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**Religious Disparity in India and Pakistan:
The Prospect of Peace through the Literary
Views of Salman Rushdie and Manil Suri**

Humanities 499

Thesis

Renee Dyehouse

The Indian subcontinent, including the regions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is the home of an enormous level of diversity, providing some of the most fascinating cultural collisions in the world. This region alone accounts for some 1.5 billion of the world's people, has 22 official languages and hundreds of other dialects and thousands of separate and unique castes and communities. Not unsurprisingly, several prevalent world religions such as Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism originated in this region. Under British rule, the regions of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India had existed together as one political unit. Religious disputes led to the decision for the partition of British India into the Islamic nation of Pakistan to the west and the Islamic nation of Bangladesh (then called East Pakistan) to the east of the essentially Hindu nation of India. India was separated from British rule and became a nation at midnight on August 15, 1947, while Pakistan became a nation at midnight on August 14, 1947.

The partition was highly disputed and left behind both feelings of general celebration and resentment. Celebration because the countries were free to rule themselves, but resentment because the act was widely seen as an acknowledgement of failure and Britain's means of no longer dealing with conflict on the Indian subcontinent following the conclusion of World War II. Nonetheless, the prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, optimistically stated, "At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom" (Wood, 240).

Nehru's idea for independence was inherited from, "enlightened leaders like Akbar, whose idea of India was pluralist and tolerant" (Wood, 240). Similarly, the country of Pakistan was formed based on the perception of the Muslim fall from power and status in India and the concern that giving Muslims political power would help their ailing position and allow for progress within both the Muslim and Hindu regions. Unfortunately though, this was not the

future that unfolded immediately after independence. According to the book, “The Idea of Pakistan” by Stephen Cohen, “No proponent of the Pakistan movement dreamed that Pakistan and India would become bitter enemies, or that the armed forces of Pakistan would dominate Pakistani politics” (Cohen, 31).

Instead, the contested partition resulted in an ongoing struggle between the nations for money, power and land that still resonates to this day, especially over the disputed and resource rich area of Kashmir. Immediately following the partition came a massive, simultaneous exile of Hindus and Muslims on either side of the unclearly defined border regions of India and Pakistan. Some 12.5 million people were left homeless and in exile, unable to find a place to live in either country. Thus, the national identity of millions of people came into question.

While Hinduism became the dominant worldview among the Indian people, the religion of Islam and the Muslim people have deeply permeated this mixed society. I am interested in the search for the Muslim and Hindu identity in a culture which has been affected by a myriad of different perspectives. I am concerned with the manner in which individuals deal with one another on the Indian subcontinent, specifically in the border region between India and Pakistan. Moreover, the Muslim minority in the heart of India and their dealings with the Hindu majority is not to be ignored.

Religious belief is a significant aspect of any culture and is oftentimes essential for understanding the motivations of people in many of their daily activities. What one believes affects how one behaves and understands the world and is a major factor underlying Hindu-Muslim and Indo-Pakistani issues. Islam and Hinduism are two vastly dissimilar religions, and upon first glance it may seem as if the two viewpoints share little in common and are unable to be reconciled in any meaningful way. After all, the religious tenets of the two belief systems are

intrinsically different, starting at the simple core of each religion: Islam is strictly monotheistic while Hinduism is forthrightly polytheistic.

People who have been raised in a Hindi culture do not understand the world as linear. Instead, “the Hindu conception of the universe is essentially cyclic;” (Thomas, 1). In effect, this means that the Hindu people, “do not believe in an absolute beginning or end of the universe, but maintain that creation, existence and destruction are endless processes ever repeating” (Thomas, 1). In other words, life itself consists of a continuous cycle of birth and rebirth. The universe and all of its aspects fragment and reunite itself endlessly in every way.

Desire is a central part of the cause of this cycle because once desire is sated, then it is replaced by another. In this manner, people become locked into the continuing and undesirable cycle of samsara. A short description of three of the main gods in Hinduism represents another key way to understand the continuous cycle which underlies the Hindi worldview. Hindus believe in the ultimate God, Brahman. Brahman takes on many different forms or avatars. The three most commonly referenced are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma is the creator of all things, Vishnu is the sustainer and balancer of the forces in the universe and Shiva is the destroyer. Their existence is the cause of the cycle of everything in the world. Once something is created, it is then sustained for a period until it is destroyed. Destruction then leads to rebirth.

In practical terms, the cyclical beliefs of the Hindu people can be seen through their belief in reincarnation, karma and the caste system. According to Thomas, the caste system is an, “independent self-sufficient unit...with a definite unalterable social status deriving its sanction from religion” (Thomas, 10). The Hindus believe what they have done in previous lives directly affects their fortunes in their current life. Similarly, the rights and wrongs of their current life directly affect the conditions of their next life. For example, if an individual is born into the

laboring caste they would believe that their actions in their previous lives determined their meager social position in their present life. These individuals will never be able to rise above their caste and are not to expect anything greater. Instead, they must accept their fortunes and pay for their assumed prior wrongdoings in the hopes that in their next life their fortunes may be better. These underlying Hindi beliefs are in direct conflict with many fundamental Muslim beliefs.

Contrary to Hinduism, Islam is a religion which is firmly planted in a linear history, rather than a cyclical conception of the universe. It is believed that God created the world at a specific moment in time. God himself, on the other hand, is believed to transcend time and to have always existed. Muslims believe that God has revealed himself through the words of the principal prophet, Muhammad, through the Qur'an. Although Muhammad did not receive revelations until 610 AD, Muhammad insisted that his revelation was a further affirmation of religions such as Christianity and Judaism rather than a contradiction of them. In her book, "Islam: A Short History," Karen Armstrong asserts, "This was the primordial faith that had been preached to the whole of humanity by the prophets of the past" and discusses how Muhammad believed, "God had not left human beings in ignorance about the way they should live: he had sent messengers to every people on the face of the earth" (Armstrong, 8). The moments when God acts in history and speaks through his prophets and the daily lives of people are considered to be of extremely high importance.

While the facets of Islam are many, the heart of Islam derives from the belief in the one and only God, Allah, who is the sole creator and sustainer of the cosmos. Philip Wilkinson in his book, "Religions" discusses how, "This belief directs and illuminates every aspect of Muslim life, from the mosque to the workplace and from birth to death" (Wilkinson, 130). Muslims

believe that peace in oneself, in one's community and in the world can be achieved through the submission to the will of Allah above everything else. The Muslim system of morality and code of life can be found in the Qur'an, or more specifically the Islamic code of law, the Shari'ah. Muslims also look to the way in which Muhammad himself lived his life as an example of how to live themselves.

