

**Between history and memory:
Mnemonic reconstruction of a disintegrating subcontinent in
Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

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Abstract: This paper argues that the interplay of history and memory in the realm of fiction is a useful dimension to examine some of the complex and multilayered problems related to the culturality and identification in the pre- and post-partition Indian subcontinent. To this end, this paper looks at how Rushdie represents history through the art of mnemonics to showcase the complex historical processes of the subcontinent in the colonial and postcolonial context in *Midnight's Children*. Firstly, it contextualizes Rushdie's representations of cultural dynamics on the subcontinent through the powerful trope of chutney, and maintains that the art of chutneyfying history provides Rushdie with a means of depicting the heterogeneous fabrics intrinsic to the Indian ethos, exemplified as diversity, plurality and intermingling by its very nature. Secondly, it studies the theme of partition to see how Rushdie treats the traumatic experiences of the dispersed ethnicities amidst the political riots in the wake of partition, and by accentuating the prevailing ethnic and religious hatred which causes social conflicts and ethnic divisions and thus afflicting the consumed multitudes, Rushdie deplores the ulterior motives of separatist movements which lead to the consequence of a disintegrating subcontinent. The paper also explores the possibilities of reconstructing cultural and national identity as the displaced ethnicities struggle to survive in the mist of estrangement and alienation as the result of ethnic fissures and religious intolerance. Hence, the intricate relationship between history and memory in Rushdie's historiographical accounts provides new perspectives on a broader question of how the new cartographies of land and culture pose a direct challenge to the new generations on both sides of the border as to how they should reconcile with the partition trauma, recreate their cultural and national identity and sustaining their subjectivity in the aftermath of the partition.

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Introduction

Midnight's Children (1981) is the second novel by the Indian-born British and American novelist Salman Rushdie. Since its first publication in 1981, the novel has been commercially successful and critically acclaimed. It won numerous prizes including the prestigious Booker Prize in 1981, and was celebrated as the Booker of the Bookers and the best amongst all winners on two important occasions, marking the 25th and 40th anniversaries of the Prize. The novel is about India's transition from British colonial rule to independence and partition. As a representative of postcolonial literature *par excellence*, *Midnight's Children* is a postcolonial, postmodern and magic-realist story. It takes the form of an autobiographical *bildungsroman*, as Saleem recounts his story to his lover Padma in a pickle factory owned by his erstwhile ayah Mary Pereira in Bombay (now Mumbai). With the art of autobiographical narration, Saleem invokes memory as a useful dimension through which he engages history from a very personal perspective and thus creates a unique version of history which is quite distinct from other versions of his time. Out of his multidimensional and multidirectional recollections comes an epic saga of the Indian subcontinent, featured by the new social, political, and cultural realities in the post-partition subcontinent. Admittedly, the story is about history and memory in which Rushdie tactfully uses such expressions as "the chutnification of history" and "the pickling of time" (Rushdie 1981, 442) to illustrate how he deploys memory as an effective strategy to trace, document and preserve histories for the younger generations in his self-reflexive style. In his acts of chutneyfying memory and pickling chapters, Saleem invites the reader to taste history, as he is dedicated to pickling private and public histories by invoking the art of mnemonics. In his nostalgic longing for the lost past, Saleem attempts to include events that happen thirty years before his birth and thirty years after, stretching a time over sixty years and spanning three generations of his family. Born at the stroke of midnight on 15th August 1947 – the precise moment of India's gaining independence from the British colonial rule, Saleem is mysteriously handcuffed to history, his destiny chained to that of India as a new nation-state. As his life trajectory mirrors the ups and downs of his country, the interaction of private and public forces as well as the

intertwining of individual and national histories are taken as two prominent features of the novel, which constitutes the basic structure of the storyline. Some critics have shown interest in the intersection of actual and imagined histories in Saleem's self-reflexive narration, and some highlight the changing cultural trajectories of the subcontinent in the wake of partition. Based on these observations, this paper intends to look at the interplay of history and memory in Rushdie's magic-realist narration as also at the paradigms of cultural encounter, clash, and integration which have kept evolving on the subcontinent. In so doing, the study is aimed at highlighting importance of Rushdie's historical consciousness embedded in his literary imagination, for his tactful way of preserving histories with fictional accounts contributes to the understanding of the social and political truths of the subcontinent in the aftermath of partition as also to the knowledge of heterogeneous cultural landscapes thereof. It argues that it is his great talent for historiography that provides valuable insights into the history of the Indian subcontinent.

