretly supports the Commander's actions as well.

Feeling guilty over the terrible crime he caused, Saleem nearly confesses to his mother; however, he suddenly changes his mind. Soon after Commander Sabarmati's trial, the Sinai's telephone began, as usual, to ring in the afternoon. Amina, limping her way to the phone, answers it and responds, "No, nobody by that name here; please believe what I am telling you, and never call again."

Saleem decides not to confess his guilt when he discovers that his plan has ultimately been successful. Amina never sees or speaks to Qasim again, and Saleem is pleased with the outcome. Saleem has manipulated his mother, and he destroyed multiple lives in the process.

In the following days, FOR SALE signs pop up all over Methwold's Estate. Ismail Ibrahim is suspended from practicing law after it is discovered that he is crooked, and he must sell his house. Commander Sabarmati is sentenced to thirty years in jail, and Lila, still alive, moves out. In an unrelated event, Cyrus-the-great's father chokes and dies, and suddenly Saleem's family is all alone with an aging Dr. Schaapsteker and Dr. Narlikar's women, who buy up all the other Villas and apartments. The women want to raze the mansions and put up a skyscraper, but Ahmed refuses to sell.

Saleem, Ismail, and Commander Sabarmati all pay for their crimes against women. The Commander is sentenced to prison, and Ismail, his lawyer, is suspended from practice. This causes a domino effect that leads to the clearing out of Methwold's Estate, and Saleem's comfortable childhood home is no longer. In a final display of girl power to counteract the rampant misogyny, Narlikar's women intend to tear Methwold's Estate to the ground.

BOOK 2: REVELATIONS

As Saleem continues his story for a rapt Padma, Narlikar's women have begun to demolish Methwold's Estate, and a massive cloud of dust settles over Buckingham Villa. Pia calls and informs Amina that Hanif, distraught over losing his income with Homi Catrack's death, has committed suicide by jumping off his apartment building.

Because of his involvement in Homi's death, Saleem is also, to an extent, responsible for Hanif's death. Had his income not stopped with Homi's death, Hanif, presumably, would not have committed suicide; however, Saleem fails to make this connection.

Saleem's entire family soon arrives at Buckingham Villa to observe the forty-day mourning period for Hanif's death. Reverend Mother, who has always disliked Pia, is irritated with her lack of crying and appropriate mourning. In true fashion, she vows not to take one single bite of food until Pia mourns properly.

Reverend Mother again exerts her power in an unorthodox way. She knows that by refusing to eat, Pia will eventually do what she wants.

On the twentieth day of mourning, Saleem apologizes to Pia for behaving so inappropriately during his exile at her apartment. She then proceeds to tell him that she is not crying because of Hanif's "hate of melodrama." Suddenly, the dust that has settled over the estate begins to tickle her **nose** and she sneezes, causing her eyes to water. The sneeze opens a flood-gate, and Pia finally begins to cry—uncontrollably.

Saleem's attempt to smooth out Pia and Reverend Mother's disagreement by apologizing to Pia for inappropriately touching her is his closest attempt at atonement for his despicable actions. Of course, Pia is saddened by Hanif's death, and ironically, it is her nose that reminds her of her true feelings.

As Pia cries, Reverend Mother embraces her, finally forgiving her for her lack of mourning. She tells Pia that she is to come and live with her and Aadam (they will be moving to Pakistan soon to be near Emerald), and together they will purchase a petrol pump. Pia agrees, "relinquishing the world of films for that of fuel."

Now that Reverend Mother has weakened Pia with her own hunger strike, she assumes complete power over her, and dictates her move to Pakistan and her purchase of a petrol pump.

On the twenty-second day of mourning, Aadam Aziz sees God, and on the twenty-third day of mourning, he tells his family of his vision. According to Aadam, he saw a man standing in the dark of his bedroom the night before. The man had holes in his hands and feet and said, "I didn't think you could see me." Aadam is convinced—he has seen God.

Much like Saleem believing that his telepathy is the voices of angels, Aadam believes the man he sees to be God, despite not fully believing in His existence. This reflects the influence religion has on all lives, even ones that are supposedly secular.

On the thirty-seventh day of mourning, Mary is convinced that she sees the ghost of Joseph approaching Ahmed in his office. Before Ahmed notices the ghost, Mary blurts out her secret, confessing to everyone that she switched Saleem and Shiva's nametags after birth. She then turns and runs from the room.

Mary never returns to the Sinais'. She never explains herself and she never seeks forgiveness, despite her deep Catholic beliefs. After her public confession she simply runs away, and this suggests that her faith is not as strong as it appears.

Shocked and confused, Ahmed turns to the ghost and says, "That, in the corner, is my old servant Musa, who tried to rob me once." Indeed, the man Mary has confused for Joseph's ghost is in fact old Musa, afflicted and dying of leprosy. Ahmed then forgives Musa, and after that day, Ahmed "never tried again to discover his own (and wholly imaginary) family curse."

This passage implies that much of the unrest and unfortunate circumstances endured by the Sinais since Musa's departure are a result of his curse, which ironically, Ahmed tried to effect on his own. As Musa's curse was, in part, in response to his anger at Mary Pereira, she is directly responsible for much of the family's troubles, and this paints her, and her religion, in a negative light.

BOOK 2: MOVEMENTS PERFORMED BY PEPPERPOTS

After Mary's confession, Saleem begins to avoid the Midnight Children's Conference. He is convinced that he won't be able to hide his secret from Shiva, "the most ferocious and powerful of the Children," who will be sure to claim his birthright if he finds out the truth. Saleem vows to keep his secret just as Mary had, and he continues to avoid the other children.

It is not necessarily Saleem's place to keep the secret of their birth from Shiva. Shiva is affected to the same level that Saleem is by Mary's actions; however, Saleem selfishly keeps this information from him. This is another example of Saleem's belief in his superiority over other people, and this serves a representation of India's own social divide along lines of class.

In the days following Hanif's mourning period, the dust begins to settle around Buckingham Villa, but Ahmed remains drunk and angry. Surprisingly, he doesn't blame Mary, or even Saleem, for the midnight switch. Instead, he focuses his considerable rage onto Amina, berating and abusing her until Reverend Mother intervenes. Telling her daughter that there is "no shame in leaving an inadequate husband," she encourages Amina to go to Pakistan. "Take your children, I say, whatsitname—*both* your children."

Again, Ahmed's actions are a representation of the gender oppression present within the patriarchy. Despite Amina's innocence in Mary's switch, Ahmed still holds her responsible and makes her pay. Reverend Mother stands up to Ahmed's power, and in the process, she legitimizes Saleem, who still has not received any support from his parents regarding his true identity and parentage.


Later that same day, Amina, Saleem, and the Brass Monkey begin to travel back to Pakistan with Emerald and Zulfikar. As Amina leaves, all the servants quit, except for Alice Pereira, who stays behind to watch over Ahmed. When Saleem arrives in Pakistan, he notices that his "thought-transmissions are jammed." He is unable to commune with the Midnight Children's Conference in the land of the pure.

Saleem's inability to commune with the children of midnight from Pakistan cements him firmly as an Indian, and this makes him even more of a foreigner in the Muslim country. This realization becomes all the more powerful when Saleem becomes a Pakistani citizen.