The most important practices of Islam are known as the Five Pillars. The first of the five is that one must believe in Allah and in his messenger, Muhammad. The second instructs Muslims to pray at specific times throughout the day in order to regularly remind themselves of the presence of God. The third pillar requires charitable giving based on one's income in order to promote taking care of others. The fourth pillar concerns a remembrance of the month in which Muslims believe the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad. This is achieved by able individuals through fasting the entire month of Ramadan from dawn to dusk. The fifth pillar requires a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca for all able persons in order to commemorate the life of Muhammad and bring together the Muslim community. By closely following the practices described in the Qur'an and the hadith, Muslims believe they bring themselves closer to God and Heaven after death.

As one can see, the differences between Islam and Hinduism are many and arguably uncompromising. In order to gain a better understanding of the clash between the two religions and cultures and examine the complexities of intercultural experiences of Hindus and Muslims in modern India and Pakistan despite religious differences, I will be taking an intimate look into the situation through two important literary works: "Midnight's Children," published in 1981 by Salman Rushdie and "The Death of Vishnu," published in 2001 by Manil Suri.

Rushdie is both an insider and an outsider to the issues at hand. He was born in Bombay, India but he and his family moved to Pakistan in hopes of planting themselves in a more stable home environment in a Muslim community. Pakistan offered neither the stability nor the community that was desired. Rushdie later attended Cambridge University in England where he thrived as a writer. His satirical writing tendencies led to a huge amount of resentment against him in various Muslim states to the point that a fatwa, or death warrant, was issued against him by the leader of Iran under the charges of heresy against the Prophet Muhammad.

Timothy Brennan discusses how Rushdie, “did not just pick up the outward gestures and moods of Islam passively while growing up in Bombay, but conducted a full-scale study of its history while at Cambridge” (Brennan, 145). Because of Rushdie’s involved Muslim background, he was in a prime position to betray the religion in the eyes of the Islamic world. A sense of homelessness, exile and cultural hybridity are recurring themes in his novel, naturally stemming from Rushdie’s own travels and from the various death threats which have been put against him from various countries.

The second novel which I will be closely analyzing is, “The Death of Vishnu” by Manil Suri. Suri has maintained a much lower profile than Rushdie, but is still appropriately qualified to provide an in depth look into Hindu-Muslim relations. He was raised in Mumbai, India, which is also the location in which his novel takes place. Today, he works as a mathematics professor at the University of Maryland and is the successful author of three novels. Themes which are prevalent in this novel include love between a Muslim boy and a Hindu girl, suspicion of people of the two faiths, the ethics crisis of whether to help someone in need and a critique of the purpose of living and the meaning of death.

These two novels are excellent resources for examining Hindu-Muslim relations because they both straightforwardly address the issue, but in opposing ways. The Rushdie novel is told from an inherently Muslim perspective. The main character Saleem Sinai is born into a wealthy Muslim family, but as troubles arise, it becomes apparent that affluence is not enough to keep the family safe from the struggles faced by the newly born Hindi nation of India. The Suri novel takes a slightly different approach. The action doesn't center on one main character, but rather a host of Hindu and Muslim characters who find themselves connected because they live within the same apartment block. The majority of the building's inhabitants are Hindus, but one Muslim family lives amongst them. This novel provides more of a day-to-day analysis of Hindu-Muslim relations today rather than during the more taxing nation birthing period of Rushdie's novel.

Rushdie certainly sends his readers on an operatic scaled journey littered with Hindu-Muslim exchanges. The story doesn't begin with the birth of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, but rather gains momentum through the telling of Saleem's family history and the events leading up to the partition and independence of India. Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz is a Muslim but is described to have a nose like the Hindu elephant god Ganesh, which is one of the first examples of the permutation of religions and a contradiction between faith and culture.

Aadam, Saleem's grandfather, circa 1917, is a doctor who works for the Ghani family. He exhibits a particular interest in Naseem, the daughter of the wealthy landlord. Naseem, later known as Reverend Mother, is treated very delicately by her family and in order to protect her innocence can only be checked as a patient by Dr. Aziz through a hole in a perforated sheet. Little by little, Dr. Aziz realizes that he is in love with her. On the fateful day WWI ended,

Naseem gets a headache and Dr. Aziz finally gets to glimpse her face. At this moment, there is no longer any question that Dr. Aziz loves her and wishes to marry her.

Meanwhile, an optimism epidemic had struck the some hundred million Muslims of India in the form of a man who was known as the 'Hummingbird.' The Hummingbird held this position as he was, "the founder, chairman, unifier and moving spirit of the Free Islam Convocation" (Rushdie, 40), an organization which stirred up a sense of hope for its represented people. This was managed by his supernatural ability to broadcast a humming sound that resonates for miles around a spiritual stimulus. The hope of the Muslim people quickly turns to despair after the Hummingbird is murdered by assassins, causing a wave of Muslim oppression and dissention between the Muslim and Hindu people. Nadir Khan, the Hummingbirds secretary, hides away in the Aziz household to escape the uprisings. Aadam and Naseem's daughter Mumtaz briefly marries Khan but it is later revealed that their marriage was never consummated.

Mumtaz changed her name to Amina when she was married her second husband, Ahmed Sinai. Amina chose to fall in love with her husband bit by bit, in the same way her father had fallen in love with her mother with the perforated sheet. Oppression on both the Muslim and Hindu front is a recurring factor of their lives. Naturally the respective groups cling together in an attempt for unity against oppression making the Muslim-Hindu lines more distinct. One day, a group of angry Muslims had gathered in Amina's neighborhood and were causing a ruckus. Amina saw that they were threatening the Hindu Lifafa Das. In order to protect him and stop the mob, she made an announcement. She shouted that she was with child and took Laifafa into her house for shelter. Saleem assumes this is the first pronouncement of his glorious and purposeful arrival. It becomes apparent that Saleem views this as both a blessing and a curse as he states, "From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have been public property" (Rushdie, 77).

Daily life in India continues as normal. Rushdie provides several examples of Hinduism playing a role in the Muslim family's life as he describes the festival for Ganesh which took place before the arrival of the fated baby Saleem. The day-to-day events are taken as signs of his forthcoming. The Sinai family plans to move into the abandoned British Methwold Estates. As it was announced that India would gain independence from Britain, the British people were to move back home. The Sinai family's move into the abandoned British Methwold Estates represents the British abandonment of the nation and symbolizes the lasting effects of their influence.

Meanwhile, "another sound is swelling now, deafening, insistent; the sound of seconds passing, of an approaching, inevitable midnight" (Rushdie, 105). *The Times of India* sends out an announcement that they would like to write a story and award a prize to the mother who had a baby at the precise moment of the birth of the new nation. Amina Sinai senses that she will become that mother. A Hindu holy man confirms Amina's suspicions as he prophesies the birth of Saleem. Amina is in labor for hours and hours, but the baby is waiting until the exact moment of the birth of the nation to allow himself to be born.