“Chutney” as a powerful metaphor for the representation of cultural dynamics on the subcontinent

In chutneyfying the private and public histories through his acts of remembering, Saleem Sinai showcases to us that history is something that can be chutneyfied, and thus being endowed with a peculiar taste. As he claims, “One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, [...]; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth [...]” (Rushdie 1981, 444). ‘Chutney’ as a commemorative trope finds its liberal expressions throughout Saleem's reminiscence, which provides a unique perspective on the cultural encounters that have been transpired in the historical course of the subcontinent. While investigating into the theme of history and memory in the novel, it is noted that Rushdie portrays the Indian subcontinent as a land of persistent cultural transaction and constant cultural transformation. Hence, it is significant to keep in view that the metaphorical role of “chutney” conveys a sense of intermingling in terms of culture, communities, religions, languages, and classes inherent in the Indian tradition. Indeed, Rushdie tries to connect the culinary image “chutney” to the complex historical process of the subcontinent, and so chutney in a sense serves to define the Indian subcontinent as a crucible in which

the commingling of myriad socio-cultural and political dynamics is a prominent feature of the society.

In particular, ‘chutney’ can be taken as a sign of cultural diversity and plurality, pointing to the reality of making chutney as a traditionally culinary practice on the subcontinent. In this sense, it is necessary to contextualize the traditional practice of chutney-making stretching over centuries. As a traditional cookery originating from the Indian subcontinent, chutney is a diverse, savory-sweet or spicy condiment, made of fruits, vegetables, or herbs blended with vinegar, sugar, and spices. Etymologically, the term derives from the Hindi word ‘chutni’ and has been used in its anglicized form as ‘chutney’. Practically, Rushdie makes use of the denotative value of the term and contextualizes it against the backdrop of cultural encounter, interaction, overlapping, and intermingling in the Indian tradition. In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie deploys the term to reveal the mishmash of a multiplicity of cultures which has long been a tradition on the subcontinent, thus highlighting the dynamics of cultural exchange and syncretism therein. In fact, many critics have explored the metaphorical references of the image of chutney in Rushdie’s fictional narrative, which is open to varied interpretations from different perspectives. Nadia Butt (2015, 62) argues that “The author’s intention is not to represent the ‘history of the world’, but ‘India’ as a hodgepodge of several cultures and languages [...]”. Indeed, in Rushdie’s literary imagination, ‘chutney’ can be understood both at literal and metaphorical level. While literally representing the blending of a variety of raw materials, it metaphorically points to the diverse traditions intrinsic to the Indian society. Rushdie confirms to us this view in an interview, as he reveals that the Indian tradition has been a tradition with heterogeneous fabrics, featured as multiplicity, plurality and commingling. Mita Banerjee (2002) analyses how postcolonial writers blend history, memory, and hybrid cultural identities in their fictional narratives. Her work explores the reinterpretation of history by reference with Rushdie’s metaphorical use of ‘chutnification’ to describe mixing diverse narratives into a new, blended, postcolonial perspective. Indeed, in his efforts to preserve the historical trajectory of a disintegrating homeland, Rushdie tends to highlight the heterogeneous traditions of the subcontinent, which is replete with myriad cultures, communities, religions, languages, and classes.

Admittedly, in Rushdie’s fictional realm, the subcontinent has been imagined as a world which is radically heterogeneous. And the trope of

'chutney' serves to represent the trajectories of cultural transformations on the subcontinent, highlighting the traditional cultural patterns therein as something of a melange. As such, the art of chutneyfying history provides alternative ways of perceiving the changing cultural trajectories in the pre- and post-partition subcontinent. Meanwhile, the art of autobiographical narration enables Saleem to connect his crumbling being to his life-long sufferings, which seems to provide him with a sense of continuous identity that helps to reposition himself in a fast-changing world. In his struggling against cracking, Saleem reminisces of his days spent with the blessings of chutney made by his erstwhile ayah, "And while chutney – the same chutney which, back in 1957, my ayah Mary Pereira had made so perfectly; the grasshopper-green chutney which is forever associated with those days – carried them back into the world of my past [...]" (Rushdie 1981, 206). His nostalgic longing for his lost past seems to bring him a sense of orientation in the present, on the one hand, and on the other, chutney as the epitome of hybridity echoes the notion of cultural fusion.