They arrive in Rawalpindi aboard the *SS Sabarmati* and go directly to Emerald and Zulfikar's large and impressive mansion, which is surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. Zulfikar frequently yells out the family's official "catch-phrase," "Let's get organized!" and the entire family is militarized, even the old beagle, Bonzo. Bonzo holds the rank of sergeant-major and is natural at sniffing out land-mines.

The fact that the ship that Saleem and his family sail into Rawalpindi on is named after Commander Sabarmati suggests that his reputation is not at all tarnished by shooting his wife and killing her lover. The ship represents society's continued support of the Commander, which serves to further oppress women.

Saleem and the Brass Monkey go to school with Emerald and Zulfikar's son, Zafar, an unpleasant boy who wets the bed and has a crush on the Monkey. Each time Zafar wets the bed (which he shares with Saleem), Zulfikar belittles him, calling him names such as "coward," "woman," and "homosexual."

Notably, when Zulfikar berates his son for wetting the bed, he calls him names that are associated with women and femininity. This implies that Zulfikar believes that the worst insult is to be considered womanly.

Amina tries to rebuild her relationship with her son (who really isn't her son), but her attempts are forced and Saleem feels alienated from his mother and the Monkey. One night, shortly after their arrival to Pakistan, Emerald readies the mansion for a dinner party. Saleem notices Army security officers and military police lurking around the property, and soon a series of long, black limousines pull into the driveway.

The obviously important men who arrive for dinner at Zulfikar's are planning a military coup. There is considerable social unrest within Pakistan as well as in India, and Zulfikar and Emerald's dinner party is a result of this unrest. The creation of Pakistan has not been a smooth transition, and they are still contesting lines drawn in British India's initial Partition.

As the dinner guests arrive, Saleem has no idea who they are, but he is sure that they are military officers. Emerald refers to the man who is clearly the guest of honor as "Mr. Commander-in-Chief," and after the meal, the women abruptly stand to leave the table. Saleem and Zafar follow suit, but "Mr. Commander-in-Chief," whose name is General Ayub Khan, asks the boys to stay, claiming, "It is their future, after all."

Mr. Commander-in-Chief will serve as the president after the coup. His involvement of Saleem and Zafar in their talk is a reflection of their compulsory military responsibilities. In Pakistan, they will be forced to join and fight against India.

Once the women are gone, General Khan declares Martial Law and states, "I am assuming control of the State." In that moment, Saleem and Zafar realize that Zulfikar and his dinner guests are planning a coup of the Pakistani government, and Zafar immediately wets his pants. Zulfikar begins to yell at Zafar, "Pimp! Woman! Hindu!" and orders him from the room. With Zafar gone, Zulfikar asks Saleem to come and sit near him at the head of the table.

General Khan doesn't assume control of the State until the women have left the room. This reflects his opinion that women are inferior to men and not capable of contributing to serious matters. Again, in a response to his son's incontinence, Zulfikar insults Zafar by calling him a woman, and to further insult him, a Hindu. This reflects his own belief in the superiority of Muslim men specifically.

Sitting next to Zulfikar, Saleem "created a new father for himself," and as Zulfikar directed him and described the movements of troops, Saleem symbolically moved pepperpots and chutneys, serving spoons and cutlery around the table, demonstrating their treasonous coup. The cream-jug represented the President, Iskander Mirza, but it did not move during the demonstration. For three weeks after the pepperpot demonstration, Mirza remained the President of Pakistan.

Zulfikar becomes yet another father-figure to Saleem, and he is eager to please him—even if that makes him complicit in a military take-over that will undoubtedly result in increased aggression towards India, and metaphorically, toward himself as well. Saleem so badly desires a decent father that he is willing to make nearly any sacrifice.

At midnight on November 1, Zulfikar wakes Saleem from a sound sleep, whispering, "Come on, sonny, it's time you got a taste of the real thing." After racing through the Rawalpindi streets, they pull up to a large mansion with armed guards. The guards part ways, allowing them to pass, and Zulfikar leads Saleem into a dark bedroom with a large four-poster bed. A sleeping man suddenly sits up, surprised, and Zulfikar shoves a long-barreled revolver into his mouth. "Shut up," Zulfikar says. "Come with us." He drags the man, naked and shivering, out to the car.

Saleem is barely into long pants and has only just become a man, and Zulfikar is already dragging him along to kidnap the President of Pakistan. He is grooming him for military service, and Saleem recognizes this. This goes far beyond the movement of pepperpots and metaphorical involvement. Saleem is personally involved in this crime, and he is a willing participate because it affords him Zulfikar's fatherly attention.

Zulfikar drives the man to a military airfield and places him on a plane. As the plane takes off, Saleem realizes that not only did he help to plan a coup, but he also helped to kidnap and exile a president.

Saleem recognizes the seriousness of his actions, but he continues to live as Zulfikar's makeshift son for years.

Amina stays in Pakistan for four years with Saleem and the Brass Monkey, who begins to abandon her rebellious ways and becomes a devout and demure Muslim. The relationship between Pakistan and India continues to deteriorate, and Saleem remains unable to contact the Midnight Children's Conference. On the Monkey's fourteenth birthday, Emerald throws a small party and encourages the Monkey to sing for her guests. She obliges, and when she opens her mouth to sing, the most beautiful, heavenly voice emerges. In that moment, "the Brass Monkey sloughs off her nick-name" and becomes Jamila Singer.

The Brass Monkey's transformation into Jamila Singer is further evidence of her conflicted identity. The Muslim influence in Pakistan is too strong to be ignored, and she begins to follow its teachings, abandoning her Christian beliefs. Ironically, Jamila retains her love of leavened bread, and this represents the part of her identity that remains devoted to her true identity—that of a Christian.

BOOK 2: DRAINAGE AND THE DESERT

At the exact moment the Indian Defense Minister decides to use all necessary force against the Chinese army on the Himalayan frontier, Amina Sinai receives a telegram from Alice Pereira. She tells Amina to return to Bombay at once as Ahmed has suffered a "heartboot." Unsure of what a "heartboot" is exactly, Amina and the children leave Pakistan at once.

Amina, still convinced by a sexist society that it is her duty to care for her husband, rushes home to Bombay with Saleem and Jamila. The use of force against China leads to a sense of renewed optimism in India, and Saleem feels this as well when he returns home.

Alice has remained with Ahmed these last four years. As his only companion, Alice has been answering his phone, fetching his drinks, and enduring his never-ending verbal abuse. The Narlikar women are still trying to persuade Ahmed to sell them Buckingham Villa, and they call him twice a day, every day. So far, they have not convinced him to sell; however, they do convince Alice to come and work for them, and she promptly quits Ahmed's charge. Alone in the mansion, Ahmed's heart began to swell with hate and self-pity, ballooning out into the shape of a boot.

Ahmed is being slowly destroyed by the Narlikar women. They are the reason he lost so badly (financially speaking) with the tetrapods, and now they want to destroy his home as well. Their theft of Alice is the last straw, and Ahmed metaphorically succumbs to the women. These women serve to dismantle gender stereotypes as well, and Ahmed is at their mercy.

Back in Bombay, Amina takes to nursing Ahmed back to health. She pours all of her energy into his rehabilitation, "driven by an unstoppable will." Ahmed begins to recover and as he does, he becomes a better man. He stops drinking and he no longer mistreats his family. Under Amina's devoted care, Ahmed finally falls in love with his wife.