Saleem is not the only child to be born at midnight. Amina and another woman, Vanita, are both to have their children at the exact moment of India's independence. At this point in the story, the reader learns that Rushdie has not been completely straightforward about Saleem's identity. The midwife who is present is named Mary Pereira. In an entirely brash moment, Mary chooses to switch the two children born at midnight, Saleem and Shiva. This becomes a moment of extreme complexity as one realizes that Saleem is not part of the Muslim Sinai family by blood. Instead, his birth mother was the poor Hindu woman Vanita who dies after childbirth. When Mary switches the baby's to their wrongful parents, she blesses the previously destined

poor child Shiva to the wealthy Sinai family, and curses the previously destined rich child Saleem to an orphaned existence. In other words, Saleem becomes Shiva and Shiva becomes Saleem. In this way, the two ethnic and religious traditions morph into each other. Later, Mary is to feel terrible for her actions and offers herself up as a servant to the Sinai family for the purpose of making amends.

Although Saleem had no surviving parents through his bloodline, India becomes his father and both Amina and Mary take the position as his mothers. In fact, “all over the new India...children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents – the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history” (Rushdie, 117). These are the children who were born within the midnight hour and were all born with magical abilities and multicultural oddities and will come to play a larger role as the novel progresses. The names of each of the characters involved were carefully chosen by Rushdie. Amina was the name of the mother of Muhammad while Mary was the name of the mother of Jesus, effectively making parallels to Saleem and prophethood. Saleem will come to understand himself as a savior and as a source of hope and purpose for India.

Saleem was by blood born to Hindu parents, but is raised into a Muslim family. Saleem’s doppelganger, Shiva, lives in both a parallel and opposite manner than Saleem. Shiva’s family by blood was wealthy and Muslim, but because of Mary’s trickery, he is born orphaned, poor and Hindi. Like Saleem, Shiva’s name is of critical significance. Shiva is generally understood as the third attribute of the ultimate power of divinity. The god Shiva is known as the Destroyer and is associated with fire. Edward Moor in his book, “The Hindu Pantheon,” discusses how Shiva “personifies *destruction*, or rather *reproduction*; for the most popular system of Hindu philosophy excludes, while time shall exist, the idea of absolute annihilation: to destroy is,

therefore, but to *change, or recreate, or reproduce*” (Moor, 35). These attributes foreshadow the future behaviors of the character of Shiva, who is a figure tangled up in divine affairs, just as Saleem is.

Thus, the two supposed most powerful individuals of India represent the stark contrasts which exist among the people of India: the wealthy, the poor, Hindu and Muslim. The two characters are simultaneously twins and enemies. In this manner, Rushdie craftily foreshadows the interconnected and seemingly impossible disputes which will later arise. These disputes present themselves both forcefully and subtly on the political scale between the nations of Pakistan and India as well as on a personal level between Muslims and Hindus. These events can be directly paralleled to Indian society due to their historical nature and show how Hindus and Muslims can have opposing beliefs which sometimes allow for circumstances where each can live together in peace, but also force the two peoples apart.

Although Saleem had supposedly been destined for greatness, it seems that as time goes on his own fortunes disintegrate further and further. Saleem still remains convinced of his greatness, however, and has the ability to reach into other’s minds and read their hearts. Because he and Shiva were born exactly at midnight, they have the most impressive powers of all of midnight’s children. Sometimes, magical powers would present themselves through physical abnormalities, including an individual who is able to switch gender at will or an especially large nose, such as Saleem has. Also noteworthy is a girl known as Parvati, whose namesake is the wife of the god Shiva, who actually has the powers of a witch.

Acknowledging the unique powers which reside within all 581 children of midnight, Saleem forms the Midnight’s Children’s Conference. Throughout the novel, Saleem struggles to maintain unity among the children despite the many directions their lives have taken them. Shiva

desires no such unity among the children, and Saleem muses that, “not a single one of us suggested that the purpose of *Midnight’s Children* might be annihilation; that we would have no meaning until we were destroyed” (Rushdie, 223). Curiously, it is uncovered that Saleem has an A blood type while Shiva has O. Together, this makes them the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end – an allusion to Christianity and foreshadowing the eventual fate of *Midnight’s Children* yet to come.

Aadam’s actions one Christmas day further accentuate the presumed call to prophethood for Saleem. It seems that he stole the piece of hair which had once belonged to Muhammad whilst at a mosque in Kashmir. Soon after, Dr. Aziz dies on the same day which Prime Minister Nehru fell ill and would never recover until he finally passed away on May 27, 1964. Saleem claims to neither know if the theft was relevant to the illness of the Prime Minister or the death of his grandfather, but he does claim that, “Public announcements have punctuated my life” (Rushdie, 271) and that Prophet Muhammad’s hair had been replaced with his own. These are not the only interesting events to happen during this period. Mary Pereira admits to switching Shiva’s and Saleem’s fate and giving each to the wrong family. Filled with guilt, Mary departs to go back to her mother’s house, leaving her sister Alice behind to continue taking care of the family.

Meanwhile, Ahmed sinks deeper and deeper into the depths of alcoholism. Reverend Mother and Amina begin to feel unsafe around Ahmed due to his condition. It is suggested that Amina, Saleem and his sister, known as the Brass Monkey, move to live in Pakistan with Amina’s sister, Emerald and her husband, General Zulfikar.

Amina finds it in herself to leave Ahmed under the influence of the Reverend Mother. Pakistan is regarded as a hopeful location for the family even though Saleem considers it an exile

where he loses contact with the Children of Midnight. These events mirror Rushdie's own life in that his family also migrated to Pakistan in hopes of finding peace and stability. Despite the high hopes for Pakistan, the Pakistanis repeatedly find themselves on the wrong side of the war.

General Zulfikar plays an instrumental role in a coup against the Pakistani government. The coup was carried out at the stroke of midnight and would mark a downward spiral for the country and Saleem's family. Saleem reflects on how he may be separated from the human incarnations of midnight's children, but, "the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty, generals, chaos [and] greed" (Rushdie, 282).

Saleem spends four years exiled in Pakistan. During this time, he grew into a teenager, his mother fell apart emotionally, his first cousin Zafar joins the Pakistani army, his father remains unstable and his sister, the former Brass Monkey, called Jamila, focuses on religious matters and becomes a singing sensation at the heart of the Pakistani people. Relations between Pakistan and India become increasingly difficult and frightening.

