# Rushdie's Domain

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In this project, I explore the topic of cultural hybridity in relation to identity and nation formation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. I focus on characters Saleem, Tai, Shiva, the Widow, and others as figures of either resistance, plurality, or fragmentation. Ultimately, I articulate the positive and inevitable aspects of hybridity of both nation and identity in a post-colonial context and explore the definition of autonomy within this framework.

In his novel *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie writes a personal, subjective account of his experience with nation, a story in which the outer or political domain is pushed to the margins in order to make space for a true post-colonial nation, the story by and of its own people. Saleem and his experiences are constantly placed at the center of the text, while historical dates and facts are faulty and subject to misremembering. After colonialism manages to destroy and fragment entire cultures and their own living histories, Rushdie arrives to pick up the pieces and work them into a coherent pluralized existence. Saleem can be read as a figure of hybridity, in that he represents the multiple aspects of nation, all of which occur in conjunction with national happenings of the political domain. Tai the boatman can stand as a figure of resistance to this notion of hybridity by refusing to be stabilized or acclimate to a post-colonial nation, preferring the pre-colonial. Shiva, similarly lacking in English blood, represents the refusal to hybridize and the unavoidable fragmentation that exists as a result of the colonizer's presence. In which of these cases in the novel is identity presented as positive and necessary? Why are both Tai and Shiva presented as negative, or unwilling to hybridize and adapt? What is the novel's value regarding identity? What does Saleem represent? Like *Midnight's Children,* Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* centers around Emperor Akbar, a character who like Saleem is "born into plurality" (*Enchantress* 31). Akbar, like Saleem, is a "swallower of worlds, this many-

headed monster" (*Enchantress* 30). Just as Saleem identifies himself as "mysteriously handcuffed to history" (Rushdie, *Midnight* 3), Akbar considers himself "the apogee of his people's past and present, and the engine of their future" (*Enchantress* 31). Metaphorically, both of them are representative of Rushdie's own sense of identity in their support of the "culture of inclusion" he longs for by contributing to the "grand syncretization of the earth, its sciences, its arts, its loves, its differences, its problems, its varieties, its philosophies, its sports, its whims" (*Enchantress* 317).

In this project, I use various essays written by post-colonial theorists to help define the phenomenon of nation formation and its effects on identity. I first refer to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* in order to point out the problematic notion of confining any national identity to Eurocentric standards. I then refer to Partha Chatterjee's responding essay "Whose Imagined Community?" in order to set up the distinction between the inner, personal domain and the outer, political domain. Rushdie seems to figure a way to situate himself somewhere in the middle of these two domains, ultimately leading to the creation of his own personal identity of many-ness and hybridity. Other theoretical sources that I turn to for articulation and framing include Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. I also elaborate on the historical context of the novel and study the parallels between events in the text and real-life events in the political sphere (such as Partition, state of Emergency, etc.).

## Young & Old

Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* is the story of a boy named Saleem Sinai living throughout the tumultuous events of India in the latter half of the twentieth century. The

novel explores the multitudinous effects that national affairs have on individuals, as well as the effects that individual internalization of these affairs have on the nation. Saleem is born "at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence," claiming his "destinies as indissolubly chained to those of my country" (*Midnight* 3). His birth coincides with the appointing of Jawaharlal Nehru as India's first prime minister, a known supporter of secular democracy and equality. In the novel, following his birth, Nehru writes in a letter to Saleem "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 closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own" (*Midnight* 139). What may initially come off as a contradiction, the idea of being both ancient and eternally young is precisely what the novel seeks to support, the concept of a new nation and an ancient culture. Saleem internalizes both the ancient roots of India, passed onto him from his Indian street performing biological mother Vanita, and also the recent effect of British colonialism on the nation, passed onto him from his English biological father William Methwold. The mingling of blood from two separate races within Saleem mirrors the inevitability of the creation of hybridized identity within post-colonial nations, which are both old and new. The birth of Saleem in the novel is synonymous with India attaining a new or different sense of identity after gaining independence from Britain. For Rushdie, this is the moment when the fragments of colonial occupation can begin to shift and fuse back together in the post-colonial imagination.

## Anderson's Imagining The Nation

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson speaks of the nation as being "imagined as sovereign" (7) at a precise moment in history under a certain set of conditions. He sets out some

"fundamental cultural conceptions" and their influence on people's imaginations, which give rise to the possibility of nation formation in Europe and the Americas. The first of his three lost cultural conceptions is "the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth" (36). He insists that with the establishment of print-capitalism, language was able to be stabilized to the point of allowing "rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (36). This idea is not an objective fact of nation, as it relies on the premise of monolingualism, which only exists in official manuscripts. When Saleem crashes "down into the mouth of the march" of the language riots in Bombay,

> smiles with good teeth surround me. They are not friendly smiles. "Look, look, a little laad-sahib comes down to join us from the big rich hill!" In Marathi which I hardly understand, it's my worst subject at school, and the smiles asking, "You want to join S.M.S., little princeling?" And I, just about knowing what's being said, but dazed into telling the truth, shake my head No. And the smiles, "Oho! The young nawab does not like our tongue! What does he like?" And another smile, "Maybe Gujarati! You speak Gujarati, my lord?" But my Gujarati was as bad as my Marathi; I only knew one thing in the marshy tongue of Kathiawar; and the smiles, urging, and the fingers, prodding, "Speak, little master! Speak some Gujarati!"—-so I told them what I knew, a rhyme I'd learned from Glandy Keith Colaco at school, which he used when he was bullying Gujarati boys, a rhyme designed to make fun of the speech rhythms of the language: 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!* (*Midnight* 218)

Anderson's notion of stabilizing language through print-capitalism falls short when applied to the polyglot India shown through Saleem's eyes. The anger and violence he witnesses when "language marchers demanded the partition of the state of Bombay along linguistic boundaries" (*Midnight* 191) is a direct result of English imperialism which carries over into Indian independence. Anderson's theory does not consider the many native languages and dialects of India, nor does it consider the effects of colonialism on national identity. Saleem's experience with the Gujarati and Marathi speaking marchers opens up the novels language to the realm of culture and politics when he claims, "the two parties fell upon one another with no little zeal, and to the tune of my little rhyme the first of the language riots got under way, fifteen killed, over three hundred wounded" (*Midnight* 219). Given the negative effects of Saleem's participation in the riots, it is evident why Rushdie chooses to write in English rather than one of the various nationally charged languages or dialects of India. As Saleem begins to telepathically communicate with the other children of midnight, he comes to find

> there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from 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 walls of my skull. Only later, when I began to probe, did I learn that below the surface transmissions—-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. (*Midnight* 192)

These so-called thought-forms, which are able to transcend the trappings of language and the "polyglot frenzy" (*Midnight* 192) of Saleem's mind, point to Rushdie's method of bending English in such a way as to preserve the India he longs for. Saleem's identity is undeniably half-

English, his mingled blood indicative of India's inseparable relationship to England. By creating a narrative of nation that aims to embody autonomy despite colonial residue, Rushdie's decision to engage with the English language rather than condemn it supports the idea that "in post-colonial texts the inscription or intimation of the vernacular modality of local speech is one of the most important strategies of appropriation" (Ashford 243).