Notably, Amina and Ahmed finally begin to fall in love, after all these years, only after Amina walks away from Nadir for good. Amina no longer tries to love only pieces of Ahmed; instead, she loves all of him and she is successful.

Saleem wastes no time reconvening the Midnight Children's Conference. He seals off the part of his mind that contains Mary Pereira's secret, and he doesn't call to Shiva. Soon, as China defeats the Indian army along the Himalayans, the children become angry with Saleem for his secrets and neglect of Shiva. Within a month, the children all leave Saleem, refusing to answer when he opens the midnight forum in his mind.

Saleem completely sidelines Shiva, and this does not sit well with the other children. In an abuse of his power, Saleem keeps Shiva's true identity from him, and makes the unilateral decision to remove him from the lives of the other children. Saleem rules over the children selfishly for his own gain, and he loses because of it.

As war between China and India builds, and Indians of Chinese descent endure racism and government internment, Ahmed and Amina finally enjoy a decent marriage. Ahmed has also begun to show Saleem affection again, and they are a happy family for the first time. Saleem's **nasal** congestion worsens, locking up completely, nearly suffocating him.

India further partitions itself, and in an outward display of racism, segregates the Indians of Chinese descent in response to their growing fear of China's contestation of the original Partition lines. As dissent builds, Saleem has a physical reaction, again underscoring his connection to his country.

As Indian armed forces continue to fall, China suddenly declares a ceasefire, content with gaining control of the Himalayas. The next day, Ahmed and Amina pack a picnic and head toward the beach with Saleem and Jamila Singer; however, they never make their picnic. Instead, they take Saleem to an ear, nose, and throat clinic to have his **nasal** passages surgically cleared.

Saleem's "nose goo" is his direct line of communication to the Midnight Children's Conference; without his snot, his telepathy is not possible. This loss mirrors India's loss as China permanently claims more of her land for their own country.

When Saleem wakes from his surgery, his sinuses are clear but his telepathy is gone. Amina finally convinces Ahmed to move to Pakistan, and after finally selling Buckingham Villa to Narlikar's women, they all board the *SS Sabarmati* and arrive in Karachi.

After the loss of his "nose goo" and his power, Saleem's connection to his country is weakened, and this is reflected in his move back to Pakistan, aboard Sabarmati's name sake ship.

BOOK 2: JAMILA SINGER

Living in Karachi in his aunt Alia's home, Saleem's clear **nose** and sinuses are now able to smell emotions. He smells Alia's hypocrisy and jealousy, despite her outward pleasantness. Alia has never forgiven Ahmed or Amina for their deception, and she is unable to hide her true feelings from Saleem, who now has "the powers of sniffing-out-the-truth."

Saleem is not completely powerless, and he senses Alia's revenge. This new information only adds to Saleem's critical eye regarding his mother and his opinion that she is a "loose woman" like Lila Sabarmati.

In his new city, Saleem cannot "forgive Karachi for not being Bombay." He misses his city, and this one feels "hopeless," having "grown too fast." Aunt Alia's house is in the "accusing shadow" of a minaret, and to Saleem, everything about the Muslim Pakistan screams "submission," a stark contrast to the "nonconformity of Bombay."

Saleem is India, after all, and he is uncomfortable in the young country of Pakistan. The minaret near Alia's house is a physical representation of the huge Islamic presence in the country, and it is all-consuming. Saleem is completely out of place in the religious state.

Soon after arriving in Karachi, Ahmed declares that the Sinais will now be new people. He decides to build a new home, an "American-style modern bungalow," and purchases a plot of land. He consecrates the new land with Saleem's umbilical cord and brine (preserved in a **pickle**-jar). Despite Ahmed's optimism, Saleem discovers that he has entered Pakistan from the wrong direction. Successful conquests to Pakistan have long since begun in the north, but Saleem has entered the country from the south-east.

Ahmed's newfound optimism and his efforts to become a new person is another reflection of postcolonial hybridity within the India subcontinent. Ahmed is going to make a real effort to be a Pakistani, and he is going to do it in an American-style bungalow. Ironically, the umbilical cord that he traditionally consecrates the land with may not even belong to his son.

Ahmed and Amina continue to finally enjoy a good marriage. Ahmed's loins have begun to thaw, and the two spend much time together. Ahmed opens a new business manufacturing and selling towels, which he names "Amina Brand." Together, they hope to "make the whole world clean and dry."

Since Ahmed is not interested in devoting himself to religion, he instead devotes himself to business, and this is a reflection of his secular, Indian side. Ahmed chooses to manufacture towels and make the world a cleaner place because cleanliness is next to godliness.

Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif arrives at aunt Alia's to hear Jamila sing. He has heard about her from General Zulfikar, and he hopes to make her famous. Ahmed agrees, and within six months, Jamila is famous.

Ironically, Jamila's Muslim persona is a fraud (deep down, she is still devoted to Christianity); however, the Pakistani people embrace her as their nation's daughter, and like Saleem, Jamila now represents an entire country.

Latif is soon a frequent presence at Alia's house. They begin to refer to him as Uncle Puffs, and during his regular visits, he encourages Saleem to marry one of his seven daughters. Amina is quick to change the subject and is not fond of the idea of her son marrying one of Latif's daughters.

Uncle Puffs' attempts to persuade Saleem to marry one of his daughters—any one of his daughters—is another example of the oppression of women in society. Uncle Puffs' offer, presumably, does not come with his daughters' consent.

Jamila's increasing fame leads to a public concert, but before Latif books it, he begins a rumor that Jamila has been the victim of a terrible disfiguring accident and must keep her face covered with a heavy silk chadar, which is held up by two muscular, sexless figures. In the center of the chadar, Latif cuts a three-inch hole, through which Jamila sings. She becomes "Pakistan's Angel," and is the daughter of an entire nation.

The Monkey's new identity as Jamila Singer is a step backward for women's rights. She actually goes back into purdah, and her traditional veil hides the deception of her true Christian identity.

Jamila is soon invited to sing at the home of President Ayub, and the entire family is invited. They accept, despite evidence that he is crooked. When Jamila sings, she "dedicates herself to patriotism."

Like Saleem, Jamila overlooks the ethics involved in associating with Ayub and instead goes with the flow. President Ayub, of course, came to power with Saleem's movements of Zulfikar's pepperpots.

Like most of the nation of Pakistan, Saleem begins to fall in love with Jamila. He runs errands for her, driving his scooter through the city to the order of Santa Ignacia, a catholic nunnery. There he buys leavened bread for his sister, which she "hankered constantly."

Similar to his attraction to Pia, Saleem develops an infatuation with Jamila. His conflicted identity confuses his feelings for his sister, and like the rest of Pakistan, he falls in love with her.

Saleem soon finds out about the death of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. The Indo-Pakistani relationship continues to deteriorate, leading to a closing of the boarders. Saleem and his family are unable to get to Agra to mourn Aadam and Reverend Mother, likewise, is unable to get to Pakistan.

The fact that her family is unable to mourn her husband's death is fine by Reverend Mother. She refuses to mourn him herself and is glad to be rid of him. Reverend Mother still resents Aadam for insisting she exit purdah and his aversion to her religion, and she never again speaks his name.

Stuck in the city, Saleem befriends a prostitute named Tai Bibi, who claims to be five hundred and twelve years old. The old prostitute is in complete control of her glands and is able to emit the smell of anyone on earth. Tai Bibi mimics the smells of all the women in Saleem's life, ending with Jamila Singer, correctly identifying Saleem's love for his sister.