As such, the illustration of the metaphor of chutney points to Rushdie's celebration of the multiplicity and plurality of Indian cultures, an underlined theme in the novel which is specified in Rushdie's self-reflexive claims. At the heart of his diasporic narrative lies Rushdie's fully awareness of the nature of Indian tradition, which is vividly echoed in the notion of multiplicity and plurality. As he maintains, "'My' India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, plurality, hybridity [...]. To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once" (Rushdie 1991, 32). Here Rushdie declares hybridity as the most prominent dimension in his act of portraying India, which allows him to encompass a bizarre and motley Indian subcontinent in his narration. In his efforts to highlight the rich cultural heritage of the subcontinent, Rushdie succeeds in representing the histories of the subcontinent as 'many-cultured', to echo with Dirk Hoerder's claim as he says that "To understand issues of cultural belonging of young people today, it is necessary to read histories as many-cultured" (Hoerder et al. 2005, 11). In this way, Rushdie succeeds in representing the history of India as a melange of manifold cultures, highlighting 'chutney' as a compelling device for the illustration of cultural dynamics which is deeply rooted in the Indian ethos of the subcontinent.

Mnemonic mapping of the intertwined histories of the dispersed ethnicities in a disintegrating subcontinent

Rushdie uses the forceful metaphor of ‘the chutnification of history’ to illustrate how he treats histories in his literary imagination. His style of preserving histories with fictional accounts is distinctive. In fact, Rushdie creates a unique mode of narrative which is aimed at representing histories via an unreliable memory as the protagonist Saleem Sinai reveals that the process of preserving the historical transformations both at private and public level in his recollections necessarily involves a certain degree of changing these transformations. Saleem admits that “‘I told you the truth’ [...] ‘Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminate, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events [...]’” (Rushdie 1981, 207). The narrator Saleem acts as an unreliable actor, frequently misrepresenting dates and timelines to reflect how personal memory shapes collective memory. He acknowledges the inevitable distortions involved in his work of pickling histories just as in the process of pickling raw materials, and attempts to give a justification for his claims by underscoring ‘memory’s truth’ in his narration. In his efforts to justify the intertwining of the factual histories and magical realism in his autobiographical narration, Saleem creates a history of his own version which is distinct from other historical versions in his times. Saleem’s version of history “has been reconstructed to suggest a more orderly view of the past which, ultimately, helps to legitimate the present”, as echoed in James W. Pennebaker’s (1997, x) claim. In fact, Pennebaker’s view of reconstructing history is justified in Rushdie’s self-reflexive affirmation, as the latter claims that “When I begin the novel [...] my purpose was somewhat Proustian. Time and migration placed a double filter between me and my subject, and I hoped that if I could only imagine vividly enough it might be possible to see beyond those filters [...]. But as I worked I found that what interested me was the process of filtration itself. So my subject changed, was no longer a search for lost time, had become the way in which we remake the past to suit our present purposes, using memory as a tool” (Rushdie 1991, 23-24). The statement reveals Rushdie’s original intention of writing the novel, that is, the book not only represents a story of India’s past,

but more importantly it is an attempt to reconstruct the nation's history to shape the present.

The observations show that there is an intrinsic connection between history and memory, which has become a prominent theme of the novel. So, it is significant to look at how memory is utilized in Rushdie's narrative as an important dimension in the representation of the intertwined histories of the dispersed ethnicities in the post-partition subcontinent. Many critics pay attention to the relations of history and memory which serves to facilitate the development of plot of the story. Peter Burke views history as social memory with reference to the French sociologist Maurice Halwachs's work which is the first serious exploration of the social framework of memory. Burke (1989, 98) points out that "Halwachs argued that memories are constructed by social groups. Individuals remember, in the literal, physical sense. However, it is the social groups which determine what is 'memorable' and also how it will be remembered". Likewise, David Lipscomb (1991) argues that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* strategically uses the insertion of actual passages from Stanley Wolpert's western historical textbook, *A New History of India* (2003) to challenge the authority of Western historiography. Lipscomb contends that by placing these fragments of objective historical discourse within Saleem Sinai's subjective, fantastical, and memory-driven narrative, Rushdie creates a 'strange middle ground' for the reader. Patrick H. Hutton (1993, xvii) explores the proposition as 'history as an art of memory' and by reference with Frances Yates's theoretical postulations he writes that "As Yates had shown, the art of memory was not just a technique. It was also a resource for recovering the lost worlds". Also, David W. Price's (1994, 92) work is an attempt to investigate into Rushdie's philosophical examination of history in his major novels, and he re-examines *Midnight's Children* by drawing on Nietzsche's theoretical assumption as an interpretive framework and says that "[...] it not only provides us with an explanation of how Rushdie constructed his novel but also offers us a means to understand Rushdie's own philosophy of history". Further, Ronny Noor (1996) argues that the novel's reliance on magical realism often distorts historical facts, cautioning readers to look beyond Saleem Sinai's subjective narrative to understand the real history of 20th-century India and Pakistan. Noor suggests that the "chutnification" of history merges personal memory with political events, sometimes leading to inaccurate representations of key historical moments, including the