The very rhythm of the novel works to "reproduce the traditional techniques of the Indian oral narrative tradition" (Ashcroft 181). Rushdie's method "of circling back from the present to the past, of building tale within tale, and persistently delaying climaxes are all features of traditional narration and orature" (Ashcroft 181). He engulfs the language of the colonizer and molds it to the non-linear "shape of the oral narrative" (Ashcroft 181). When Amina Sinai goes to see Shri Ramram Seth "sitting cross-legged, six inches above the ground" (*Midnight* 92), she is subject to his "sing-song, high-pitched" (*Midnight* 96) prophecy of baby Saleem, as follows,

> newspapers praise him, two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him—-but, crowds will shove him! Sisters will weep; cobra will creep . . ." Ramram, circling fasterfaster, while four cousins murmur, "What is this, baba?" and, "Deo, Shiva, guard us!" While Ramram, "Washing will hide him—-voices will guide him! Friends mutilate him—-blood will betray him! And Amina Sinai, "What does he mean? I don't understand—-Lifafa Das—-what has got into him?" But, inexorably, whirling egg-eyed around her statue-still presence, goes Ramram Seth: "Spittoons will brain him—-doctors will drain him—jungle will claim him—-wizards reclaim him! Soldiers will try him—-tyrants will fry him . . ." While Amina begs for explanations and the cousins fall into a hand-flapping frenzy of helpless alarm because something has taken over and nobody dares touch Ramram Seth

> as he whirls to his climax: "He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! *And he will die . . . before he is dead.* (*Midnight* 96)

In his use of "oral art as the indigenous equal of the European literary tradition" (Ashcroft 126), Rushdie is able to manipulate the English language into something Indian. This method is also put to use in Tai the boatman's time spent with young Aadam Aziz out on the water, when he tells Aadam "smile, it is your history I am keeping in my head" (*Midnight* 11). Tai, like Ramram Seth, circles back from present to past, when informing Aadam of his age, ""so old, nakkoo!" Aadam, the nakkoo, the nosey one, followed his pointing finger. "I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen Emperors die. Listen. Listen, nakkoo . . ."—-the brandy bottle again, followed by brandy-voice, and words more intoxicating than booze—-". . . I saw that Isa, that Christ, when he came to Kashmir" (*Midnight* 11). He refers to Aadam as nakkoo, a Hindi term denoting Aadam as the one with the nose, and uses the Arabic term Isa to make the claim that he has lived as long as Christ and even the mountains themselves. As a figure of colonial resistance, Tai's voice is able to reshape the English language into something akin to Indian speech. This is why Tai insists on keeping history in his head, he refuses to stabilize either his language or his identity. However, because Tai represents only a fragment of the post-colonial nation in his being symbolic of ancientness, he dies just as India becomes independent.

Unlike Tai, Rushdie writes in the language of the colonizer in order to appropriate English and claim it as his own. Ashford, Griffiths and Tiffin place India in the linguistic group they refer as "diglossic societies . . . in which a majority of people speak two or more languages" (Ashcroft 38). In these "diglossic societies english has generally been adopted as the language of government and commerce, and the literary use of english demonstrates some of the more pronounced forms of language variance" (Ashcroft 38). Resistance to hybridization of language

for the post-colonial nation is therefore a rejection of identity which leads to further violence and loss of cultural autonomy. Considering the claim that "english has been historically subject to a large variety of uses and has therefore become an efficient tool for conveying cultural complexity, as well as functioning as an interregional language. The application of a language to different uses is therefore a continuous process. And these uses themselves become the language" (Ashcroft 39), Anderson's claim that the "bulk of mankind is monoglot" (38) denies agency to the post-colonial identity; this claim is disproven by Rushdie's act of taking part in the continuous process of syncreticity by imagining his own nation. Saleem thrives in India due to its function as a place of secularism and hybridity. Alternatively, in Pakistan, Saleem completely loses his plurality under the weight of religious fragmentation, only able to understand himself as "he (or I)" (*Midnight* 403). In the novel, Pakistan manages to "confuse decolonization with the reconstitution of pre-colonial reality" (Ashcroft 29), a move which gives birth to the "war-hounds of unity" (*Midnight* 411), those who help hold "Pakistan together by turning flamethrowers machine-guns hand-grenades on the city slums" (*Midnight* 410). Resistance to colonial rule for Rushdie depends upon the English language and its "potentialities which have been realized in its adaptation to different cultural requirements" (Ashcroft 39). Denying this method of appropriation prevents Shiva and Tai from understanding that

> nationalism's task is to overcome the subordination of the colonized middle class, that is, to challenge the "rule of colonial difference" in the domain of the state. The colonial state, we must remember, was not just the agency that brought the modular forms of the modern state to the colonies; it was also an agency that was destined never to fulfill the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was a rule of

> colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group. (Chatterjee 10)

Though Tai does bitterly resist the English to his death, his refusal to engage with the reality of colonialism in the domain of the state unavoidably renders him a passive victim of the rule of colonial difference. In a clarifying reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* Tai is described as a "watery Caliban, rather too fond of cheap Kashmiri brandy" (*Midnight* 10). As the only true human native of the island in Shakespeare's play, Caliban functions as a figure of resistance to the European colonial rule that Prospero represents. When Prospero's daughter Miranda scolds Caliban for not being grateful that she taught him her language, he responds, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I.ii. 366-367). Just as Tai resents Aadam's "sister-sleeping pigskin bag from Abroad full of foreigners' tricks" (*Midnight* 16), Caliban resents the foreign presence of Prospero and Miranda on his island. The tragedy of this form of linguistic resistance shared by Tai and Caliban is the loss of agency through drunkenness, withdrawal, and passivity. Conversely, through approaching language as "a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world" (Chatterjee 7), Rushdie manipulates the language of the colonizer and reworks it into something "modern and at the same time recognizably Indian" (Chatterjee 8), effectively breaking down this rule of colonial difference and successfully establishing authority over his own imagination. Similar to Ramram Seth's oral prophecy which contains the beginning, middle, and end of the story, the women in the novel also adapt English language to the rhythms of Indian speech. Reverend Mother often uses "the term *whatsitsname* as her leitmotif" (*Midnight* 41), a term which sounds very similar to an Urdu

phrase, “vis-ka-naam,” meaning the same thing. The novel’s “project then is to claim for us, the once-colonized, our freedom of imagination” (Chatterjee 13).

The second of Anderson’s lost cultural conceptions is the idea that “human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it” (36). In post-colonial nations, the rule of colonial difference serves to keep hierarchies in place, though Indian cultural nationalism attempts to dismantle this on its own. The incident in the novel in which the Rani of Cooch Naheen is “going white in blotches” (*Midnight* 45) can be attributed to England’s attempt to create “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 34). She claims to think of her skin as “the outward expression of the internationalism of my spirit” (*Midnight* 45), though metaphorically, she is afflicted by the rule of colonial difference and Europe’s battle to hold onto the “premise of its power” by “preservation of the alienness of the ruling group” (Chatterjee 10). The novels attention to this rule relates to the political climate of India throughout British imperialism, such as in the case of the Ilbert Bill of 1883, which, if passed, would allow for Indian men to be appointed judges in Indian courts. The bill was met with fierce opposition by British settlers at the time, as they were acting on their internalized anxiety of keeping the rule of colonial difference in place in order to maintain power.

The last of Anderson’s lost cultural conceptions is “a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical” (36). In other words, Anderson claims that Europe is the first to comprehend and act on this idea, thus granting them the right to establish the narrative of history itself. In putting forth this particular idea of nation and community as a suggested universal blueprint of nation

formation, Anderson completely ignores the stain left by colonization on all post-colonial states. It must be understood that the post-colonial nation is born out of the contest between imperial will to power and nationalist resistance to that power, rather than Anderson's "conventional histories in which the story of nationalism begins with the contest for political power" (Chatterjee 6).