A turn of events comes on September 9, 1962 as Amina receives notice that Ahmed has become seriously ill. After residing in Pakistan for four years, she uproots her family once again to go to Ahmed's aid. After she sees him once again, she uncovers a newfound resolve within herself to help Ahmed regain his health. Sometime in this process, the two fall in love belatedly with one another. Meanwhile, India is facing the prospect of war with China. Saleem chooses to call together the Midnight's Children's Conference where the others excitedly welcome Saleem back into their midst. However, as it becomes more and more apparent that India is losing the war against the Chinese, the other children turn against Saleem. Midnight's Children lose their faith in Saleem's ability to save the world.

The continuing war against the Chinese is compared to Saleem's congested sinuses. On the same day of a huge Chinese victory against the Indians, Saleem is to have surgery to have his sinuses cleared. Political events continue to parallel the daily life in that as his sinuses are cleared, the morale of the public also is drained away. With the draining of his nose come both a potential curse and a blessing: Saleem is able to smell for the first time in his life and he has lost his connection with *Midnight's Children*. This loss of connection mirrors the loss of hope the people of India are experiencing due to China's occupation. Once again, India finds herself in a state of panic and Amina responds in just the same way she had previously. She suggests that she and the family move back to Pakistan in hopes of a happier, more stable and purer life.

Saleem is unable to wrap his mind around the idea of a place of purity. He confesses that his heart and mind had forever been tainted by the multicultural nature of Bombay. His, "head was full of all sorts of religions apart from Allah's," (Rushdie, 301) deriving from the fact that he, "had lived in a country whose population of deities rivaled the numbers of its people" (Rushdie, 301). Saleem's childhood in India and adolescence in Pakistan forces upon him a feeling of homelessness and malaise. Over time, Saleem realizes that he is in love with Jamila. Eventually he confesses his feelings to her, and she is mortified despite the fact that they are not related by blood.

Naseem greeted the family in Pakistan in mid-1964. She chose to leave behind, "an India in which Nehru's death had precipitated a bitter power struggle" (Rushdie, 317). In January of 1965, Amina announces happily, but somewhat fearfully, that she has become pregnant again. In tune with the events of the nation, both the family's health and morale dissipates. Ahmed has a stroke which leaves him paralyzed while he watches his ailing pregnant wife. Soon after, on September 22, 1965, Pakistan and India fight their second war over the disputed region of

Kashmir. Bombs released by Indian planes kill the formally Indian citizens Reverend Mother, Ahmed and Amina. Saleem desperately assumes that the war must have been fought for the strict purpose of the elimination of his family. Saleem receives a blow to the head which wipes his memory clear, and he finally achieves the purity which his mother had brought their family to Pakistan to discover. After this event, “On the morning of September 23rd, the United Nations announces the end of hostilities between India and Pakistan” (Rushdie, 332).

Saleem finds himself sitting beneath a tree and recounts how Gautama Buddha achieved enlightenment in the same manner. Peace is temporary for the nations of Pakistan and India, as the war continues in 1971. He follows in the footsteps of the Buddha and submits to his country and, “became a citizen of Pakistan” (Rushdie, 340) by becoming a Pakistani soldier. His time as a soldier leads him to the regions of eastern India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The terror of the battles causes some 10 million people of East Pakistan/Bangladesh to become refugees as they flee into India. Saleem reflects on the impossibility of understanding the immensity of this displacement and notes that it was the largest migration in the history of humanity. Saleem is able to maintain his state of buddhahood and purity, despite his time spent as a soldier, until a poisonous snake bites him and his horrific memories come back to him. During a battle one day, he watches his friends get shot one by one.

For a time, Saleem is relieved of his past. He is unaware of the malaise which constantly follows his life. His connection to *Midnight's Children* had gone silent and his memory of his parents and grandparents, his love of his sister had all disappeared. He submitted to the irrationality of his existence through his submission to the Pakistani government and his time spent as a soldier. He is relieved of the anxiety which comes from the interrelatedness of a Muslim upbringing and a Hindu culture through the transition into a third option, Buddhism.

However, in the aftermath of the war, his memory catches up with him. Saleem solemnly admits, “What you were is forever who you are” (Rushdie, 356) and accepts that there is never a true escape from one's own identity. Saleem's identity, of course, is all but clear. He exists as a contradiction, a hybrid of cultural and religious identities.

The lieutenant-general of the Pakistani army, Tiger Niazi surrenders to India on December 15, 1971 causing some 93 thousand Pakistani troops to become prisoners-of-war. In the events immediately following the surrender, Saleem is reunited with another of *Midnight's Children*, Parvati-the-witch. Parvati calls out his name, bestowing upon him the last remaining facet of his identity that had been lost to him after his accident. Parvati's magical abilities render Saleem invisible, allowing him to escape from the Pakistani army and return to his Indian homeland. Saleem recalls his prophethood and compares himself to Caliph Harun al-Rashid who also had the ability to wander about invisible. While invisible, he discovers what it must feel like to be dead, but also begins to feel enraged.

Saleem only spends a short time with Parvati before deciding to leave for his wealthy uncle Mustapha Aziz's home. His reasons are varied, fantasizing about how his, “true-incestuous feelings were for my true birth sister, India” (Rushdie, 373) and not for his sister Jamila. He desires to bring redemption to India, but also involved in his decision is the sight of his doppelganger, Shiva, which only hastens his departure. Mustapha maintained a contradictory front about, “how he was clearly the victim of anti-Muslim prejudice” while maintaining “absolute loyalty to the government of the day” (Rushdie, 378). This contradictory reality is reverberating across the Indian subcontinent because each ethnic group had reason to call the land home. Mustapha also is the carrier of bad news, telling Saleem of the death of all of his relatives which launches Saleem into a 420 day period of mourning.

When Parvati-the-witch comes in search of Saleem, Saleem is kicked out of the house, “returned at last to the poverty and destitution of which [he] had been cheated for so long by the crime of Mary Pereira” (Rushdie, 383). The comparison to Gautama is thus continued in that Saleem states that he chose to leave his life of comfort in order to go out into the world as a beggar. Despite Saleem’s hesitation due to his impotence, he eventually marries Parvati on February 23, 1975. Parvati-the-witch becomes Laylah Sinai. Marriage is an example of how the differences between Islam and Hinduism can be resolved in that if a Hindu woman marries a Muslim man, they are expected to convert to Islam and take a Muslim name.