partition. As Joanna Klama Teske (2016, 284) points out, “some readers, (e.g. Ronny Noor) took the book as a historical novel and listed Rushdie’s mistakes”. Meanwhile, Teske makes a comprehensive analysis of the contradictions inherent in the book by directing the reader’s attention to the historical context, the unreliability of the narration, and erroneous view of Indian history included in Rushdie’s historiographic accounts, which, according to Teske, are ascribed to the deployment of the technique of magical realism. Teske (2016, 283) claims that “Saleem Sinai, the novel’s narrator, aims to tell the history of India, but quite unperturbed by the mistakes he commits. He misinforms his narratees about the date of Gandhi’s death, reports his own mistake and defiantly announces that he will not correct it”. In this sense, Teske seems to highlight the unreliability of Saleem’s imaginary power in taking the vital task of reviving the nation.

A number of writers have written on the partition of the British India in 1947 which leads to the division of the subcontinent into two independent dominion states, i.e., the Hindu-majority India and the Muslim-majority Pakistan (comprising East and West wings). Led by the 1947 Indian Independence Act, the chaotic separation precipitates the largest mass migration in history uprooting nearly 20 million populations and causes massive communal violence, resulting in up to 1 million deaths. Under such circumstances, the violent episodes induced by the partition riots have become the collective memory of the displaced population of the subcontinent, and have been taken as the centrality of many South-Asian writers’ literary imagination. In *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie has unique perception of the traumatic experiences of the dispersed ethnicities during the division of the subcontinent. Rushdie highlights the violent scenes induced by partition riots that have afflicted the people of the subcontinent by writing that “I shall not describe the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab (where the partitioned nations are washing themselves in one another’s blood [...]) I shall avert my eyes from the violence in Bengal [...]" (Rushdie 1981, 111). Further, what distinguishes Rushdie’s novel is the representation of the partition through Saleem’s retrospective narrative, on the one hand, and a diasporic writer’s perspective on the ethnic fissures on the other. He features the transformation of a simple man amidst political crises, and by highlighting stories of ordinary individuals in a *bildungsroman*, Rushdie interrogates the ideologies of nationalism and national identity in his fictional realm. The story traces Saleem’s memory to represent

the Muslim communities in Indian society. The episodes showing the distortion of human nature in the face of religious and ethnic hatred is depicted as “What is known about the Ravana gang? That it posed as a fanatical anti-Muslim [...] That it sent men out, at dead of night, to paint slogans on the walls of both old and new cities: [...] muslims are the jews of asia! [...] And that it burned down Muslim-owned factories, shops, godowns” (Ibid., 72). Rushdie captures the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims as a result of the racial hatred prevalent in the Indian society, and he articulates the afflictions of the Muslim people when confronted with violence and intimidation unleashed by the Ravana mob against the Muslim communities by writing that “Anonymous phone calls, letters written with words cut out of newspapers were issued to Muslim businessmen” (Ibid.), to accentuate the sufferings of the Muslim communities in the mist of social upheaval.