## Chatterjee's Inner & Outer Domains

India as a concept and a cultural entity is ancient, but India as a political entity with a national border and all the attributes of political nationhood is young. This notion of the cultural versus the political is elaborated on by Partha Chatterjee in his essay "Whose Imagined Community?" in his distinction between the inner and outer domain. It is Chatterjee's distinction between the inner domain and outer domain that acknowledges Anderson's flaw, yet still manages to claim some autonomous authority over the cultural and spiritual aspects of nation. The formation of these two separate domains is a direct result of fragmentation caused by British imperialism. Two separate identities forced on the individual leads to a need to establish a sense of autonomous cultural nationalism. Chatterjee claims that the "most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the "modular" forms of the national society propagated by the modern West" (5). Post-colonial nations do not have the uncomplicated linear history of development as European nations do, their history is more complex. For instance, the British have in many ways bounded India into the nation it currently is, but they have had to bound something that already exists and predates their arrival. In bounding the nation, they have inevitably erased a great deal of the ancient culture of Indianness that Rushdie evokes, but they

have also added the political dimension of nation that he evokes. Through his crafting of the story of India, Salman Rushdie manages to both support and give evidence for the theory set forth by Partha Chatterjee. His vehicle of nationalism "proclaimed its sovereignty in the inner domain," before setting out to confront that "contested field" (Chatterjee 10) of the outer domain. Chatterjee claims of the political domain, "…with the growing strength of nationalist politics, this domain became more extensive and internally differentiated and finally took on the form of the national, that is, postcolonial, state" (Chatterjee 10). Rushdie places Saleem at the center of the text while pushing political events to the margins of the novel. In this way, the

> colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the "inner" domain of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a "modern" national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power. (Chatterjee 6)

The writing of the novel itself is, for Rushdie, a contribution to the sense of nationalism that Chatterjee is touching on. Saleem endures many personal changes throughout the nation's development as an independent entity. These changes to the spiritual domain of the main character, synonymous with India, ultimately come to shape the post-colonial political domain. When Saleem's finger is mutilated at the school dance, he insists "the consequences for the sphere of public action, as will be shown, are-were-will be no less profound" (*Midnight* 271). It is Saleem's inner domain which takes precedence here; whatever occurs after this moment will still be the outcome of autonomous experience. The process of colonization creates many

fragments as the West seeks to destroy the culture and autonomy of the East. Saleem's mutilated finger acts as a metaphor for the fragmenting effects of British imperialism on the nation. Because Saleem is the figure of hybridity of the novel, this event will similarly create a momentary disruption in his identity, and ultimately lead to a greater sense of plurality. Rushdie writes:

> because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogenous; all kinds of everywhichthing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another the next. The body, on the other hand, is homogenous as anything. Indivisible, a one-piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. (*Midnight* 270)

This sense of wholeness that must be preserved can be understood as the national identity which arises from Chatterjee's notion of the inner and outer domain. What remains jumbled up inside of Saleem is the notion of the cultural domain asserting autonomy and power over itself. His body, or "one-piece suit," is the altered, essential political domain which only finds its shape through the spiritual identity which fills it. In order for Rushdie's idea of India to remain autonomous, the wholeness that must be preserved consists of both the ancient and the recent aspects of the imagined community.

## Fragmentation In Pakistan

Because Pakistan refuses its colonial inheritance, it functions as a place of fragmentation in the novel. Tai's death at the moment India gains independence signifies the erasure of ancientness and simultaneous birth of post-colonial India, while Shiva's birth signifies the creation of anti-colonial fundamentalist Pakistan. Saleem's representation of "the diseased reality

of my Pakistan years" (*Midnight* 386) is a place and time where history is not allowed to exist due to "the fear of schizophrenia, of splitting, that was buried like an umbilical cord in every Pakistani heart" (*Midnight* 404). The notion of splitting not only calls to mind the actual separation of Pakistan's East and West Wings "by the unbridgeable land-mass of India" (*Midnight* 404) at the time, but also the fragmentation of identity that is symptomatic of Pakistan's refusal to hybridize in the wake of colonialism. The separation of Saleem and Shiva at birth points to the physical, ideological, and cultural rifts felt from the lack of hybridity through damaged sense of identity. In Pakistan, "past and present, too, are divided by an unbridgeable gulf. Religion was the glue of Pakistan, holding the halves together; just as consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a homogenous entity in time, a blend of past and present, is the glue of personality, holding together our then and our now" (*Midnight* 404). Pakistan and purity are clearly viewed as negative in the novel in that they suppress history and prevent the cohesion of the fragments that Saleem is trying so desperately to unite. As the "bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young" (*Midnight* 139), Saleem, along with many of the other midnight's children, are the symbols of blended personality and syncretism. The hybridity of Saleem Sinai, "variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon" (*Midnight* 3) in conjunction with his awareness of the spiritual and political fragmentation caused by colonialism, allows him to navigate his way towards establishing autonomous identity without the elements of religion that are so central to Pakistan, Shiva, and the Brass Monkey.

In this land, "emptied of history, the buddha learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. I became a citizen of Pakistan" (*Midnight* 403). Saleem loses the connection to his inner domain due to his,

> past plummeting towards me like a vulture-dropped hand to become what-purifies-and-sets-me-free, because now as I look up there is a feeling at the back of my head and after that there is only a tiny but infinite moment of utter clarity while I tumble forwards to prostrate myself before my parents' funeral pyre, a minuscule but endless instant of knowing, before I am stripped of past present memory time shame and love, a fleeting but also timeless explosion in which I bow my head yes I acquiesce yes in the necessity of the blow, and then I am empty and free, because all the Saleems go pouring out of me, from the baby who appeared in jumbo-sized front-page baby-snaps to the eighteen-year-old with his filthy dirty love, pouring out goes shame and guilt and wanting-to-please and needing-to-be-loved and determined-to-find-a-historical-role and growing-too-fast, I am free of Snotnose and Stainface and Baldy and Sniffer and Mapface and washing-chests and Evie Burns and language marches, liberated from Kolynos Kid and the breasts of Pia mammon and Alpha-and-Omega, absolved from the multiple murders of Homi Catrack and Hanif and Aadam Aziz and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, I have shaken off five-hundred-year-old whores and confessions of love at dead of night, free now, beyond caring, crashing on to tarmac, restored to innocence and purity by a tumbling piece of the moon, wiped clean as a wooden writing-chest, brained (just as prophesied) by my mother's silver spittoon. (*Midnight* 392)

Strangely, the object responsible for Saleem's loss of memory is also the vessel which proves to be his lifeline throughout his time in Pakistan. The incident with the silver spittoon allows Rushdie to anchor identity through use of negative locution, a method of writing that makes Saleem's memories present in the text even as the character is losing touch with them. Saleem prostrating himself before his parents funeral pyre demonstrates the elegiac mode of writing

which uses language to fill the vacuum created by the loss. In fact, one could say that Rushdie's entire novel is written in order to presence the India that he wants, needs, and desires; the India of Nehru's vision which was sadly and ironically betrayed by Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi.