Tai Bibi makes it possible for Saleem to interact sexually with his sister, mother, and Pia without negative repercussions and awkward interactions. Saleem's relationship with Tai Bibi is further proof of Saleem's struggle with his true identity.


In the northern princedom of Kif, a prince, or Nawab, arranges the marriage of his daughter to Zafar, General Zulfikar's son. Jamila Singer performs at their engagement party, where the Nawab's son, Mutasim, falls in love with Jamila and vows to see her face.

This entire passage is a reflection of the patriarchal power over women. The Nawab's daughter has no say in her marriage to Zafar, and Jamila is powerless once Mutasim vows to see her face.

As Jamila sings, a "hashashin wind" blows in from the north, making Saleem drowsy. The wedding guest begin to giggle uncontrollably and Zafar is so relaxed, he wets his pants. Mutasim attempts to get behind Jamila's chadar, and Latif escorts her to a private room.

The "hashashin wind" is laden with marijuana, and it exacerbates Zafar's incontinence and lowers their inhibitions. This is prime example of Rushdie's use of magical realism in storytelling.

Saleem later goes to Jamila's room to confess his love, and the hashashin wind has caused Mutasim to crawl in through Jamila's window. Saleem stops him and Jamila turns down his advances, and at last, Saleem confesses his feelings to his sister.

Even Saleem's inhibitions are gone, and he goes to Jamila. While he does save her from the advances of Mutasim, he is not exactly welcomed by Jamila either, and this makes very little difference to Saleem.

Jamila becomes upset with Saleem's confession, but he explains to her how his love is not wrong. Since they are not biological siblings, their blood is not the same. As Saleem speaks, he knows that his feelings are wrong. He realizes that even though "what he is saying is the literal truth, there were other truths which had become more important because they had been sanctified by time."

Despite their different blood, Saleem and Jamila are siblings, and Saleem does ultimately accept this. The realization that Jamila is his true sister reinforces his own true identity, and he grows even more ashamed of his "sister-love."

As Saleem leaves Jamila's room, he hears the daughter of the Nawab scream. She has had a dream in which her fiancé, on their wedding night, wet their marital bed. Disgusted, she resolves never to reach puberty so that she may forever avoid marrying Zafar.

The Nawab's daughter's refusal to menstruate in order to avoid marrying Zafar is a representation of her power and her extreme desire to not *become Zafar's wife. Avoiding puberty is the only way she is able to voice her wishes.*

BOOK 2: HOW SALEEM ACHIEVED PURITY

Following Aadam's death, Reverend Mother and Pia move to Pakistan. Reverend Mother does not mourn or mention Aadam, who had long since refused to move to Pakistan. The two women open a petrol station, and they do excellent business. Pia's beauty draws in customers, and once there, they are strangely compelled to stay. Drinking pink Kashmiri tea, the customers tell Reverend Mother their entire life stories.

Pia and Reverend Mother also dismantle traditional gender stereotypes. Together, they run a successful business—a business that happens to have a very masculine connotation—and they do it without any men. Their business has a feminine touch with pink tea and on-the-spot counseling, but they are nevertheless successful.

After Aadam's death, Saleem finds himself dreaming about Kashmir, even though he has never been there. His life in Karachi is becoming difficult, and for the first time in their lives, Saleem and Jamila avoid each other completely.

Saleem's conflicted identity parallels that of Aadam's, whose own identity was rooted in Kashmir. Despite confirming their relationship as true siblings, Jamila still exits Saleem's life.

Soon, Alia begins to work her revenge on Ahmed and Amina. She begins, like Mary Pereira and Reverend Mother, to stir her emotions into her cooking, and she feeds Saleem and his family her food infused with hate and revenge. The family becomes moody and distraught under the influence of Alia's cooking, and Jamila soon begins to avoid them all together. Ahmed's business begins to fail, and he soon suffers a stroke, turning into child, "capable of little more than dribbles and giggles."

Alia's cooking is another example of food's ability to elicit emotions and activate memories. Alia enacts her revenger through her cooking, finding power within the domestic realm. Additionally, Ahmed's stroke and the failure of his towel business is another example of the fragility of social class and effects of Saleem's metaphorical "Snakes and Ladders."

In January of 1965, Amina discovers that she is again pregnant, and she begins to rapidly age. As she worries and endures nightmares about the state of her unborn baby, Amina turns into an old woman.

Amina is exhausted, and finally pregnant, she is weakened and has lost her power—and her energy to keep fighting the patriarchy.

Zafar, still waiting for his fiancée, daughter of the Nawab, to reach puberty, is dispatched to Rann of Kutch, a disputed territory located in Pakistan. As Indian and Pakistani forces fought in the territory, the soldiers believe that they see ghosts fighting each other. Now, Zafar and the other Pakistani soldiers are tasked with occupying the boarder until new troops arrive.

Zafar's fiancé continues to exercise her power by refusing to menstruate. Zafar is deceived by both his fiancée and his father, whose smugglers dupe Zafar into believing they are ghosts, further humiliating him.

On his last night of occupation, Zafar sees an army of ghosts approach and cross the territory. Zafar is scared to death and sure he is about to die when he discovers that they are not actually ghosts. Instead, the men are smugglers, operating under the direction of General Zulfikar.

Presumably, Zulfikar is aware of the ghostly rumors, and still fails to inform his son of the truth. He is determined to humiliate Zafar at every turn, and Zafar's hatred for his father grows as he fights and defends his father's beloved Pakistan.

After returning from the Rann of Kutch, Zafar arrives at his father's home in Rawalpindi. Blaming Zulfikar for his awful experiences in the territory, Zafar slips into his father's room and murders him, slitting his throat with a "long, curved smuggler's knife."

Zafar's patricide has been brewing for years, and when he finally kills Zulfikar, his death is the metaphorical death of the patriarchy as well.

It is August 1965, and Saleem's life is about to change on account of the Indo-Pakistani War, which he claims is initiated for the sole purpose of destroying his entire family. As the war intensifies, fighting over the territory of Kashmir, it is one week before Saleem's eighteenth birthday. He waits to be drafted.

Saleem will be forced to fight against India—against his metaphorical self—and the fight worsens in Kashmir, the birthplace of Saleem's true identity.

On the night of September 22, air-raids take place all over Pakistan. Of the three bombs that hit Rawalpindi, the first hits and kills Reverend Mother and Pia, the second hits Zafar's jailhouse, effectively freeing him, and the third hits Emerald's house, killing her as well.

Notably, the bomb kills the all the women, but not Zafar. Not only is he spared, he is also freed. This too reflects the power of the patriarchy; the women are killed while Zafar is rewarded.

The bombs also hit Karachi, including the home of Uncle Puffs and his seven daughters. Another bomb falls on the home Alia, killing Saleem's entire family, including Ahmed, Amina, and their unborn child. The final bomb in Karachi falls on and destroys Ahmed's newly constructed split-level home.

Just as Saleem claims, the purpose of the air-raid is to wipe out his entire family—and anyone who could potentially become his family. India is punishing Saleem for defecting, and she (Mother India is depicted as a woman) is doing it by killing his family.

As Saleem runs around the blast-zone chaos, knocked back by the power of the explosion, Amina's old **spittoon**, her wedding gift from Rani, comes flying out of the fiery debris, striking Saleem on the back of the head. Saleem is suddenly and completely stripped of his memory and identity, restoring his innocence and purity.