As Saleem had fallen into poverty, Shiva had risen in affluence and power. Saleem was impotent, but Shiva was nothing short of a prolific seducer. Parvati becomes pregnant with Shiva’s child before Saleem and Parvati are married, but Saleem is to claim him as his own. Even though Saleem was born a Muslim into a linear worldview, the cyclical Hindu nature continually appropriates his life. Thus, “Once again a child was to be born to a father who was not his father who was not his father, although by a terrible irony the child would be the true grandchild of his father’s parents; trapped by the web of interweaving genealogies” (Rushdie, 401).

At the precise moment Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is found guilty of malpractice in her campaign of 1971, Parvati goes into a terrible labor which would last 13 days. At long last, and at the precise moment Indira announces a State of Emergency the child, Aadam, is born, completely healthy but with abnormally large ears. Saleem compares his son’s large ears to the elephant headed Ganesh, providing yet another example of assimilation of Hindu thought into a traditionally Muslim family. Foreshadowing events to come, Rushdie discusses the many sterilization campaigns the government undertook to address the overpopulation issue in 1975.

Little Aadam suffers from tuberculosis for the entire duration of the Emergency. Troops are sent into the slum where Saleem, Parvati and Aadam are living and a sense of tragedy is abundant. Parvati is killed, and Saleem is hoodwinked into confessing where each of the remaining children of midnight are so they can all be rounded up to be sterilized and deprived of their magical abilities. Shiva is the leader of this brigade and has betrayed his fellow children of midnight, but as has Saleem since he informed Shiva of their locations. Saleem and Shiva share three things, “the moment (and its consequences) of [their] birth; the guilt of treachery; and [their] son Aadam” (Rushdie, 410). Saleem passionately apologizes to the other children of midnight for his treachery, but the disease of optimism recurs among the children. Instead of being weakened by being locked away, they consider that perhaps they are stronger than they have ever been.

Nevertheless, all of the surviving 420 out of the original 581 of midnight’s children are sterilized and relieved of their abnormalities and superpower abilities. Even Shiva opts to have a vasectomy. Shiva is partly the incarnation of the Hindu deity with whom he shares a name, who represents destruction and reproduction. Hindu philosophy, “while time shall exist, [excludes] the idea of absolute annihilation: to destroy is, therefore, but to *change*, or *recreate*, or *reproduce*” (Moor, 35). Saleem finds Shiva’s actions to be both peculiar and amusing because by undergoing a vasectomy, Shiva has chosen to rid himself of the ability to create anything new after it has been destroyed; he has rid himself of his own nature. Furthermore, Shiva has already fathered countless children, each of which he abandoned, including Aadam! In the March of 1977, the children are released and Saleem goes to find his son who is now nearly two years of age.

Saleem recounts a number of important events: Shiva and Saleem part ways, but Saleem still frequently worries about his probable return. Aadam survived through tuberculosis and is now happy and healthy, due to the care of a woman named Durga. Saleem meets Padma and understands that he is to marry her someday. He confesses to being exhausted by politics and wishes to be rid of their influence. Mary Pereira and Saleem have a joyful reunion and Saleem is delighted to have some piece of his family back. He believes she is the only mother he has left, implying that his homelessness and the loss of his magic powers has removed India from his parentage. Finally, Aadam speaks his first word: “. . . cadabba” (Rushdie, 442).

Aadam muses over the fact that Abracadabra derives from the main god of Basilidan Gnostics and ponders what kind of great prophet his son must imagine he is. The ending centering on Aadam is a continuation of the cyclic nature of events, a continuation of the story of India and a continuation of *Midnight's Children* through their descendents. All the while, Saleem had assumed that he was blessed by fate and he comes to discover his position as both a privilege and a curse. He never finds comfort or stability. Saleem is a man who is repeatedly exiled, never truly belonging in any one place. Lapses in memory can bring one temporary relief, but memory always returns and one cannot escape from one's purpose, or dharma.

Saleem reaches the conclusion that there isn't a way to resolve the political and social challenges which prevail among different ethnic groups. Perhaps some solution was uncovered when Shiva ridded *midnight's children* of their magical abilities. Their part to play in the history of India was no more, but the duty, or dharma, has been passed on to the next generation of *Midnight's Children*. In some ways, Saleem finds hope for the second generation and for his son in that the, “second generation of magical children...would grow up far tougher than the first, not looking for their fate in Prophecy or the stars, but forging it in the implacable furnace of their

wills” (Rushdie, 431). In time, change may take place for the better, but one can never truly be free of the cyclical nature of the universe, nor of the linear polarity of the Alpha and the Omega.

Despite the resounding impact of the partition of 1947, the effects have, in many ways, been dismissed by younger generations simply as historical events according to research completed by Nita Kumar in the book, “Everyday Life in South Asia.” Her research suggests that the partition of 1947 to Indian citizens who were born after 1980, “is only a distant event with which they have at best tenuous relationships” (Kumar, 337). Today, the series of catastrophic events related to the partition are thought of as events which occurred in the past. However, Hindu-Muslim relations and the lasting impact that came from the circumstances of the births of India and Pakistan undoubtedly continues to resonate, unconsciously, on the Indian subcontinent.

Rushdie’s novel provides an intimate look into life during the period around independence. Suri’s novel moves the reader forward in history to the present-day, when relations have calmed significantly. Suri’s novel, “The Death of Vishnu” provides a meaningful discussion on the day-to-day lives of Muslims and Hindus who live together even after their past difficulties. It is my view that essentially these characters are the second and third generations of *Midnight’s Children*.

“The Death of Vishnu” begins with a discussion of the abhorrence shared by several of the occupants of the apartment building of Vishnu, a man who is very ill and never leaves the front steps of the building. The tenants are disgusted by Vishnu’s complete lack of hygiene. Some of the tenants condescend to help Vishnu by leaving him bits of food, but this seems to be more out of guilt than pity. In fact, Mrs. Asrani and Mrs. Pathak both claim to care about Vishnu, but seem to be more in a competition concerning which of the them cares more about his

deteriorating state. Their husbands somewhat reluctantly accept the rivalry between the two families. While the two generally tend towards a competition against one another, they have the same unfavorable opinion about Vishnu. Meanwhile, Vishnu dazedly reminisces on his past love affair with the prostitute Padmini.

Chapter two opens with the frustrated musings of Mr. Pathak. He feels as if his wife blames him for Mrs. Asrani's unreasonableness and for Vishnu's sickness even though he has no control over these matters. He begins to consider the idea of going against his wife's wishes and teaming up with Mr. Asrani to call an ambulance for Vishnu, or else, he could call for the ambulance and claim Mr. Asrani had done so! On the surface, the Pathak's and the Asrani's seem to be concerned by spiritual matters, but if one examines their motivations, one recognizes that they are mainly concerned with worldly affairs and constantly get caught up in gossip, rumors and drama.