Chatterjee's theory of the inner domain and its attempt to establish autonomy over the self is carried throughout the pages of the text. For example, when the four men are lost in the Sundarbans, the "jungle's tricks" are "fooling them into using up their dreams, so that as their dream-life seeped out of them they became as hollow and translucent as glass" (*Midnight* 422). As the characters lose touch with their inner domains in the "historyless anonymity of rain-forests" (*Midnight* 414), they are doomed to purity and deprived of their sense of self. This motif of cultural disconnect is Rushdie's way of communicating that "this was what was left of a human individual when you took away his home, his family, his friends, his city, his country, his world: a being without context, whose past had faded, whose future was bleak, an entity stripped of name, of meaning, of the whole of life except a temporarily beating heart" (Rushdie, *Enchantress* 173). In Saleem's case, however, the jungle provides a healing escape for the trauma of too much history, a place which makes possible the rebuilding of identity. After being bitten on his heel by a "blind, translucent serpent," Saleem is "rejoined to the past, jolted into unity by snake poison" (*Midnight* 419). The venom, like Padma's potion, produces an effect in Saleem in which "his words flowed so freely that they seemed to be an aspect of the monsoon" (*Midnight* 419), a force reminiscent of both Tai and Reverend Mother. Saleem spews forth "stories issuing from his mouth, beginning with a birth at midnight, and continuing unstoppably, because he was reclaiming everything, all of it, all lost histories, all the myriad complex processes that go to make a man" (*Midnight* 419). The act of story-telling provides the narratological repetition that Rushdie employs in order to reclaim history and autonomy. Unlike

his counterpart Shiva, "Saleem, as Rushdie's agent, challenges notions of indigenous ethnic purity, insisting instead on secular plurality" (Narayan 143). "In finding himself and his nation in a hybrid language of impure birth" (Narayan 143), Saleem represents the ideal nation for Rushdie, a necessary alternative to Pakistan. Saleem's long list of acquired names reinforces the idea that plurality is both natural and essential to the idea of the post-colonial nation, while his personal experiences are central to the novel in that they represent Rushdie's own inner domain, his cultural challenge to imperialism. Situating Saleem's experiences in this inner domain allows for the marginalization of the political events of India, consigning them to the outer domain of the nation, such as when he makes the claim that "the purpose of that entire war had been to reunite me with an old life, to bring me back together with my old friends" (*Midnight* 429). After his experience in the Sundarbans, Saleem begins to work his way back to India, remembering more of his past the closer he gets to his homeland, and ultimately, his own name when he runs into one of his fellow midnight's children from his youth.

Saleem claims to be writing his story for his son, so that he can learn the history of his nation from someone with a lived experience rather than an outsider historian or a corrupt political party. The recording of this lived experience is certainly a contributing factor to Chatterjee's theory of the inner domain and the process of nation formation. Chatterjee insists that the inner domain is anything but consistent, meaning it can be anything but stabilized, and what cannot be stabilized cannot be fully colonized, or forced into the mold of the colonizer. However, despite its ability to effectively redefine identity through the telling of one's own story, Chatterjee was not completely right in positing the inner domain as sacrosanct because, the British did in fact take part in the "reform of traditional institutions and customs" (Chatterjee 6). For instance, the outlawing of Sati was a process which did allow the colonizer to re-shape

Indian culture in the space of the inner domain. For many natives, "sati became an important proof of their conformity to older norms at a time when these norms had become shaky within" (Spivak 94). However, given the fact that India and Pakistan are post-colonial nations, there is no possibility of a return to some sort of pure or untainted world for those left within their boundaries. President Barack Obama recalls a woman in his autobiography *Dreams From My Father*, whose "voice evoked a vision of black life in all its possibility, a vision that filled me with longing-a longing for place, and a fixed and definite history" (61). One of the problems with colonization is, however, that it gives us a longing for a pre-colonial possibility which is complete fantasy and may lead to fundamentalism. The princess in *The Enchantress of Florence* who comes "in the hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East, knowing she has much to learn from us and believing, too, that she has much to teach" (Rushdie, *Enchantress* 276), embodies the same hope that Saleem does in *Midnight's Children*. The antithesis of this dream is made clear by Rushdie's act of denying Shiva his birthright in the novel through the swapping of the newborns by Mary Pereira at the hospital.

## Colonial Fragmentation & Shiva

Why is the wholly Indian child of the novel not the face of India? What is the point of denying Shiva his birthright? Just as Saleem, Shiva "too, was born on the stroke of midnight; he, like me, was connected to history. The modes of connection—if I'm right in thinking they applied to me—enabled him, too, to affect the passage of the days" (*Midnight* 342). And yet, he stands for the India that Rushdie is betrayed by—Indira Gandhi's India—the violent India that Rushdie critiques. Both inseparable aspects of identity, "Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim; understand our rivalry, and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live"

(*Midnight* 496). For Rushdie, post-colonial India is in fact comprised of all the children of midnight, light and dark, Shiva and the Widow included. This rivalry between Shiva and Saleem represents the battle of opposing ideologies and the complications of asserting a national identity that does not simply perpetuate the violence of imperialism. By denying the wholly Indian child his birthright, Rushdie insists upon embracing the already forced mingling of cultures rather than outright dismissing English influence.

Shiva's embroilment in India's political affairs keeps him in the margins of the text because his "anticolonial nationalism" fails to create "its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society . . . before it begins its political battle with the imperial power" (Chatterjee 6) in the outer domain. The concept of hybridity does necessarily include many ideologies, identities, and existences. Because Shiva represents a new political dimension in India which refuses its colonial inheritance, he comes "to represent . . . all the vengefulness and violence and simultaneous-love-and-hate-of-Things in the world" (*Midnight* 342). Denial of colonial inheritance in the novel, as seen with Tai, once again results in violence and death. The political dimension that forms in Pakistan, (and could potentially form in India), "arises because we have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously" (Chatterjee 5). In the novel, Shiva abandons his inner domain in a contrasting attempt to reclaim his autonomy through attempted rejection of foreign influence rather than intentional appropriation. Saleem constantly insists upon his personal experience being the cause of various national political events while Shiva remains imprisoned in this same effected outer realm. Saleem considers, "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"

(*Midnight* 333). Shiva signifies a very complicated aspect of identity, in that he represents the undeniable existence of "the shadows of imperfection" (*Midnight* 529) that Rushdie observes in humanity. His desire to find the perfect narrative for India is tragically tainted by the fragmenting effects of colonialism, especially when considering the complicated question of whether or not Shiva and his counterparts would have to die in Rushdie's imagined nation. Ultimately, Shiva never does die in the novel, but becomes a constant reminder to Saleem of the possibility of alternative historical narratives. Saleem's fear that Shiva might someday learn the truth of their having been swapped at birth is metaphorical of Rushdie's awareness that the narrative of history is quite debatable; the possibility of a fundamental wholly-Indian narrative of India always exists. So, "why did he, who had once led anarchistic apaches through the slums of Bombay, become the warlord of tyranny?" (*Midnight* 495). If the India of Shiva's desire came to be, it would be like Pakistan, a place of godliness and purity where Shiva's anarchic behavior and indignation could be manipulated by corrupt politicians, driven by an "insidious nostalgia for times of greater possibility" (*Midnight* 501). The false promise of national purity offered by Shiva and by Pakistan drives many characters to their lowest points; it drains the soldiers of identity in the Sundarbans, and tragically causes the "mischievous as a whirlwind and noisy as a crowd" (*Midnight* 172) Brass Monkey to lose her youthful subversive spirit when she is given a new "name at her fourteenth birthday party . . . known after that as Jamila Singer" (*Midnight* 336).