The old spittoon is a metaphorical symbol of India, and, ironically, it is what knocks Saleem out. Through his amnesia and the stripping of his identity, Saleem is purified, and is now a much more suitable citizen for Pakistan.

BOOK 3: THE BUDDHA

Saleem begins to tell Padma the story of his time in the Pakistani army, claiming that Jamila sent him to army as punishment for loving her. Saleem's memory is still absent after being brained by the **spittoon**, and he is sent to a mysterious camp in the Murree Hills.

Saleem's amnesia enables his treason and allows him to fight against India. His suspicion that Jamila is to blame for his recruitment is unfounded and is reflective of Saleem's latent misogyny.

At the camp in the hills, Brigadier Iskandar rallies the three new troops of the Canine Unit for Tracking and Intelligence Activities (CUTIA), Ayooba Baloch, Farooq Rashid, and Shaheed Dar. He informs the new recruits that they will be working with the man-dog tracking down rebels.

As the man-dog, Saleem uses his power of midnight against India and tracks bombs for the Pakistanis. Saleem's moniker as the man-dog is demeaning, and Iskandar treats the troops poorly, reflecting the hierarchical nature of their squad.

Sitting under a tree holding a silver **spittoon** is Saleem, the CUTIA man-dog in the flesh. The three new recruits know little about him, only that he's from an important family, has a highly susceptible **nose**, and is the brother of famed songbird, Jamila Singer. The three soldiers quickly nickname Saleem "the Buddha," or "old man."

Saleem clings to the old spittoon because, as a symbol of Old India, it represents his true identity as an Indian, not a Pakistani. Of course, Saleem doesn't remember this, but he nevertheless keeps the spittoon close.

Saleem begins to irritate Ayooba Baloch, since the man-dog doesn't seem to track very much at all. Instead, Saleem sits under a tree with his **spittoon**, smiling. The irritation in Saleem's camp mirrors the irritation present in Pakistan, as Sheikh Mujib, the leader of an independence movement in Bangladesh, begins to advocate for his own government.

Saleem doesn't seem to work at all and he smiles smugly as Pakistan loses ground to a self-governed Bangladesh. Deep down, Saleem appears to know who he is, and his reaction reflects this.

Soon, twenty CUTIA units are flown into Dacca, the capital of Bangladesh, including Shaheed Dar, Farooq Rashid, Ayooba Baloch, and Saleem, along with sixty thousand other troops. Once in the city, Saleem leads the troops to Sheikh Mujib. Saleem is given one of Mujib's old shirts and sniffs him out. According to Saleem, "it's easy when you've got the smell."

Pakistan's response in Dacca is overkill. Surprisingly, Saleem never questions orders and willingly sniffs out and gives up the leader of the Bangladeshi resistance. Thanks to his amnesia, Saleem becomes a good Pakistani soldier, and his is able to ignore his true identity.

Padma is disappointed in Saleem for leading the troops to Sheikh Mujib, but Saleem never questions his actions. As the troops lead Mujib out of town, Saleem witnesses Pakistani troops burning the town, which is already riddled with bullets. As they drive by, soldiers beat and rape the citizens.

Despite representing the land of the pure, the Pakistanis' behavior is deplorable, and Saleem is complicit in this. Without knowledge of his true identity, Saleem has also lost his moral compass.

In response to the Dacca invasion, ten million refugees pour over the Pakistani border from Bangladesh into India, making it "the biggest migration in the history of the human race." As this mass exodus occurs, Saleem and his unit begin tracking an unknown enemy, and Saleem leads his team directly into the Sundarbans, a large and dense jungle on the banks of Bangladesh.

Saleem still doesn't know who he is, but he can no longer tolerate taking orders in the Pakistani army, and he goes off tracking an imaginary enemy to avoid further orders that are sure to offend his morals. Saleem's actions are evidence of his true identity in the face of his amnesia.

BOOK 3: IN THE SUNDARBANS

Saleem admits that there is not an enemy rebel to track and he has only led the boys away from Dacca to avoid following further orders. Padma is relieved that Saleem has come to his senses; however, now the four soldiers are lost in the jungle.

While Saleem may have protected their morals, he endangers the soldiers' lives by crossing partition lines into Bangladesh. Again, this is a unilateral decision made by Saleem, and it represents his belief in his inherent power.

Suddenly, a snake bites Saleem on his heel, and Shaheed Dar crushes it with a stick. The three boys wait for days for Saleem to die, but he doesn't. He finally regains consciousness, and remembering his lost history, he begins to tell Ayooba, Farooq, and Shaheed his many stories. Saleem remains, however, unable to remember his name.

Once again, Saleem's transformation in identity is made possible by snake venom, which metaphorically represents a transformation. Rushdie further argues the importance of storytelling when Saleem tells the soldiers his story.

Moving yet deeper into the jungle, the three boys begin to hear the voices of their past and distant families, along with the continued voices of their victims. The boys pack their ears with mud and are deafened by the insects and jungle-droppings embedded in the mud. Saleem leads them to a Hindu temple of Kali, where they find respite from the rain and fall asleep.

The soldiers' deafness mirrors Saleem's own deafness. Not only is he deaf to the voices of the Midnight Children's Conference, he is still unable to hear out of his left ear, the lasting punishment from his father after his confession of the voices. The temple, out in the middle of nowhere, represents the wide-spread presence of the Hindu faith in India.

They wake to four women standing over them who take them in their arms, satisfying them over and over again. Saleem and his team pass many days in the temple, rarely leaving, and they suddenly begin to turn hollow and translucent. Saleem notices the remains of other bodies in the temple and realizes that this is "the last and worst of the jungles tricks." The women are holding them hostage, and if they don't leave, they will surely die.

The women intend to entice the soldiers to their death, and they use their bodies and their sex as a source of their power. This too disrupts gender stereotypes in society—the women have complete control over the men while in the temple.


Saleem manages to lead Ayooba, Farooq, and Shaheed Dar out of the temple and back to their small boat, where a tidal wave suddenly picks them up and washes them out of the jungle. Saleem later notes that no tidal waves were recorded at the time.

This again makes Saleem appear as an unreliable narrator. If no wave was recorded, how can his story be believed? According to Saleem, genuine truth is found within stories, even when they seem unbelievable.

Out of the jungle and in a deserted village, Ayooba, Farooq, and Shaheed Dar are still deafened from the mud, and they noisily walk about the village, speaking loudly to each other. Saleem sits down, upset and crying over his inability to remember his name, and Ayooba stoops to comfort him. Suddenly, a sniper's bullet shoots through Ayooba's head, narrowly missing Saleem.

Ayooba's death is similar to the death of Shiva's mother, Vanita, who dies because the medical staff are too busy fussing with Ahmed's toe after she gives birth. As Ayooba fusses over a distraught Saleem, it makes him vulnerable to the sniper's bullet. He dies tending to Saleem, and this is a reflection of Saleem's importance and superiority. Of course, Ayooba is a man as well, but he is still disposable compared to Saleem.

After escaping, the three men return to Dacca, where corpses rot in plain view. Saleem, Shaheed Dar, and Farooq are told of the worsening war and a formidable Indian soldier with a huge pair of knees. Suddenly, Farooq is hit by a sniper's bullet, and he is killed instantly.