On Saturdays, Mr. Asrani would try to pay for the sins he had committed during the week by traveling from temple to temple offering up prayers to the Hindu gods. Afterwards, he would travel, "to the masjid...and offer his prayers there covering his scalp with his handkerchief like the Muslim mosque-goers" (Suri, 35). If he could manage it, he would also make a dash to the nearby church and offer his prayers there. Mr. Asrani doesn't know which of these religions best offers appeasement to the divine, and doesn't seem to be spiritually connected to any of the gods he attempts to satisfy.

The three religions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are somehow competing while existing on the same spiritual plane for Mr. Asrani. Nevertheless, he feels confident when entering the Hindu temples as the majority of India's population is Hindi. He is more reluctant to enter the mosques and is afraid of other's opinions when attending church. Mr. Asrani's

affiliation with spiritual meeting places is marked by the judgment of others and selfish considerations rather than spirituality. He is mainly concerned with keeping up appearances and is an individual who exists with a surface level understanding of the world around him. Mr. Asrani and Mr. Pathak end up calling the ambulance. However, neither of these men admits being involved so as to avoid getting in trouble with their wives. When the ambulance arrives and asks for payment, no one agrees to pay the bill and Vishnu doesn't get the medical help he needs.

One flight up the apartment building live Mr. and Mrs. Jalal and their only son, Salim. This Muslim family represents the alien presence in the otherwise Hindu apartment building. Mr. and Mrs. Asrani's Hindu daughter Kavita is smitten over Salim. Kavita hopes to marry Salim someday, but her parents are entirely against the idea of a Hindu and a Muslim marrying one another. Naturally, this causes some upheaval and gossip among the residents, especially with the Asrani family, who regularly announce their disapproval on the matter.

The Asrani's had not always been so negative towards Salim, however. When Salim was a child, he had gotten in trouble with Mrs. Asrani and apologized in such an eloquent manner that she exclaimed that Salim and Kavita would be siblings. Mrs. Asrani favored religious harmony on the level of friendship and had stated, "If we can't all live in harmony in this building, what hope is there for the nation" (Suri, 77) implying that from then on the Asrani's would live without dispute amongst people of different religious beliefs from their own. However, her desire to live in harmony with others did not include the concept of inter-religious marriage.

This is an example of a prevailing attitude amongst people of India around 2001, the year the novel was published. India's people, on the whole, are familiar with people of other religions

and do not regard them as evil, but do regard them with suspicion. Suspicion exists on either side of the boundary between Hindus and Muslims. The choice to inter-marry is somewhat taboo, though certainly not unheard of. Generally, this problem is resolved by the conversion of the woman to the religion the husband practices. While this can assimilate the wife into the husband's family, she may be distanced from her blood family.

The Jalal's and their experiences with religion do not remain static throughout the novel. At first, Mrs. Jalal is understood as a devout Muslim woman while Mr. Jalal was a skeptic of religious belief while also being extremely knowledgeable on the religious tenets of Islam. His, "interest in religion only seemed to extend to reading about it, not practicing it" (Suri, 64). Sometimes Mr. Jalal would pour over passages from various religious texts and would make comparisons to the Qur'an. During these times, Mrs. Jalal would always try to block out his statements in order to keep herself pure from blasphemy.

In Mr. and Mrs. Jalal's marriage, one can uncover two very distinct spiritual perspectives, even though they are a traditionally Muslim family showing the immensity of variation that exists in belief. Mrs. Jalal is the embodiment of faith, believing in Allah and his prophet Muhammad fully, without questioning. Mr. Jalal takes the opposite path and considers himself wiser than faith. He relies on rationalistic thought, comparing and contrasting the texts of different faiths in an attempt to undermine their worth.

The Asrani's particularly dislike the Jalal's because of the deemed impious relationship between Kavita and Salim. Mrs. Asrani begins toying with the idea of arranging a marriage for Kavita in hope of getting rid of the relationship. Kavita is mortified by this idea and is forced to start meeting Salim in secret. These secret meetings often occur on the front steps in the company of Vishnu, whom they would grow to become fond of. Kavita frequently likes being

the center of attention. Even though she has every intention of eloping with Salim, she thinks it would be more shocking to pretend to fall in love with the person her parents will have arranged for her, Pran. When she meets her first suitor, she tries to seem attractive and catch his attention.

To Kavita's surprise, after meeting Pran she begins to fantasize about her potential future with him. With Pran, she would have a simple life. It would provide security and she would find pleasure in being the only one to know how special a relationship they would have. Eloping with Salim, on the other hand, implies an unknown future. Her life would be completely unpredictable and this idea frightens her. At the same time, the concept is enticing because it is dramatic. In theory, choosing the exciting life is closer to the glamour of the stars of Bombay cinema, which greatly influences her.

Thus, she reconsiders how attracted she is to Salim and resolves to continue with her plan of eloping with him. Kavita's predicament provides some insight into Indian society. To follow tradition and agree to marry the individual whom one is appointed to wed assumes an outcome similar to what one's parents experienced. To go against what is expected, is to go against caste. They set themselves up for a questionable and unknowable future without determined variables. Challenges become abundant because their chosen lifestyle harvests dissent from family and society itself.

The Jalal's are considerably less concerned with their son's involvement with the Hindu girl. Instead, they both seem much more involved in religion (though in different ways) and their own personal affairs. When Mrs. Jalal suggests calling the Hajrat Society, a Muslim charity, to help Vishnu, she does this out of genuine concern rather than out of guilt like Asrani's and Pathak's. The Jalal's understanding and experience of reality exists on a higher plane than the previously discussed apartment residents. This is represented symbolically in that they live on

the second floor of the building and are fewer in number than those on the first floor who are more concerned with worldly matters.

Upon hearing Mrs. Jalal's suggestion about the Muslim charity to help Vishnu, the other tenants respond with suspicion. They ridicule and anticipate that the Muslim charity must have intentions other than good heartedness. Mrs. Asrani states, "We aren't just going to hand [Vishnu] over like that" (Suri, 80), certain that the charity would be sure to perform strange experiments on cadavers. This is an example of prejudice and distrust of the Muslim people by the Hindus. While the tenants fall short of suspecting Mrs. Jalal (whom they are quite familiar with) of deception, they certainly do not credit the Muslim organization with any honesty. This suggests that while people may be willing to trust individuals of different religious beliefs than their own, it is much more difficult to trust whole groups.

Mr. and Mrs. Jalal are each pursuing truth, though in very different ways. Mr. Jalal, or Ahmed, had seen Mrs. Jalal, or Arifa, as a clean slate because she was unknowledgeable about religious matters. He assumed that he would be able to enlighten her through rationality and spent much time trying to teach her about why reason trumps faith. Arifa is an example of how faith can be enduring. Generally, complete conversion, as Ahmed had attempted on his wife, is tremendously difficult and cannot be managed under ordinary circumstances as belief frequently lies at the center of one's being.