## Bulbul-e-Din, The Veiled Woman In Pakistan

Just as Saleem represents the voice of India in the novel, Brass Monkey becomes the voice of the nation of Pakistan, Bulbul-e-Din. Saleem observes his sister,

> the Monkey, who was a crucial year younger than me, fall under the insidious spell of that God-ridden country; the Monkey, once so rebellious and wild, adopting expressions of demureness and submission which must, at first, have seemed false even to her; the Monkey, learning how to cook and keep house, how to buy spices in the market; the Monkey, making the final break with the legacy of her grandfather, by learning prayers in arabic and saying them at all prescribed times; the Monkey, revealing the streak of puritan fanaticism which she had hinted at when she asked for a nun's outfit; she, who spurned all offers of worldly love, was seduced by the love of that God who had been named after a carved idol in a pagan shrine built around a giant meteorite: Al-Lah, in the Qa'aba, the shrine of the great Black Stone. (*Midnight* 334)

Pakistan functions as a place of loss for female agency in the novel, in its promise of granting religious freedom to those who submit. As seen in the case of Brass Monkey, ideal women in Pakistan are expected to be quiet and obedient, to be anything that men expect them to be. In fact, Saleem's sister becomes almost like the perfect woman that Rushdie parodies in his novel *The Enchantress of Florence* when Emperor Akbar insists "it is necessary that she be able to sing. She should know how to play musical instruments, and dance, and do all three things together when requested: singing, dancing, and piping on a flute or fiddling a tune upon a string" (152). In India, Saleem is able to use his voice for the promotion of secularism and plurality, while Brass Monkey is able to find "her ways, undeterred by punishment and threats" (*Midnight* 171). But in Pakistan, she becomes Jamila Singer and trades her secular identity for the the singular voice of the veiled, submissive woman. Saleem recalls how his

> emerald-icy aunt would have begun, quite unwittingly, my sister's transformation from monkey into Singer; because although she protested with the sullen clumsiness of

> fourteen-year-olds, she was hauled unceremoniously on to the musicians' dais by my organizing aunt; and although she looked as if she wished the floor would open up beneath her feet, she clasped her hands together; seeing no escape, the Monkey began to sing. (*Midnight* 335)

The transformation of monkey into Singer paints Pakistan as a place where women are bound into a gendered narrative of repression. As if in prayer, the act of clasping her hands together to sing represents the loss of agency experienced in Rushdie's understanding of the land of the pure. This is the complete opposite of the move that the Mughal of Love makes with the memory palace in *The Enchantress of Florence* with,

> this apparently inert being, her self erased or buried beneath this never-ending story, this labyrinth of story-rooms in which more tales had been hidden than he was interested to hear. This toothsome sleepwalker. This blank. The rote-learned words poured out of her as he looked on, and while he unbuttoned and caressed. He exposed her nudity without compunction, touched it without guilt, manipulated her without any feelings of remorse. He was the scientist of her soul. In the smallest motion of an eyebrow, in the twitch of a muscle in her thigh, in a sudden minuscule curling of the left corner of her upper lip, he deduced the presence of life. Her self, that sovereign treasure, had not been destroyed. It slept and could be awakened. He whispered in her ear, *"This is the last time you will ever tell this story. As you tell it, let it go."* Slowly, phrase by phrase, episode by episode, he would unbuild the palace of memories and release a human being. (182)

Rushdie's novels tend to explore notions of sovereignty in general, the question of whether or not India should be ruled by the English mirrors the question of whether or not women should be ruled by men. Inevitably, when exploring questions of personal autonomy in a post-colonial

context, the voices of those previously silenced come to the forefront and demand to be heard. Through the unbuilding of the memory palace, the previously bound woman is able to emerge from her captive space and reclaim her identity:

> *My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur of Bourges, merchant of Montpellier. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur. My father was a trader and brought nuts and silks and carpets from Damascus to Narbonne. He was falsely accused of poisoning the King of France's mistress and fled to Rome. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur who was honored by the Pope. He was made captain of sixteen papal galleys and sent to the relief of Rhodes but he fell ill on the way and died. My name is Angélique and I am of the family of Jacques Coeur. While my brothers and I were trading with the Levant I was abducted by pirates and sold into slavery to the Sultan of Stamboul. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter. My name is Angélique and I am. My name is Angélique.* (*Enchantress* 186)

The process of liberating women from the confines of cultural narrative is a gradual recovering of personal connections and experiences. Through the telling of her own story, and repeating her assertion of identity, Angélique is able to release the external details and access the center of her self. The narrative drops away bit by bit, gradually revealing the woman's independence and subjectivity through the assertion of her own name. The transformation of Brass Monkey into Bulbul-e-Din reverses the process by which Angélique finds identity. It supports the negative view of Pakistan that Rushdie posits, as Pakistan becomes a place where her true identity is masked, her voice necessarily veiled in the "purity of wings and the pain of exile and the flying

of eagles and the lovelessness of life and the melody of bulbuls and the glorious omnipresence of God" (*Midnight* 336).

**Foreignness & The Culture Of Inclusion**

Tai dies when India achieves independence because it is a fragmenting moment in which the ancient, pre-colonial India vanishes as a result of the creation of post-colonial India and Pakistan. For Tai, the "Europe-returned chappies" (*Midnight* 19) and Aadam Aziz's medicine "bag represents Abroad, it is the alien thing, the invader, progress" (*Midnight* 16). Tai's disdain of the foreign cannot co-exist with Saleem Sinai's biracial identity because it is a clear sign of the irreversible blending of the cultures of the East and the West. Saleem, similar to Emperor Akbar, represents the

> idea of becoming the World King, that he could incorporate into his line—into himself—persons, places, narratives, possibilities from lands as yet unknown, lands which might, in their turn, also be subsumed. If one foreigner could become a Mughal then so, in time, could all foreigners. Additionally, it would be a further step in the creation of a culture of inclusion, that very culture which the Raushanai cult satirized merely by existing: his true vision come to life, in which all races, tribes, clans, faiths, and nations would become part of the one grand Mughal synthesis, the one grand syncretization of the earth. (*Enchantress* 317)

This embrace of foreignness expressed by both Saleem and Akbar is an essential component of Rushdie's notion of hybridity. They are central to the texts, just as the culture of inclusivity is central to Rushdie's understanding of national identity. Emperor Akbar wonders, "was foreignness itself a thing to be embraced as a revitalizing force bestowing bounty and success upon its adherents, or did it adulterate something essential in the individual and the society as a

whole, did it initiate a process of decay which would end in an alienated, inauthentic death?" (*Enchantress* 319). The latter half of this question posed by Akbar is answered by Tai the boatman, while the former applies to Saleem and Emperor Akbar. Tai's "illiteracy, dismissed with a flourish; literature crumbled beneath the rage of his sweeping hand" (*Midnight* 11), his refusal to face the disruption caused by the English presence in India does result in the "uncorroborated rumor of his death" in which he is "infuriated by India and Pakistan's struggle over his valley, and walked to Chhamb with the express purpose of standing between the opposing forces and giving them a piece of his mind. Kashmir for the Kashmiris: that was his line. Naturally, they shot him" (*Midnight* 35). Evidently, in order for foreignness to be revitalizing and successful, it must be taken in by someone like Saleem, or Akbar, "the Universal Ruler, king of a world without frontiers or ideological limitations" (*Enchantress* 307). Tai's ideological limitations prevent him from envisioning a bi-racial India or a syncretized cultural literature. For Rushdie, writing and telling his own story of India is the very thing which enables him to pickle history as he remembers it. His appropriation of the English language allows him to overcome the rule of colonial difference and create characters who feed the dream of a secular, democratic India through their resistance to fragmented religious or cultural doctrines.