The violence of the war is obvious, and when the men are told of the Indian soldier with the big knees, Shiva suddenly becomes responsible for all the destruction in Dacca, living up to his identity as a god of war and destruction.


Saleem soon notices a small pyramid in the middle of a field and discovers that it is a pile of enemy soldiers, and one is still alive. Surprisingly, the soldiers are none other than Eyeslice, Hairoil, and Sonny, who begins to talk to Saleem. Sonny soon dies, but Saleem claims that "the purpose of that entire war had been to reunite me with an old life."

Eyeslice, Hairoil, and Sonny represent the youth lost during war. Additionally, Saleem's belief that the war has been fought solely for his benefit reflects his self-centeredness and belief in his own superiority.

BOOK 3: SAM AND THE TIGER

On December 15, 1971, Tiger Niazi, the Pakistani in charge of the war in Bangladesh, surrenders to Sam Manekshaw of the Indian army. According to Saleem, the fighting has cost Pakistan "half her navy, a third of her army, a quarter of her air force" and "more than half her population."

This passage reflects the death and devastation that came along with Pakistan's war in Bangladesh. Again, this war was fought because of Saleem, and he becomes responsible for the death and destruction.

Saleem and Shaheed Dar arrive in Dacca and find the city demolished. They are met with the atrocities of war and are surrounded by death and destruction. Saleem enters a crumbling building, while Shaheed remains out in the street, surveying the damage. Suddenly, a grenade is launched in his direction, and Shaheed is blown in half. Saleem drags Shaheed to the cover of a nearby mosque, and his screams are echoed throughout the streets. Shaheed soon dies, and while Saleem still has his **spittoon**, he is unable to remember his name.

The nearby mosque is a representation of the Muslim faith, and to a greater extent, Pakistan. Shaheed Dar's echoed screams through the streets represent Pakistan's defeat in the conflict. Saleem's inability to remember his name indicates that his identity is not yet whole, and because of this, he still clings to the spittoon, a physical symbol of his Indian identity.

A special I.A.F. troop soon arrives in the city, arriving just before the Indian troops. The troop carries with it entertainers from the famous magicians' ghetto in Delhi, including Picture Singh, a giant man weighing nearly two hundred and fifty pound, known as "the Most Charming Man In The World" on account of his snake-charming abilities, and he is accompanied by Parvati-the-witch.

This passage brings Parvati back into Saleem's life. Without her, he would never remember his name and his identity would never be complete. This passage also introduces Picture Singh, who will play an important role in keeping Parvati's son alive during the climax of the story.

Parvati entertains the crowd by making them disappear inside a wicker basket, a skill made possible by her gift of sorcery bestowed upon her by her midnight birth. When she sees Saleem, she becomes excited, calling out to him by name, and he suddenly remembers who he is.

Without Parvati's help, Saleem is unable to remember his name. As usual, it is a woman who saves Saleem, and this highlights the importance of women within the story.

Parvati clings to Saleem, claiming that now that she has him, she won't let him go. As the Indian army arrives and carts countless Pakistani soldiers to P.O.W. camps, Parvati smuggles Saleem out of Dacca and back to India, hidden in her magic wicker basket.

Despite his Indian identity, Saleem will become a prisoner of war if he is found by the Indian soldiers. Ironically, Saleem's own country sees him as the enemy.

BOOK 3: THE SHADOW OF THE MOSQUE

As Saleem continues his story, he notes that he now has twenty-six **pickle**-jars present for each of the chapters in his story. Padma continues to enjoy the story and Saleem's company. She talks of a Kashmiri vacation together, and for the first time, she has a "desire for legitimacy" and a "hope-for-marriage." Sadly, Saleem's cracks are worsening, and he must finish his story—Padma will have to wait.

The pickle-jars which hold Saleem's chapters are a physical representation of his attempt to preserve his history and stories. Finishing his story is the most important thing to Saleem, even more important than Padma.

When Saleem returns to India, Indira Gandhi's New Congress Party is in full power. Saleem is struck by a sudden sympathy for his country, and he vows to save the country from Mrs. Gandhi's grip.

Indira Gandhi' hold on India is foretold in Saleem's nightmare about the Widow, and now it is coming true.

Saleem stays for a few days in the ghetto, a guest of Picture Singh, but he soon remembers that his uncle, Mustapha Aziz, lives nearby in the city of Delhi. He hopes to stay with Mustapha for a while and recover from his recent trials.

Saleem is not entirely comfortable living in the poverty of the ghetto, and this is a reflection of his own privileged, middle-class life.

Parvati tells Saleem that she also ran into Shiva in Dacca when he came through with the army procession. Shiva, a famous war hero, gave Parvati a lock of his hair, and she hopes that he will come and visit the ghetto so that they may all be together.

Shiva, named for the god of war and destruction, is living up to his identity. Parvati does not know about the dissent between Saleem and Shiva, as Saleem has kept the truth from her.

Mustapha spends his free time researching genealogies and lineages. One day, Saleem sees a folder in his office labeled TOP SECRET with the title PROJECT M.C.C.

Saleem is convinced that the folder is information on the Midnight Children's Conference. The Conference represents a free and diverse India, and to Saleem, the folder is proof that the government wants to destroy them.

While at Mustapha's, Saleem also definitively learns about the deaths of his family and the recent disappearance of Jamila Singer. When Mustapha's wife Sonia learns that Saleem fought on the Pakistani side of the war, she refuses to feed him and wishes him gone; yet Mustapha insists that he can stay. Saleem begins a four-hundred-day mourning period, to honor each of his fallen family members.

Sonia views Saleem as a Pakistani and a traitor. Saleem's Muslim faith (which he still claims not to practice) dictates his long mourning period, proof again of the effects of religion in even a secular life.

Following Saleem's disappearance during the war, Jamila spoke out against the Pakistani government and was forced to go into hiding. Jamila slips, undetected, behind the watchful walls of the order of Santa Ignacia, dedicating herself to Christianity and leavened bread.

Jamil finally surrenders to her true identity. As one of the new sisters of Santa Ignacia, her Christian faith is realized, and the order provides much needed sanctuary.

On the four hundred and eighteenth day of Saleem's stay in Mustapha's home, a man with "a mouth as fleshy as a woman's labia" comes to dinner. Saleem thinks that he recognizes him, and the man joins Mustapha in his office.

The man who visits Mustapha is Sanjay Gandhi, the Prime Minister's son. Notably, Sanjay helps to organize the sterilization program, and this is reflected in his "labia mouth." His description also serves as an insult. Just like Zulfikar, Saleem views feminine insults as the worst possible affront.

That night, Parvati comes to visit Saleem. She tells him that she has been wanting him to come and visit her in the ghetto because she has no one to talk to. She can't tell the others, including Picture Singh, about her true powers, and she is able to talk to Saleem.

Most of the other magical people in the ghetto are phonies; but Parvati possesses real magic. There is a long history the world over of women being persecuted as witches, and Parvati must carefully guard her secret.

Later that same night, Sonia and Mustapha kick Saleem out of their house after they catch him in bed with Parvati. Parvati is waiting for him in the street, and together, they return to the magicians' ghetto.

Parvati has been loyal to Saleem (like most of the women in his life) since they were children, and this continues in adulthood. This highlights the importance of women in Saleem's life.

