# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION : THE TWO KINDS OF REPETITION

One of the Saleem's earliest memories is of a blue bedroom with John Everett Millais's picture 'The Boyhood of Raleigh', on the wall. The picture depicts two young boys listening rapturously to the stories of an old fisherman with a walrus moustache, sitting on driftwood, his right arm outstretched and his finger pointing towards the sea. Saleem at one point in the novel likens himself to the fisherman telling stories, in Millais's picture and thus is, evidently, conscious of his role as the narrator of ***Midnight's Children*** (henceforth MC).

Jeremy Hawthorn, in ***Narrative***, commenting on Millais's picture, draws our attention to one important fact: 'His (the fisherman's) gaze does not follow the direction of his pointing arm but is fixed upon the two boys who, in return, stare not out to the sea but at the person who is addressing them, the narrator…Like the two young boys (in the picture) we (the readers) stare at the 'telling' while our minds are fixed upon what the telling points towards.'[1] In this analysis of the novel, I propose to do likewise –'stare' at a feature of the 'telling' – repetition, with my mind 'fixed upon what the telling points towards.'

Deliberations on repetition begin with Homer, the Pre-Socratics, and Plato. Vico, Hegel and the German Romantics, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Mircea Eliade, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida have made significant contributions to the theory of repetition. My interest in repetition is strictly from a literary-critical point of view. I do not deliberate on

repetition as such, but on its usage in MC. I shall make use of J. Hillis Miller's account of Gilles Deleuze's treatment of repetition, since Deleuze's idea of the intertwining of the two possible kinds of repetition, is immensely useful in the interpretation of MC.

Gilles Deleuze proposes two ways of looking at repetition: as difference in similarity and as similarity in difference. J. Hillis Miller translates Deleuze as follows:

> Let us consider two formulations: only that which resembles itself differs, 'only differences resemble one another'… It is a question of two readings of the world in the sense that one asks us to think of difference on the basis of preestablished similitude or identity, while the other invites us on the contrary to think of similitude and even identity as the product of fundamental disparity. The first exactly defines the world of copies or of representations; it establishes the world as icon. The second, against the first, defines the world of simulacra. It presents the world itself as phantasm.[2]

Deleuze describes the first as 'Platonic' repetition. What Deleuze calls 'Platonic' repetition says Miller, 'is grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition. All the other examples are copies of this model.'[3] Udaya Kumar calls this first type of repetition 'naked' repetition, which '… accomplishes the reproduction of an original identity so that each occurrence of the repeated element is only a copy of the original…'[4] The assumption of such a world, says Miller, gives a rise to the notion of genuine participative similarity or even identity. The validity of the copy depends on its correspondence to the original. Miller identifies realistic fiction with its insistence on verisimilitude as an example of this type of repetition.

The other Nietzschean mode of repetition posits a world based on difference. Each thing… is unique, intrinsically different from every other thing… It is a world not of copies but of what Deleuze calls "simulacra" or "phantasms". These are ungrounded doublings which arise from differential interrelations among elements which are all on the same plane. This lack of ground in some paradigm or archetype means that there is something ghostly about the effects of this second type of repetition. It seems that X repeats Y, but in fact it does not, or at least not in the firmly anchored way of the first sort of repetition.[5]

Udaya Kumar calls this second kind of repetition 'clothed' repetition which denotes '…repetition with variation i.e. with difference.'[6] This form of repetition makes it 'impossible to think of… an original model', [7] as it was possible in the first type. In the second type, each occurrence of repetition '…is an affirmation of singularity- repetition is the mode that articulates difference without the mediation of identity or analogy.'[8]

Explicating the difference between the two kinds of repetition, Miller also uses Benjamin's ideas on two kinds of memory in Proust: the first, a rational, willed, intentional remembering of daytime, and the second, involuntary memory. 'The first kind of memory,' says Miller, '…constructs a lucid pattern from which the life' has disappeared, like a dry historical recital of facts. The second kind of memory constructs an imaginary life, 'lived life', as dreams make for us a strangely powerful affective 'memory' of things which never happened as such.'[9] Miller comments on Benjamin's idea and says: 'The originality of Benjamin's insight here is his recognition of the constructive, fictive, falsifying aspect of Proust's involuntary affective memory. This

'memory' creates … a vast intricate network of lies, the memory of a world that never was.[10]

Miller says that the tapestry of memory is woven on the basis of the experience of recurrence, but the two forms of recurrence differ.