On the point of religion, Saleem responds to the Widow's claim that "Indians are only capable of worshipping one God" with the retort, "but I was brought up in Bombay, where Shiva Vishnu Ganesh Ahuramazda Allah and countless others had their flocks" (*Midnight* 503); just like Emperor Akbar, "no single faith could contain him, nor any geographical territory" (*Enchantress* 307). The positive and necessary aspects of identity are present in both novels central characters, as Akbar

> did not wish to be divine. If there had never been a God, the emperor thought, it might have been easier to work out what goodness was. This business of worship, of the abnegation of self in the face of the Almighty, was a distraction, a false trail. Wherever goodness lay, it did not lie in ritual, unthinking obeisance before a deity but rather, perhaps, in the slow, clumsy, error-strewn working out of an individual or collective path. (*Enchantress* 310)

For Rushdie, the act of basing cultural identity around religious dogma is tantamount to intellectual suicide. Religion turns the Brass Monkey from a positive female figure to a defeated, subservient woman lacking in autonomy. It also renders Pakistan a place of lost identity and drained memory, a place of war; for Saleem, "fires blossomed like flowers, reminding me of the way the Brass Monkey used to set fire to shoes to attract a little attention" (*Midnight* 432). Brass Monkey's transformation into Bulbul-e-Din really is a tragedy, caused by this same problem of God that Emperor Akbar ponders. Emperor Akbar

> thought of the faraway dukes in the foreigner's tale. They did not claim a divine right to their lands either, but only the right of the victor. Their philosophers too portrayed the human being standing at the center of his time, his city, his life, his church. But foolishly, they ascribed man's humanity to God, they required divine sanction to support their case in this matter, the higher matter of Man, even though they dispensed with the need for such a sanction in the lower matter of power. How confused they were and how little they were too, ruling a mere city in Tuscany and a Roman bishopric to go with it, and how much they thought of themselves. He was the ruler of the frontierless universe and he saw more clearly than they. No, he corrected himself, he did not, and was indulging in mere

> bigotry if he asserted it. Mogor had been right. *The curse of the human race is not that we are so different from one another, but that we are so alike.* (*Enchantress* 310)

If the act of centering the human does not include this lower matter of power Akbar references, then fragmentation is inevitable and identity suffers. The Emperor's realization that human beings are more alike than different from one another, leads to the understanding that religious violence and holy wars are a result of the bigotry fed by "this version of the world" where "there is no love to be found anywhere" (*Enchantress* 347). Because Akbar, like Saleem, represents the ideal post-colonial nation, the thought of his being de-centered from the presence of the text gives way to his worry that,

> it was the future that had been cursed, not the present. In the present he was invincible. He could build ten new Sikris if he pleased. But once he was gone, all he had thought, all he had worked to make, his philosophy and way of being, all that would evaporate like water. The future would not be what he hoped for, but a dry hostile antagonistic place where people would survive as best they could and hate their neighbors and smash their places of worship and kill one another once again in the renewed heat of the great quarrel he had sought to end forever, the quarrel over God. In the future it was harshness, not civilization, that would rule. (*Enchantress* 347)

To keep his India from evaporating like water, Saleem claims, "in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories;" the "chutnification of history" (*Midnight* 529) is achieved through the act of combining "memories, dreams, ideas, so that once they enter mass-production all who consume them will know what pepperpots achieved in Pakistan, or how it felt to be in the Sundarbans" (*Midnight* 530).

## The Widow Or Indira Gandhi

The first lengthy description of the Widow occurs in the chapter "At the Pioneer Cafe," in which she epitomizes the macabre vision of Saleem's opposition, representing yet another case of fragmented identity. Rushdie recalls in his book of collected nonfiction, *Step Across This Line,* "in this stream-of-consciousness dream sequence a nightmare of Indira Gandhi is fused with the equally nightmarish figure of Margaret Hamilton; a coming together of the Wicked Witches of the East and West" (17). This witch of the East, or "Widow's hair has a center-parting it is green on the left and on the right black" (*Midnight* 238). The duality of her appearance is characteristic of all that is presented as negative in the novel, an unwillingness to hybridize, but also the darkness of the Emergency veiled in the white light of historical narrative. In his novel *A Fine Balance,* Rohinton Mistry helps shed some light into this darkness when the president of the student union explains,

> three weeks ago the High Court found the Prime Minister guilty of cheating in the last elections. Which meant she had to step down. But she began stalling. So the opposition parties, student organizations, trade unions—they started mass demonstrations across the country. All calling for her resignation. Then, to hold on to power, she claimed that the country's security was threatened by internal disturbances, and declared a State of Emergency . . . under the pretext of Emergency, fundamental rights have been suspended, most of the opposition is under arrest, union leaders are in jail, and even some student leaders. (Mistry 243)

If we read Saleem as Rushdie's hope for secular democracy, the novel being a vehicle for Nehruvian socialism, then the Widow, or Indira Gandhi, is as much an enemy of the author's vision as she is of Saleem. Saleem's question whether or not he and the Widow are "competitors

for centrality" (*Midnight* 483) can be applied to the entirety of the text itself. The fact is simply that they are. Saleem represents the true son of Nehru, having received his congratulatory letter upon being born and ultimately coming to support his political ideology. It is this ideology that Rushdie places at the center of the text, while the Widow spends much of her time in its margins. Rushdie's aim is to write the truth of the political history which has been perverted by Mrs. Gandhi, the history of the Emergency.

Rushdie once again mirrors the personal happenings of Saleem's inner domain with the outer political when Parvati goes into labor at the precise moment that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is found guilty of campaign malpractice. Thirteen days of labor pass with the child being born "at exactly the same moment, the word Emergency was being heard for the first time, and suspension-of-civil rights, and censorship-of-the-press, and armored-units-on-special-alert, and arrest-of-subversive-elements; something was ending" (*Midnight* 481). Among the many things ending in this instant is the dream of a democratic India; the birth of the mute child, symbolic of a censored press and the suspension of free speech, is synonymous with the subverted dream of the Widow's own father. Rushdie's narrative of the Emergency forcibly sheds light on the reality of what happened in those twenty-one months. Just like the Widow's dual hairstyle, "the Emergency, too, had a white part—-public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—-and a black part which, being secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us" (*Midnight* 483). In this episode and through the character of the Widow, Rushdie is calling out the dominant narrative of history, situated in the political domain, which is about the horrible things that occurred under Mrs. Gandhi's rule. Mistry gives a direct account of the violence when the character Om's "pants were taken off for the second time. A rag soaked in chloroform was gripped at his nose. He tore at it briefly, then went limp. With a swift incision the doctor removed the testicles, sewed up the

gash, and put a heavy dressing on it" (526). Though Rushdie does choose to include the disturbing image of "something frying in an iron skillet, soft unspeakable somethings spiced with turmeric coriander cumin and fenugreek . . . the pungent inescapable fumes of what-had-been-excised, cooking over a low, slow fire" (*Midnight* 505) in reference to forced sterilization, on the topic of the two men who come in to question Saleem, "bar-fettered in a tiny room" (*Midnight* 499), Rushdie chooses to exclude the violence enacted upon him. He uses negative locution with incidents, such as the violence of partition—"I shall not describe the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab"—and the violent creation of Bangladesh—"I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal and the long pacifying walk of Mahatma Gandhi" (*Midnight* 125)—and also, "here I record a merciful blank in my memory. Nothing can induce me to remember the conversational techniques of that humorless, uniformed pair; there is no chutney or pickle capable of unlocking the doors behind which I have locked those days! No, I have forgotten, I cannot will not say how they made me spill the beans" (*Midnight* 498). Rushdie deems it necessary to preserve the memory of the Widow's arranging Saleem's sterilization, in that it promotes the villainizing of her political effect on the nation. But, he does not want to sully his own tent and puncture its comedic tone by explicitly including the details, as seen with Mistry.