At the magician's ghetto, Parvati shares her magic with Saleem in the shadow of a mosque. She is a skilled witch of "white magic," and can cure sickness and counter poison. With Parvati, Saleem's hair begins to finally grow back, and the birthmarks on his face fade; however, he is never able to "do for her the thing she desired most." Saleem claims that he is under a bewitchment which has stolen his sex.

Despite being in the Delhi ghetto and out of Pakistan, Saleem still can't escape the Muslim faith, and the mosque near the ghetto is proof of this. Parvati's use of "white magic" means that she is a good witch, and by association, a good woman.

Parvati develops a perpetual pout, and Picture Singh decides it is because she wants to get married. He asks Saleem if he is interested, but Saleem claims that he can't marry Parvati because he is unable to father children. Picture Singh warns him, "One must not lie about such things, captain. To lie about one's manhood is bad, bad luck. Anything could happen."

Picture Singh's assumption that Parvati is missing a husband and wants to get married is more evidence of the patriarchy. Singh assumes that Parvati wants to get married and serve her husband. He never considers that she is capable of more or that her pout is indicative of something else.

BOOK 3: A WEDDING

Saleem continues his story, telling a captivated Padma that on February 23, 1975, he marries Parvati-the-witch. Padma immediately becomes upset, but Saleem quickly cuts her off. He reminds her that "women have made him" but "also unmade him." He quickly recaps the women of his life to an irritated Padma, who claims, "that's too much women!"

This passage reflects the importance of women in Saleem's life. He owes everything he is to women, and Padma is clearly jealous.

Saleem agrees, thinking also of the Widow, and claims that even "the great cosmic energy" is "represented as a female organ." According to Saleem, much like Mother India herself, "there is no escape" from women.

According to Saleem, the ultimate cosmic power which rules the world is a woman, and so is India.

Saleem states that Parvati "took her destiny into her own hands." Knowing of Saleem's impotence, she uses her magic to summon Shiva to the magicians' ghetto, and when he arrives to her shack, he doesn't quite understand why.

Parvati uses her power as a woman to get what she wants. Saleem won't marry her since he can't father her children, and Parvati finds a way around this using Shiva—the other half of Saleem.

According to Saleem, Shiva is successful both in the military and socially, and he frequents parties, dances, and other social events. He is handsome, and like Saleem, is cursed with too many women. Shiva is a "notorious seducer" of high society women, and he has had many—and has fathered many children as well. He suffers from a "curious fault," however, and loses interest in women the moment they become pregnant.

Shiva's sexual exploits are a reflection of his namesakes, the gods of procreation and destruction. Ironically, despite being named for his ability to father children, Shiva abandons his children and their mothers, which is just what Parvati is hoping for.

On May 15, 1974, Shiva is inexplicably struck by a desire to see Parvati-the-witch, and he immediately goes to the magicians' ghetto. Shiva takes Parvati in his arms and makes love to her. After, he brings her back to his living quarters, and they spend several enjoyable months together.

Parvati uses her white magic to summon Shiva to her. Despite his strong knees and military experience, Parvati is in complete control of Shiva.

On September 12, Parvati tells Shiva that she is having his child, and his temperament immediately changes. He begins to yell at her and beat her, and he takes to sleeping with as many prostitutes as he possibly can. Suddenly, Parvati releases Shiva from her spell, and he deposits her, once and for all, back at the magicians' ghetto.

This is Parvati's ultimate plan, and Shiva plays right into it. Again, he frequents prostitutes and his physical abuse of Parvti suggests that he is guilty of killing the prostitutes years earlier.

According to Saleem, by casting a spell on Shiva, Parvati "invalidated his only defense against marrying her." Upon her return to the ghetto, Parvati stands, visibly pregnant, on the steps of the mosque, and it is not long before the other women in the ghetto begin to shun her and her illegitimate child. As Parvati is insulted by others in the ghetto, widespread civil unrest unfolds all around India.

Parvati stands on the steps of the mosque because she wants the people of the mosque to see her condition. She knows that she will be shunned, and she does so to manipulate Saleem into marrying her. Again, she has ultimate power over Saleem, just as she did with Shiva.

Picture Singh convinces Saleem that the only way to preserve Parvati's honor and solve his own problem of infertility is to marry her. Saleem agrees, and after Parvati converts to Islam, they are married. Saleem changes her name to Laylah, a name from his dreams, and together, they are set to have a child.

Notably, Saleem forces Parvati to convert to Islam, and this suggests that religion is more important to Saleem than he is willing to admit. Additionally, Saleem's renaming of Parvati is a reflection of his own patriarchal power. It also echoes his own father, Ahmed, changing Mumtaz's name to Amina.

As public discontent with Indira Gandhi grows, Parvati begins the first stages of labor, which in total, lasts thirteen days. During this time, Mrs. Gandhi is found guilty campaign malpractice, yet despite public outcry, she remains in power. Riots and arrests ensue, and Parvati continues to labor.

Similar to Saleem's birth, Parvati's labor unfolds alongside a significant historical event. Like Saleem, these historical events connect Parvati's child to the country of India.

On June 25, 1975, just as Indira Gandhi is declaring a state of emergency, Parvati gives birth to Aadam Sinai, a perfectly formed baby—with the exception of a pair of "colossally huge" ears. Like Saleem, Aadam's birth has historical significance, and he is "handcuffed to history" as well, his "own destiny chained" to that of his country.

Aadam's large ears echo Saleem's large nose. Parvati's baby is named for Saleem's grandfather, and despite not being his biological son, there are several physical similarities—just like there were between Saleem and Aadam Aziz.

BOOK 3: MIDNIGHT

Saleem's story continues in the winter of 1975-6, in the middle of Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency, where young Aadam Sinai is sick with tuberculosis. There is "something darkly metaphorical" about his illness, and Saleem knows that Aadam will never be well as long as the Emergency lasts.

Like Saleem's own connection to India, Aadam physically manifests his country's turmoil as an illness. The Emergency is creating considerable social unrest, and Aadam is dying.

Saleem's **nose** smells trouble, and soon the Constitution is altered to give Indira Gandhi absolute power over India. He also smells something rotten, something he discerns as "retributive knees."

Saleem's power is not completely gone. His nose is still able to sense trouble—just like Aadam Aziz's was.

As Aadam's illness rages on, he doesn't grow and he makes no sound. He doesn't cry or cough, and he appears to hold all of his sound inside himself. Saleem soon smells danger again, and he knows that the "truest, deepest motive behind" Mrs. Gandhi's Emergency is to destroy the children of midnight.

By destroying the children of midnight, Indira Gandhi metaphorically destroys India, and the diverse nation it has become. Without the children, she will be better able to control the masses.

Vans and bulldozers soon arrive on the magicians' ghetto, and under the auspices of the "civic beautification program," an operation under the Sanjay Youth Central Committee, they must all relocate, as the ghetto has been declared a public eyesore. Beds and surgical equipment is unloaded from the vans, and volunteers move about.

The Sanjay Youth Central Committee is headed by Sanjay Gandhi, and it is a cover for his sterilization program. Sanjay's sinister program accomplishes several things; it controls India's massive population, stops the poor from reproducing, and ensures, specifically, that the children of midnight will not reproduce. The Committee is a representation of postcolonial India's classist society.

A rumor quickly spreads around the ghetto: "Sterilization is being performed!" and soon, the rioting begins. Fires are started, people are assaulted, and troops are soon sent in. Major Shiva has arrived as well, and he is looking only for Saleem, who he quickly pulls into a van. Saleem believes that Gandhi's sterilization program is a distraction that will enable Shiva to destroy him.