Daylight, willed memory works logically, by way of similarities which are seen as identities, one thing repeating another and grounded in a concept on the basis of which their likeness may be understood. This corresponds to Deleuze's first Platonic form of repetition…The second, involuntary form of memory,…is woven also out of similarities, but these are called by Benjamin : 'opaquely similar', These similarities he associates with dreams, in which one thing is experienced as repeating something which is quite different from it and which it strangely resembles…This repetition is not grounded. It arises out of the interplay of the opaquely similar things…It corresponds to Deleuze's second, Nietzchean form of repetition.[11]

It is not similarities in actions, physiognomies or speech mannerisms, the similarity of one thing to another which we are used to, which occupies us in a wakeful state, says Miller, rather it is a 'deeper resemblance of the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to one another.'[12]

**Miller draws our attention to one more point.**

> If logical, daylight resembles depend… on a principle of identity which precedes them, the opaque similarities of dream are baseless, or, if based at all, then based on the difference between the two things. They create in the gap of that difference a third thing, what Benjamin calls the image. The image is the meaning generated by the echoing of two dissimilar

> things in the second form of repetition. It is neither in the first nor in the second nor in some ground which preceded both, but in between, in the empty space which the opaque similarity crosses.[13]

An example which Benjamin offers of opaque similarity is a sock which functions as an empty sack, but which is also at the same time a gift inside the sack, filling it, but also a sock again. The sock, the sack and the gift seem completely different from each other but are nevertheless, opaquely similar. The obscurity of the similarity between the sack and the present lies in the fact that one cannot see through the similarity to its ground, because the sock is itself, the possibility of being two different things- the sack and the present.

It would be worthwhile now to take examples from MC and examine the kind of repetition that Saleem employs. The burning down of Ahmed Sinai's leather-cloth godown and Ramram Seth's prophesy are two important events in this novel. The narrator describes these events in tandem. The narrator highlights the similarities and differences between the two situations. At the outset itself, in a proleptic passage, the narrator draws our attention to the similarities between the two situations:

> One journey began at a fort; one should have ended at a fort, and did not. One foretold the future; the other settled its geographical location. During one journey, monkeys danced entertainingly; while, in the other place, a monkey was also dancing, but with disastrous results. In both adventures, a part was played by vultures. And many-headed monsters lurked at the end of both roads. (MC, 91)

Besides these, there are other similarities. Taxis take the characters to their respective locations, Amina 'clutching at her handbag' and Ahmed, Butt and Kemal 'clutching at their grey bags.' Amina climbs a dark staircase, while Ahmed waits in the dark ruins of Old Fort.

That the two situations are not identical to each other is evident. They are not identical copies of each other nor is there any 'genuine participative similarity' between the two situations. The two situations nevertheless, strangely resemble each other. The second kind of repetition is at work here. The two situations can be described as 'opaquely similar', as 'simulacra' of each other. They are 'ungrounded doublings' of each other, as they are not grounded in any identity. These 'ungrounded doublings' arise from 'differential interrelations among elements', from the echoes one has of the other. The opaque similarities between the two situations are not based on or grounded in identity, but in difference. They create in the gap of that difference, the image, which is not any single thing, but which arises out of the interrelations between the two opaquely similar events.

The second example which will explicate these concepts is a passage from the chapter 'All India Radio' in MC: It is a hot night. Saleem returns to his desk. He has a transistor for company. Saleem remembers another hot night in the past. Here is how Saleem describes the two nights:

> Pickle-fumes… stimulate the juices of memory, accentuating similarities and differences between now and then…it was hot then; it is (unseasonably) hot now. Then as now, someone was awake in the dark, hearing disembodied tongues. Then as now, the one deafened ear. And fear, thriving in the heat …He and I, I and he … I no longer have his gift;

> he never had mine. There are times when he seems a stranger, almost … he had no cracks.
>
> Padma would believe me; but there is no Padma. Then as now, there is hunger. But of a different kind: not, now, the then-hunger of being denied my dinner but that of having lost my cook.
>
> And another, more obvious difference: then, the voices did not arrive through the oscillating valves of a transistor… then, the nearlynineyearold in his midnight bed had no need of machines.
>
> Different and similar, we are joined by heat. A shimmering heat-haze, then and now, blurs his then-time into mine… my confusion, travelling across the heat-waves is also his. (MC, 198-99)

The passage describes two dissimilar situations; one is the narrating situation, where the narrator Saleem writes his story and the other, a memory of a day when he had heard voices in his head for the first time. The time of the night, the heat, the voices in the dark, the confusion, the hunger and the fear join the 'nearlynineyearold' Saleem and Saleem the narrator. But actually, it is only the time of the night and the heat that are similar: as the hunger the narrator feels, is for Padma, the fear, is the fear of being disbelieved, the voices in the dark, are not of the children of midnight, but from a transistor. The narrator, besides, does not have the young Saleem's midnight given gift of being a sort of ham-radio, while olfactory abilities and cracks belong only to the narrator.