The Widow's role in the novel is even more sinister than Shiva's, as she is the one responsible for disbanding the M.C.C. (Midnight's Children Conference), and for having performed on them what Saleem refers to as "sperectomy: the draining-out of hope" (*Midnight* 503). Of course, Saleem claims that the gang of the children of midnight "were hated feared destroyed by the Widow, who was not only Prime Minister of India but also aspired to be Devi, the Mother-goddess in her most terrible aspect (*Midnight* 504). Saleem, dissimilarly aspires to be

the Bharat-Mata, to embody the "dynamic aspect of maya," including in his pluralism the "too-many women" (*Midnight* 467) that have all contributed to his identity. The sterilization of the gang is a clear attack on the political ideology they represent, as well as their hybrid identities. The Widow wants to ensure that this notion of secular democracy does not spread any further. Mistry's narrative reveals the message of the Emergency with the Prime Minister claiming,

> our newly formed flying squads will catch the gold smugglers, uncover corruption and black money, and punish the tax evaders who keep our country poor. You can trust your government to fulfil the task. Your part in this is very simple: to support the government, support the Emergency. The need of the hour is discipline—discipline in every aspect of of life, if we are to reinvigorate the nation. Shun all superstitions, don't believe in horoscopes and holy men, only in yourself and in hard work. Avoid rumours and loose talk if you love your country. Do your duty, above all else! This, my brothers and sisters, is my appeal to you! (263)

Her rule aims to destroy creative thought, to situate the nation in the outer political domain, while folks like Saleem Sinai and Emperor Akbar work at fostering their contrasting inner cultural domains before even considering stepping into the political arena.

Although the character of the Widow places Indira Gandhi's political role in the outer domain, her being a woman naturally poses the question of female identity within the novel's inner, cultural domain. At first glance, Rushdie's demonization of female characters may come off as misogynist if read uncritically. However, the "closer Indira Gandhi comes to being identified as the Widow, the more obvious the deliberate misogyny of the construct of the Widow and the way it is used to condemn Indira Gandhi and the Emergency becomes" (Weickgenannt 80). Delving deeper into the text, it is clear that Saleem has a strained

relationship with all of the women in his life, an idea that mirrors the fact of India itself having an issue with its female population within the confines of patriarchal society. In her article "The Nation's Monstrous Women: Wives, Widows, and Witches in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children," Nicole Weickgenannt claims that "one of the purposes of Saleem's monstrosity-bestowing description of Indian women is criticism of those strategies which make women appear monstrous in the first place, whenever they violate the essentialist image of feminine nature and demeanor" (Weickgenannt 75). If Rushdie and Saleem are fighting for a progressive secular democracy, then naturally the role of women in society becomes important for them to call attention to.

Before being bound in the narrative of Bulbul-e-Din, "the new daughter-of-the-nation" whose "character began to owe more to the most strident aspects of the national persona than to the child-world of her Monkey years" (*Midnight* 359), the Brass Monkey exists as a positive female figure, a figure motivated by her own agency and, like Saleem, "the loyalties of blood" (*Midnight* 258). The Monkey's childhood reveals a strong, willful character for whom "silence was, indeed the worst punishment she could have been given; but she bore it cheerfully, standing innocently amid the ruins of broken chairs and shattered ornaments" (*Midnight* 172). Unhindered by silence, the young Brass Monkey represents the antithesis of the "new woman" that Chatterjee defines, a woman who "was to be modern, but she would also have to display the signs of national tradition and therefore would be essentially different from the "Western" woman" (Chatterjee 9). Though she is not filled with the same mingled blood that Saleem contains, her birth occurs one year after his; one year into the creation of independent India as a post-colonial, hybrid nation. Brass Monkey's eager support of Bombay—expressed upon returning from a visit to Pakistan, ""home again!" the Monkey shouts. "Hurry . . . Back-to-

Bom!" (She is in disgrace. In Agra, she incinerated the General's boots.)" (*Midnight* 216)—mirrors that same appreciation felt by Saleem for a place "as teeming, as manifold, as multitudinously shapeless as ever" (*Midnight* 143). Her childhood ritual of burning the shoes of her friends and family members reaches subversive heights when she unleashes her force upon a symbol of Pakistan's patriarchal oppression, Major Zulfikar's boots. The expectations—of "a new patriarchy that was brought into existence, different from the "traditional" order but also explicitly claiming to be different from the "Western" family" (Chatterjee 9)—that Brass Monkey so tenaciously rejects in her youth eventually come to consume her, binding her in narrative, like the memory palace.

**Women & The Nation**

Through "her ignorance and superstition," the most prominent female figure of the novel, Padma, provides Saleem with "necessary counterweights to my miracle-laden omniscience," a "paradoxical earthiness of spirit, which keeps . . . my feet on the ground" (*Midnight* 170). Padma is both listener and co-producer of the story written by Saleem, she possesses a greater deal of agency than other female characters due to her being situated alongside him in the cultural domain that Rushdie creates. When Saleem finds himself in a spell of writers block, Padma takes a "bus into the country to dig for herbs, with which your manhood could be awakened from its sleep" (*Midnight* 221). The effect of the herbs on Saleem causes a delirium which finally enables him to continue with his story, "once again Padma sits at my feet, urging me on. I am balanced once more—-the base of my isosceles triangle is secure. I hover at the apex, above present and past, and feel fluency returning to my pen" (*Midnight* 222). Because she is the only one to receive Saleem's story in the oral tradition, Padma is a necessary component for the success of

the novels ability to effectively appropriate the English language. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin mention an "oral technique" which "illustrates the possibilities of undoing the assumptions of logocentric texts in post-colonial practice. Rushdie can employ similar graftings in the development of the relationship between the narrator and 'listener' (Padma) in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie assures us that such techniques from orature are consciously part of his writing" (Ashcroft 182).