Ahmed's situation is unique. Arifa won the battle. Ahmed was puzzled, time and time again, by her uncompromising sense of faith. He begins to consider whether his immense level of rationality is actually inhibiting him from viewing the spiritual. In hopes of uncovering a deeper truth beyond the limits of ordinary reason, he practices a variety of different kinds of asceticism. In an attempt to have a religious experience similar to the Buddha, he meditates

underneath a banyan tree. He has an experience and sees a flash of red light, but then realizes that some children had shined a light into his eyes. He broods over how, “the world had become too overpopulated a place to recreate the conditions for renunciation from the Buddha’s time” (Suri, 140). Nevertheless, Ahmed becomes fixated on the feeling of complete oneness with the divine and decides to cogitate in the company of Vishnu.

Vishnu is an extremely interesting character although he physically has the ability to do very little. His level of awareness of reality wanes while his awareness of inner daydreams is precise. The sounds and smells of the physical world correlate to his daydreams. In these dreams, he repeatedly relives his love affairs with Padmini and contemplates the idea that he is a divine presence in world, an idea which solidified after Ahmed receives a revelation that Vishnu is the Hindu god of his namesake. Vishnu is the, “personification of the *preserving* power” (Moor, 15). Through existence, Vishnu sustains and balances all the forces of the universe.

In Ahmed’s vision, Vishnu metamorphoses into a huge, many limbed figure that saturates all space and permeates all time. He confesses himself to be the sustainer and destroyer of the universe and gives Ahmed a task: “Tell them down there to recognize me for who I am...For I have come to save and destroy the universe” (Suri, 149). When Ahmed awakes from his slumber, he knows he must tell others about his vision. When Vishnu, the man dying on the front steps, catches word of this, he considers whether he is truly a god. He determines that he must be and ponders what to do with his powers. He comes to believe himself to be the avatar, Kalki. Kalki’s duty is to, “renovate the creation with an era of purity” (Moor, 188).

Ahmed’s recognition of spirituality and newfound determination to become a prophet prepares the reader to meet a new character who exists on an even higher spiritual plane than Mr. Jalal. Vinod Taneja lives on the top floor of the apartment building, but rarely ever leaves. Mr.

Taneja was married to a woman named Sheetal who had died some time ago. The death of his wife left Vinod devastated and he continues to love her more than anything else through the rest of his life. He tries to find meaning in life by joining an organization which helps those who live in the slums. After a woman gives him the opportunity to start a new life with her, however, Vinod retracts himself from all involvement with the organization. He spends some time walking about, meeting various people, questioning what his purpose could possibly be without Sheetal.

As time passed, “Vinod found his anger spent. He felt a tranquility he could not remember having experienced before” (Suri, 262). Through meditation, he uncovered a means to discovering and experiencing Brahma. He chose a simple life, spending great amounts of time just listening to the sea, or watching worshippers congregate at the church across the street. Vinod, “would transcend the limitations of the finite, of the physical and the perishable...as he lost himself in the harmony and the eternal resonance of the beautiful sound *om*” (Suri, 263). Thus, he had achieved a higher plane of spirituality, of enlightenment, which transcends suffering and which Ahmed is searching for. Vinod represents the highest plane of spirituality. This can be seen symbolically in that he lives by himself and at the highest part of the building. He is the minority who is unconcerned with worldly affairs.

Meanwhile, the Asrani’s recognize that Kavita must be with Salim and are furious. They attempt to keep her absence unnoticed by the other tenants because her actions would bring shame to the family, providing further evidence of the stigma that goes along with dating someone of an opposing religion from oneself. The Jalal’s, being less concerned with what others think of them, face other problems. Arifa doesn’t know why her son has decided to leave and is horrified when her husband confesses himself to be a Hindu prophet and begins proselytizing about the dying man on the front steps. Arifa thinks her husband must be ill and

tells him, “There are no more prophets. It’s written in the Koran...There is no God but God” (Suri, 168).

Ahmed promptly brings a mango as an offering to Vishnu. He believes Vishnu is pleased and has given him a blessing to tell the world about his powers. Arifa laments the fact that she had tried and failed to lead her husband on the path to Allah. She knows his sins are great and wonders whether or not she should divorce Ahmed. She determines that she is not strong enough to divorce him and in doing so, chooses Ahmed over Allah. Through these events, Suri is questioning the role of God and family. The situation demands Arifa choose a side where each of the options is foundational to her character and she makes the choice to be unfaithful to her God to the point where she is willing to listen to her husband discuss a religion of many gods. In this way, Suri merges characters with dissimilar beliefs and practices together, in spite of their differences. The Jalal’s are together in unity, but the differing religious beliefs are not rectifiable.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Asrani is cursing the Jalal’s, saying things like, “Is this what you people came here to do, steal our daughters from under our noses” (Suri, 201)? By the phrase, ‘you people,’ Mrs. Asrani was referring both to the Jalal’s and also to the Muslim people as a whole. This further highlights the distrust of people with different beliefs from ones own in India. This particular suspicion is completely unfounded as the elopement was Kavita’s idea and the Jalal’s were not even aware that their son was with Kavita at all. The events to unfold reveal how stereotypes and prejudices can be so damaging.

A small mob gathers in fury against the Jalal’s. Ahmed sees this as an opportunity and imagines that Vishnu must have arranged for this to happen so that a crowd could know about his power. Ahmed tells his audience about his vision, but those listening interpret it as blasphemy because the same story is in the Bhagavad-Gita, a Hindi holy book. Confused,

Ahmed looks out the window and sees the cross on the nearby church. He realizes that one must suffer to be a prophet. By the third blow, all thoughts of martyrdom, as Jesus had done, had left him. He fled, leaving his wife behind to get beaten up.

Ahmed is left with no other choice but to climb up to Mr. Taneja's apartment where he can find safety and call the police. As he is trying to climb, he gets stuck on the railing. Mr. Taneja is busy meditating and does not hear Ahmed's calls. Hanging from the balcony, Ahmed reminisces about the regrets in his life. Although his humanity had forced him to flee from the mob, he still recognizes that martyrdom was a good way to gain a following. He considers how he would simply be reborn again after this if he does die, and believes that if he has enough faith that he will be able to float in midair.

He gathers his strength and tries to force his way upwards, but is unable to. This symbolizes his attempt to move to a higher level of spirituality, but his past reasoning self catches up with him. He questions, "To sacrifice his life in the hope he could have another? What kind of insane gamble was that" (Suri, 270)? At that moment of doubt, he falls from the third level. The reader can presume that his lack of faith forced him to his fall and left him broken on the ground. He and his wife are both taken to the hospital. Vinod, already enlightened, remains safe at the top level of the building, completely unaware of the problems occurring around him.