Rushdie presents the tragedy of Saleem's family targeted by the subversive elements in Delhi, leading to the destruction of the reccine-and-leather cloth business of Saleem's father Ahmed Sinai. Ahmed Sinai is overwhelmed by the conjuncture, and thus rushed clatter footed out of his house, attempting to prevent the outrageous perpetrators from burning down his warehouse by paying off the cash sum set by the gang. In order to stay in business, Ahmed Sinai carries a grey bag full of pay-off money to meet the demands of the Ravana gang, and the episode is featured by Rushdie to reveal the panic and distress that engulfs Ahmed Sinai and his companions. Rushdie depicts the scene as “‘Don't show panic,’ Mr. Kemal said, ‘Look calm.’ But their feet kept getting out of control and rushing on. Jerkily, in little rushes of speed followed by a few badly-disciplined steps at walking pace” (Ibid.). In this way, Rushdie highlights the sufferings of the Muslim communities amidst social crisis, as embodied in the character of Ahmed Sinai, through whom the rascallions find an outlet to vent their frustration and dissatisfaction. The antagonism between Hindus and Muslims remains fundamental to Rushdie's narrative when he pinpoints the conflicts between two Muslim households comprising the Sindhis and the Bengalis and one Hindu household by writing that “They dropped garbage on his house from their rooftops. They hurled multilingual abuse at him from their windows. They flung scraps of meat at his door ... while he, in turn, paid urchins to throw stones at their windows” (Ibid., 7). Caught in the dilemma of religious and ethnic division, abuse and fighting become the normality of the day

amongst Hindu and Muslim people. To further dramatize this very hostile environment, Rushdie presents the episodes of Lifafa Das, a peepshow street man whose presence in a Muslim community triggers a massive riot as he is sieged by a Muslim mob. He is abused by the rioters as mother raper, violator, rapist, and other charges as such, and the tension mounts to such an extent that it incites more bitter confrontations, as Rushdie depicts, "[...] but now he is surrounded by voices filled with blood, and the street loafers are moving towards him [...] a pot flies through the air and shatters on a wall beside him; he has his back against a doorway as a fellow with a quiff of oily hair grins sweetly at him and says, 'So, mister, it is you? [...] who sleeps with his sister?'" (Ibid., 76). Ahmed Sinai is directly involved in such movements which constantly reduce him to extremely miserable circumstances, especially the incident led by the Ravana gang which comes to destroy his world when he fails to pay up the cash sum ordered by the gang, thrusting him into a totally crumbling world. It is through Saleem's recollections that the episode is presented, "[...] when my father came home late that night, with a ditchy smell on him which overpowered his customary reek of future failure, his eyes and cheeks were streaked with ashy tears; there was sulphur in his nostrils and the grey dust of smoked leather cloth on his head ... because of course they had burned the go down" (Ibid., 89). The depiction reveals an irretrievable loss that dooms Ahmed Sinai to failure.

To demonstrate racial divisions as prevalent phenomena in the society, Rushdie embraces stories of people from difference social strata in his narrative, in particular the lower strata of society including the marginalized and excluded Muslim population in India, to expand the stretch of partition discourse in literature on the one hand, and to intensify the implications of depriving of one's homeland and means of survival both as a result of religious intolerance and ethnic hatred on the other; or to put it differently, the wretched lives of the Muslims to face perennial ostracism and persecution, and experience extreme estrangement and alienation.

In this way, Rushdie questions the ideologies of nationalism against the backdrop of social fissures which, in attempting to glorify and celebrate national identity, is at the cost of millions of displaced families and communities.

Partition trauma and the reconstruction of national identity amidst estrangement and alienation

With the partition contributing to the creation of Pakistan as a new nation-state for millions of Muslims, it leads to a consequence of attributing a singular national identity to wondrously discrete and varied ethnic groups in Pakistan. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's family believe in the ideology of purity, as they see Pakistan as the land of submission and the home of purity, and in their struggling towards achieving purity, they tend to deem purity as a fundamental cultural ideal. They are so obsessed with purity that they proclaim that, "'We must all become new people'; in the land of the pure, purity became our ideal" (Ibid., 301). Notably, Saleem's grandmother, known by the curious title of Reverend Mother, makes a resolute determination to emigrate to Pakistan after her husband's death, as in the pure land she can embrace purity in every inch of her life and becomes new people. Immersing herself in the myth of Pakistan as a pure land only for Indian Muslims, Reverend Mother leads a life of incredible vitality. Saleem recalls that "Setting her face against the past, Reverend mother concentrated on gasoline and oil. [...] while Reverend Mother, who had been transformed by bereavement into a woman who was more interested in other people's lives than her own, took to inviting the pump's customers into her glass booth for cups of pink Kashmiri tea" (Ibid., 318). For Reverend Mother, the years in Pakistan are full of hope and possibility, and her aspiration to become new people seems to be within her reach. Her overt preference for the pure attributes a unique cultural identity to her. However, his entering into his exile in the Land of Pure makes Saleem feel awkward all the time. On the contrary, Saleem does not believe in purity, and is in no mood to become new people. When his parents embrace the ideal of become pure in Pakistan, Saleem appears to be "[...] forever tainted with Bombayness, his head was full of all sorts of religions apart from Allah's [...]; and his body was to show a marked preference for the impure" (Ibid., 301). Admittedly, beset by an ambiguous identity – be it to the citizen of India or to a refugee in Pakistan, Saleem rises in revolt against the claustrophobic throng of being trapped in such a liminal state, and he is doomed to be a misfit in the home of purity. Consequently, when his family embrace purity in its entirety in the Land of the Pure, Saleem's life in Pakistan turns out to be infertile and good for nothing, featured as emptiness and nothingness.