However, despite her vital role in Rushdie's imagining of the nation, Padma's function as a recipient of narrative, her being spoken for by the author, is metaphorical of her representation of what Spivak refers to as the "subaltern" figure. Her modernity and her authorial collaboration are not enough to liberate her from her position as an Indian woman expected to acquiesce to the demands of society's standards. Despite her collaboration, she remains on the margins of the narrative. Saleem claims, "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 my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices" (*Midnight* 220). Rushdie's own inability to access the female inner domain results in the majority of his female characters being situated in a silent group. Chatterjee points out that "religious beliefs and practices, especially those relating to treatment of women," (9) are decided upon by men with a "desire to give the hysteric a voice, to transform her into the *subject* of hysteria" (Spivak 92). For Spivak, women in society are mistreated as the symbol of cultural nationalism. The subject of Sati is instructive in this regard. As Spivak points out, the "redefinition as a crime of what had been tolerated, known, or adulated as ritual," and the consequent "leap of suttee from private to public has a clear and complex relationship with the changeover from a mercantile and commercial to a territorial and administrative British presence" (Spivak 94). The

outlawing of Sati turns Indian women into an "ideological battle-ground" (Spivak 96) where "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 92). The voice of the Indian woman, as well as her inner domain, are silenced and shrunken down, for "imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind" (Spivak 94). In their exclusion from the political domain, Spivak refers to the abolition of Sati as a double silencing moment in history for Indian women because the woman was never allowed to speak for herself in the Sati debate. The Hindu men spoke for Sati on her behalf and the British men spoke against it on her behalf. Unable to speak for herself, "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world-woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 102). Spivak writes, "the narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme" (Spivak 82). Setting epistemic violence aside, as it is not the subject of this discussion, Rushdie's imperfect allegory of general violence manifests as Pakistan, where Saleem passes through "a maidan (field) in which lady doctors were being bayoneted before they were raped, and raped again before they were shot. Above them and behind them, the cool white minaret of a mosque stared blindly down upon the scene" (*Midnight* 432). In this sentence, Rushdie speaks of the violent cost of nation formation that women pay. They emerge as the vulnerable victims of the process. This necessarily puts them on the margins of national culture.

In Spivak's terms, subaltern figures are not necessarily oppressed figures, but figures who do not have a place in the narrative of history. They are spoken for in the same way that the Orientalist text seeks to reveal and speak for the Orient to the European reader. Ashcroft,

Griffiths, and Tiffin believe that "discourse analysts like Edward Said have been important in elucidating the dialectical encounters between Europe and the Other" (30). His concept of Orientalism "tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate an even underground self" (Said 11), helping to provide a framework for understanding the question of individual autonomy within post-colonial nations, as it explores the colonial fragmentation that occurs which necessitates the eventual formation of hybridized identity. What both Spivak and Said set out to do is "offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (Spivak 76). Considering the "analogy between the relationships of men and women and those of the imperial power and the colony" (Ashcroft 30), "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 13). This relationship of power imposes a certain ideational structure upon the geographical space referred to as the Orient. Just as Sati's leap from private to public assists the British in conquering territory in India, "the period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion" (Said 49), so also the Brass Monkey's retreat to private space and the violence against women relates women to the margins of public space in the newly formed nations. According to Said, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert's narrative leaves "very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her" (Said 14). Said's focus on Flaubert's narrative is mainly concerned with his opinion that "in any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presence, or a representation" (Said 29). The act of

painting a portrait of subaltern desires through writing, of speaking on behalf of the subaltern, is the very thing which disfigures and distorts subjectivity. The "re-presencing" of the East by the West is therefore a problematic, romantic vision in which the whole world is assumed to be accessible through texts. The lack of self-representation experienced by the "Oriental," subaltern woman mirrors that modular blueprint of nation posited by Anderson in which post-colonial "imaginations must remain forever colonized" (Chatterjee 5). Spivak says of him, "indeed, the brilliance of Anderson's misreading does not prevent him from seeing precisely the problem I emphasize" (87). Spivak is critiquing Anderson's theory for its justification of imperial methods of control; the three lost cultural concepts he posits—the stabilization of language, the translation of sacred script, and the establishing of historical narrative—are directly responsible for the epistemic violence surrounding the Sati debate. Following Anderson's blueprint, the English infiltrate the inner domain of the nation of India by stabilizing Hindu law using print-capitalism, translate the sacred scripture to the colonial language, and project onto the women of the Indian nation their own dominating historical narrative. In many ways, this narrative continues in Rushdie's novel, which does not explicitly unseat colonial premises and articulations.

Rushdie's female characters call attention to the loss of cultural autonomy in post-colonial nations by their existence as marginalized figures dependent upon the men at the center of their stories. Padma's brief absence from Saleem's imaginative process provokes his thinking, "I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present . . . but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line?" (*Midnight* 170). The function of Saleem as the apex of the triangle is a clear metaphor for the patriarchal hierarchy of the post-colonial nation, the equally supporting twin deities representing Spivak's "accounts of the double

subjection of colonized women" (Ashcroft 175). Left alone by Padma with only his memories, Saleem's triangle flattens out, leaving behind the oppressive linearity—the straight line—of Western thought; a loss which renders "autonomous forms of the imagination of the community . . . overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state" (Chatterjee 11). The collapse of the triangle without the support of "the lotus-goddess of the present" indicates Rushdie's understanding of the necessity for Spivak's contemporary critique of the subaltern figure, not only for the liberation of women, but for the liberation of all post-colonial identities, as "the silencing of the subaltern woman extends to the whole of the colonial world, and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male or female" (Ashcroft 175).

## Pure Origins & Conclusion

Spivak claims, "a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism" (87). The desire for pure origins therefore writes out the figure of the subaltern, as seen in Pakistan with the transformations of both Brass Monkey into the veiled Bulbul-e-Din, and Saleem into the memoryless Buddha. The folly of this dream is that it only seems to further fragment identity rather than allow for the reclaiming of it. If Rushdie had chosen to write in one of India's many native languages, then "linguistic purity would situate Saleem within his appropriate indigenous origins and clothe him in a dangerous essentialism as it has done with Shiva in India and the Brass Monkey in Pakistan" (Narayan 144). Considering the act of Shiva and Saleem being swapped at birth, the dominant novelistic point seems to be that,

> in order to preserve the modern nation-state with its commitment to Western liberal humanist ideologies, India must write its British past into its present. It must police

> history's borders so that aggressive decolonizing tendencies do not lead the nation into originary moments centralized by sectarian ideologies with dubious ethics that are implicitly represented by Shiva. (Narayan 142)

The question of beginnings is obscured by Saleem's resistance to linearity and purity because his identity contains an infinite number of starting points. Can any living person definitively identify a starting point for the ancient world without narrative? Saleem's ability to give birth to multiple mothers and fathers himself reveals the fact that all communities are imagined and all nations are stories told. To strive for purity in an impure, post-colonial nation is to assume the same kind of fragmentary, Western essentialism that Benedict Anderson wrongly assumes as universal. Rushdie avoids this pitfall because his nostalgia considers the effects of colonialism and generates a fresh sense of hybridity rather than chasing a lost memory. Tai and Shiva's unwillingness to engage with—and therefore appropriate—colonial influence, is a result of their desire for lost origins in a post-colonial world. As the protagonist Saleem is "a bastard child who combines various points of origin and accomplishes a wholly paradoxical relationship to the notion of national legitimacy" (Narayan 143), the novel's value regarding identity is its ability to define post-colonial identity as that which must defy by appropriation rather than a complete return to the past. According to Said, "there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them" (24). Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* gives birth to too many beginnings to keep track of, as hybridity considers the simultaneous existence of an infinity of projects.

As a result of my investigations, I conclude that imperialism's effect on post-colonial nations produces a sedimented national culture which includes colonial influence, while limiting

its hegemony. Rushdie's choice to use the English language imposed on him by the colonizing nation results in his ability to establish cultural autonomy over his post-colonial identity. Rushdie's imagining of the nation entirely disproves Anderson's Eurocentric theory while supporting Chatterjee's concept of the inner and outer domain, as he manages to assert a new emergent national identity by including both colonial and indigenous languages and forms in his narrative. The value of hybridity to post-colonial literatures is therefore the ability to articulate the positive outcome that exists as a possible response to the destructive violence and oppression of imperialism.

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