The senselessness of the whole affair is brought to attention when Kavita returns home. She had come to find that the exciting, dramatic life she thought she would have with Salim, did not match reality. Salim planned to open a car repair business and Kavita imagined herself impoverished and taking care of many children and realized that she wanted nothing to do with that life. She has no desire to settle for someone as boring as Pran, though either. Instead, she,

“was going to become a film star. A heroine. A glamour queen. No one man could hope to possess her, only long after her on the screen” (Suri, 286).

Needless to say, the Asrani’s are not pleased by this change of heart either, although they are relieved that at least she isn’t with the Muslim boy any longer. While her family recognizes that it wasn’t exactly the Jalal’s fault, the simplest thing to do is still to cast blame on them! To cover up for their own wrongdoings, Mrs. Asrani says, “Mr. Jalal tried to kill Mrs. Jalal because you ran away with his son. Then he tried to commit suicide himself” (Suri, 287). Of course, this isn’t the true story at all. The Arani’s are still concerned with keeping up appearances and protecting their own name even though their own actions caused the Jalal’s to suffer serious injuries. Their selfishness, their underlying prejudices against Muslims and their revulsion to the concept of a Muslim and a Hindu marrying were the cause of a multitude of problems.

Sometime during all of these events, Vishnu dies. It is then that Vishnu meets the Hindu god and avatar of Vishnu, Krishna. Krishna acknowledges Vishnu and plays him a tune on the flute and instructs him to rest. Krishna and Vishnu exchange pleasant conversation. The fact that he meets Krishna, suggests that Vishnu does exist in some form of divinity. However, his divinity is incomplete, which could be symbolically understood by the fact that he slept in the middle of the staircase, rather than the top. Therefore, he is to be reincarnated to have another attempt towards pursuing nirvana, or perhaps godhead.

The conclusion of the novel is left open ended. It is unclear whether or not Mr. Jalal maintains faith in his vision of Vishnu or if he will become more skeptical. It is also unknown whether or not the police will convict any of the tenants who had formed the mob. What can be assumed is that Mr. Taneja will continue on his path of spirituality and that the Pathak’s and Asrani’s will continue on their path of worldly concerns. The Jalal’s live within the middle

ground where every decision they make may have a major impact on their future. However, both of them are severely injured and their linear, one-time lives as Muslims are certainly impaired.

People who identify with Hinduism exist on either side of the spiritual ladder – at the top with Mr. Taneja or at the bottom with the Asrani's and the Pathak's. The Muslim family exists between these two extremes, which is an example of how being a minority can thrust one in opposing directions. Mr. Taneja gains spirituality through a variety of different means and often spends time watching people congregate at church. This suggests that on the top level of spirituality, differences between religions dissipate. The differences become more apparent the lower down the spiritual ladder one goes. After Ahmed had his vision, the religious differences between him and his wife were less of a concern. Arifa chose her husband even though her religious beliefs would have prescribed divorce. The Pathak's and the Asrani's compete with one another despite sharing the same beliefs. At the bottom, differences become more apparent and problematic.

Perspectives on the prospect of peace in India and Pakistan between Muslims and Hindus are varied. Rushdie's novel presents little hope on the matter and assumes a continuing cycle of chaotic events. However, he does suggest improvement will come slowly for future generations as they learn from the mistakes of their past. Suri's novel is more spiritually grounded rather than politically grounded. The novel's themes would suggest that religious ideals converge on a higher level and as people move upwards towards that goal, problems diminish. People who exist on the lowest level of spirituality are certain to continue bickering, while those in the middle face a constant pulling in either direction.

Rifaat Hussain explains his views on the matter in the book, "Prospects for Peace in South Asia." He believes peace between India and Pakistan is heavily dependent on four main factors. First is the recognition on either side that war has not been a viable solution in the past and will continue to not be. Second is the condition that the United States of America continues pressure on each of the countries to remain peaceful as they recognize the nuclear power each country has. Third is the responsibility of developing countries with nuclear power to maintain their reputation and demonstrate responsibility in management of said weapons to other developing countries. Last is the benign influence of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who made it his mission to pursue peace between India and Pakistan. Hussain declares that, "Resumption of the India-Pakistan dialogue, with its focus on nuclear risk reduction measures, seems to be the only credible way of easing world concern over the safety and security of the two countries' nuclear arsenals" (Hussain, 137).

I feel that all the proposed methods of negotiating peace on the Indian subcontinent are certainly worthwhile. Rushdie's proposal for a better future, though long and tortuous seems to be on target. Suri's concept of religions converging on a higher spiritual plane is one that I find interesting and agree with. Despite this, the core differences that exist between Islam and Hinduism still exist. These differences are concrete and for many the concept of losing some of the core tenets of a religion as one grows closer to the divine is impossible and unacceptable, attenuating Suri's view. Though inconclusive, each text allowed for insight into the problems faced by Muslims and Hindus and their attempt to live together peacefully in the same society.

Regardless, the conflict between the two religions has come a long way since the partition of 1947. As Hussain suggests, dialogue between the two nations is essential for continued social and political development. I would add that dialogue across religions would also

be of immeasurable help as it tends not to occur in either of the novels discussed on any meaningful level. The prejudices and distrust that exists between the characters stem from a lack of understanding of each other.

Nevertheless, each of the novels included a religious cross-over experience. Saleem, born Muslim, finds short-term enlightenment through Buddhism but falls short of true enlightenment when he is confronted with his own identity. Ahmed, born Muslim, receives revelation and becomes a Hindu prophet but also falls short of perfection as his past rationalizing self catches up to him. Both Saleem and Ahmed suffer greatly from their falls from the divine and it is unclear whether or not either of them will ever be able to make it back to their respective heights of religious experience. I believe both Rushdie and Suri are suggesting that the journey towards better Hindu-Muslim relations in India and Pakistan will be challenging and perhaps tumultuous. Or in other words, progress will involve steps forward as well as steps backwards.

The cultural collisions which exist in this region come from a longstanding tradition. If things are to continue on this path, one cannot expect a huge amount of change. Change usually happens slowly and the solutions posed for change on this matter are vague at best. Therefore, it is difficult to determine what the future will hold for Hindu-Muslim relations in India and Pakistan. What is clear though is that walls cannot be built between the two. Despite the partition, Hinduism and Islam have both permeated the Indian subcontinent. To attain peace, people must find their own personal ways to live together peacefully despite the many barriers restraining progress.

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