In rejecting the ideal of being pure as a distinctive cultural attribution, Saleem, in effect, questions the ideology of Pakistan as an exclusive nation only for the Indian Muslims. In fact, the etymological meaning of “Pakistan” is “Land of the Pure” in Persian and Urdu. Literally, “Pak” means “pure” or “holy” in Urdu and Persian, while “-stan” is a suffix meaning “land” or “place of”. Originally, it was coined in 1933 by Choudhry Rahmat Ali, a Muslim nationalist activist, to represent a proposed Muslim homeland in British India. In reality, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the All-India Muslim League, led a separatist movement with the purpose of making a separate state for the Indian Muslims. However, Pakistan’s experiments with the ideologies of purity go against the realities that the Indian subcontinent is traditionally diversified in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, and many other aspects. Partition leads to new cartographies of land and nation, and yet by drawing lines as new borders of a divided home/land cannot deny the fact that people on both sides of the border share common histories and tradition. In the novel, Saleem rejects the ideal of cultural purity in Pakistan by illustrating the persistent existence of dualities mainly exemplified as the stereotypes of the sacred and the profane, and in bringing into full play his extraordinary nasal passages, Saleem sniffs out the smells of sacred and profane in his scooter-trips rambling through the streets and alleyways of Karachi, exemplified as: the sacred – purdah-veils, halal-meat, muezzin’s towers, prayer-mats; the profane – western records, pig-meat, alcohol. The dualities deemed by Nadia Butt (2015, 69) as “often nothing more than pseudo-religious and cultural cliches” and confronted by Saleem favourably refute the idea of cultural purity in Pakistan, and the persistent ethnic conflicts in Karachi and other cities of Pakistan are the inevitable consequences of partition which forcibly attributes a single national identity to a radically heterogeneous society which consists of a multiplicity of ethnicities. As such, Saleem is unwilling to reconcile with the ideology as “Pakistan as purity” as he believes in multiculturalism as the foremost reality of the Indian subcontinent.

Conclusion

To sum up, the novel is about history and memory in which the protagonist Saleem Sinai takes on the task of reconstructing histories through his retrospective narrative. He deems himself as the “swallower” of historical occurrences, and thus proclaims that “And

there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (Rushdie 1981, 11). Obviously, Saleem accesses the past from an infinite number of perspectives to include an excess of intertwined histories in his retrospection. His unique ways of reclaiming past experiences help him to justify the intermingling of actual and imagined histories in his narration. As David Koester (1996, 142) points out, "For any scene, image, individual feeling, or group sentiment that one recalls, it can be recollected from an infinite number of perspectives in an infinitely divisible number of ways". As Saleem seeks to reconstruct histories through the filter of his intertwined memory, he is dedicated to creating "memory's truth. He evades the chronological account of personal histories by placing the episodes of political turmoil at the centre of his commemorative narrative, highlighting the implications of religious and ethnic fissures for the making of a disintegrating subcontinent. The leitmotif of partition as a historical predicament in Rushdie's fictional autobiography draws our attention not only to the intricate relationship between history and memory, but more importantly to the complex and ambivalent process of India's struggling to reconcile with the legacies of the partition. Rushdie accentuates the interplay of history and memory in his historiographical accounts, and the significance of which lies in its potential to contribute to the understanding of the consequences of dividing the subcontinent in which the new cartographies of land and culture precipitate the new generations on both sides of the border into a particular state of identity crisis, and thus make a direct challenge to them as to how to articulate their dilemma in an interstitial state, reconfigure their cultural and national identity, and sustain their subjectivity in a divided home/land in the aftermath of partition.

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