Saleem is sure he will be killed. After all, sterilization is no threat to him. Saleem's assumption that the sterilization program exists simply to destroy him and the other children is proof of his self-absorbed nature.

While captured by the Widow, Saleem tells his captors everything they want to know, including all the information about the children of midnight, and they tell him that Parvati is dead. Saleem is held prisoner during the Emergency, a fate shared by "either thirty thousand or a quarter of a million" people during the same time.

Obviously, there is a huge difference between thirty thousand and a quarter of a million. This true statistic of Indira Gandhi's emergency is a reflection of the marginalization and oppression present in postcolonial India. The government cared so little about the people killed that they couldn't be bothered to officially count them.

During his imprisonment, Saleem speaks a letter aloud to the other children of midnight. He tells them that we all "get the leaders we deserve," and he blames himself for the state of their nation, claiming, "I should never have dreamed of purpose."

Saleem is beginning to recognize his full complicity in the events of his life. India is divided because Saleem and the other children have divided them.

On New Years' Day, Saleem is visited by the Widow's Hand, and by the end of the day, each member of the Midnight Children's Conference, including Saleem, is permanently and irreversibly sterilized.

The Widow's Hand, another historical character in the novel, is in charge of sterilization. In 1976, over six million men alone were forcibly sterilized during the Emergency.

Saleem is released from his imprisonment in March of 1977, along with the other four hundred and twenty children of midnight. Saleem returns to the ghetto, but it is gone, and he can't find Picture Singh. All of the children of midnight silently depart, and they never see each other again.

Without the ability to procreate, the children of midnight cannot produce more magical children, and their purpose will never be realized.

BOOK 3: ABRACADABRA

Saleem claims that Shiva is still alive, and he is terrified. They still have "unfinished business" that will persist as long as Saleem lives. For now, Padma wants to be married in Kashmir, and Saleem agrees.

Marrying Padma in Kashmir represents a return to Saleem's roots. Saleem says throughout his story that men go to Kashmir to appreciate its beauty or die, and he intends to do both.

Saleem continues his story, and after his release from the Widow's imprisonment, he returns to the magicians' ghetto and finds Picture Singh there with his son, Aadam Sinai. Under the care of Durga, a local washerwoman, Aadam has been nursed back to health and there remains no sign of his tuberculosis.

Durga is another example of a strong woman. Her breastmilk has healing properties and she alone is responsible for Aadam's good health.

Picture Singh has fallen in love with Durga, and it is not difficult to understand why. Each day, new stories fall from Durga's lips; however, Saleem is no longer interested in stories, and he soon discovers that Durga is a succubus. Reunited with his son, Saleem becomes convinced of his impending death.

The fact that Durga is a succubus (a demon who has sex with sleeping men) somehow cancels out her previous good deeds. A succubus is evil, and this association highlights the sexist nature of Saleem's story.

Young Aadam Sinai, at less than two years old, requires "perpetual attention" from Saleem, and he keeps him busy. According to Saleem, Aadam is part of a new generation of magical children, one that will "not look for their fate in prophecy or the stars," but instead will "forge it in the implacable furnaces of the wills."

Aadam introduces the new generation of magical children, and his birth represents the ultimate failure of Indira Ghandi to destroy the children of midnight and a unified India. Aadam symbolizes optimism—he will accomplish what Saleem couldn't.

Picture Singh hears of "the existence of a rival" snake-charmer in Bombay, and he convinces Saleem to return to the city with him and Aadam Sinai in search of the famous snake-charmer. Saleem agrees, and he is soon on his way back to Bombay.

Picture Singh's rival does not present any real threat to Singh's status as the best snake-charmer; rather, he exists solely to get Saleem back to Bombay—and Mary Pereira, another missing piece of his identity.

When they arrive in the Bombay, the city has greatly changed and barely resembles the Bombay of Saleem's youth. Most of the stores he knows are gone, and up on the hill where Methwold's Estate used to stand, a tall, pink, skyscraper obelisk stands instead.

Narlikar's women have been successful in building their pillar to business and progress. The tall obelisk skyscraper, clearly a phallic symbol, is ironically colored a feminine pink, and it is visible proof of the women's power.

Saleem and Picture Singh arrive at the Metro Cub Club with Aadam Sinai, in search of Picture Singh's famous competition. They are led to a backroom by a woman who walks with her eyes closed, stating, "Here you are in a world without faces or names; here people have no memories, families or past; here is for *now*, for nothing except right now."

The Metro Cub Club's initials, M. C. C., connect it magically to the Midnight Children's Conference, as it too exists outside of time, just like the midnight hour. Saleem's name and identity do not matter in this club; here they are outside the hierarchical constraints of society.

Picture Singh soon meets his opponent, Maharaja of Cooch Naheen, and the two quickly begin to charm all manner of snakes. They both manage "impossible feats" with their snakes, but ultimately, it is Picture Singh who manages to "knot a king cobra around Maharaja's neck, and Maharaja immediately gives up, declaring Picture Singh the winner.

Maharaja of Cooch Naheen is Hindi, and it loosely translates to Ruler of Nothing, reflecting the club's theme of nothingness. Singh has no real danger of losing his title to Maharaja—he exists simply to bring Saleem back to Bombay.

Afterward, a waitress brings Saleem and Picture Singh bowls of bright green chutney, and Saleem immediately recognizes the taste. The waitress tells him the chutney has come from Bragaza **Pickles**, a factory located north of town, in the area of the old Methwold's Estate. Saleem takes off running, leaving Picture Singh behind.

Saleem immediately recognizes the taste of the chutney because it is, unmistakably, Mary Pereira's chutney. This harkens back to the ability of food to elicit emotions and trigger memory, in a way, becoming its own form of storytelling.

Arriving at the factory, Saleem meets a feisty Padma for the first time, and standing at the top of the stairs is his former ayah, Mary Pereira, the owner of Bragaza **Pickles**. She lives in the pink obelisk, which is owned by Narlikar's women, with her sister Alice, who also convinced the women to invest in her sister's chutney.

By convincing Narlikar's women to invest in Mary's chutney, Alice finally atones for running of with Joseph D'Costa and prompting Mary's jealousy, which resulted in Saleem and Shiva's switch.

As Saleem visits with Mary, Aadam Sinai finally utters his first word: "Abracadabra." Saleem decides to stay on at the factory with Mary, who becomes Aadam's ayah, and becomes the manager of the **pickle** factory, overseeing the all-woman staff.

Aadam's first word is proof of his magical identity, and he will, presumably, discover the purpose of the children of midnight.

Saleem vows to preserve his stories the same way he preserves Mary's chutney, and he labels the last jar "Abracadabra," indicating the end of his story. Saleem immediately decides to begin writing his future, and he starts by describing his wedding in Kashmir, where he crumbles into six hundred million pieces of dust and is trampled on by Aadam Sinai and the other guests.

The fact that Saleem begins to write his future suggests that he has control and purpose. Like his son, the writing of Saleem's future implies that he is an active participant in it, and that it will be "forged by his will." Ironically, Saleem still writes his own death into his future, just the way he predicted it, at the age of thirty-one. Technically, Saleem and the Midnight Children's Conference completely failed their objective and millions of people were horribly affected; however, with Aadam comes the "virulent disease of optimism," and there is hope for a unified India.

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