It is the second kind of repetition, which is at work here, as there is no identity between the two situations, only a kind of opaque similarity. The two situations are only simulacra of each other and not copies. The similarity between the two situations is not based on identity; rather it is based on

difference. The interrelations between the two situations create an image, which is neither the first nor the second situation, but something in the gap created by difference.

It is important to note one more point. According to Deleuze and Benjamin, says Miller, the second form of repetition is dependent on the first grounded or naked form. Each form of repetition necessarily calls up the other form of repetition. The second form of repetition is the subversive ghost of the first. It is not the negation or the opposite of the first form of repetition, but its 'counterpart'. The two forms are intertwined with each other. We cannot have one without the other, though each subverts the other. The chains of repetitions examined in the novel are both grounded and undergrounded simultaneously.

In most instances it is Saleem, the narrator, who points out the recurrences in the novel. Saleem sees correspondences and similarities as repetitions. Even the Widow's Hand is an instance of repetition for the narrator, in that she once owned a jewellery boutique like Saleem's great-grandparents did. Early on in the novel, the narrator says in a parenthesis: '(…And already I can see the repetitions beginning; because didn't my grand-mother also find enormous…and the stroke too, was not the only…and the brass Monkey and her birds…and the curse begins already, and we haven't even got to the noses yet!) (MC, 7)'

J. Hillis Miller's comment on the narrator's vision in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* is relevant to the narrator of MC too: 'The narrator… sees the sequence of Jocelyn Pierston's loves as duplications of one another. Such a vision sees things in their metaphors, or rather, it sees things as metaphors, as the transportations of the same pattern from one episode or event in the narrative to another.'[14] Miller calls this tendency 'unconscious, spontaneous and

unrationalized', and says, 'It seems to be a primary aspect of perception, not something projected, but something there in the act of seeing itself.' He sees as a 'linguistic mistake' the seeing of one person or situation as repeating an earlier person or situation. Here, things and persons are not seen in their uniqueness, but as signs pointing back to earlier things or persons standing for them. Life is itself, seen as a series of repetitions while actually nothing repeats itself. It is only what Miller calls the 'unconscious human state of illusion', which causes events or persons to be seen as repetitions.[15]

Genette, similarly, calls repetition a 'mental construction which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others ….' He gives us an example: The sun rises every day, but "the sun" that "rises" every morning is not exactly the same from one day to another. Similarly, the '8.25 p.m. Geneva-to- Paris' train is not made up each evening of the same cars hooked to the same locomotive. Genette tells us that 'identical events' or 'recurrence of the same event' is only 'a series of several similar events considered only in terms of their resemblance'[16].

The sheer prolixity of repetitions in MC necessitates some sort of classification, without which it would be difficult to appreciate the variety and extent of its usage. Repetitions in MC can be examined at two levels:

(1) Repetition at the level of the story.
(2) Repetition at the level of the narration.[17]

I shall now consider repetition at the level of the story.

**Notes**

1. Hawthorn, Jeremy (ed.), 1985. *Narrative*, London: Edward Arnold, vii.
2. Miller, J. Hillis, 1982. *Fiction and Repetition*, Oxford : Basil, Blackwell, 5-6.
3. Ibid.
4. Kumar, Uday , 1991. *The Joycean Labyrinth: Repetition, Time, and Tradition in Ullysses*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
5. Miller, 6.
6. Kumar, 7.
7. Ibid, 8.
8. Ibid.
9. Miller, 7.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, 8.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, 9.
14. Miller, 13.
15. Ibid.
16. Genette, Gerard, 1980.*Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 113.
17. Genette uses the term 'story' for 'the signified or narrative content' and the term 'narrative', 'for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself…' , p.27. To avoid the confusion arising from the usage of the term 'narrative', I use the term 'narration'.

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# CHAPTER 2

## REPETITION AT THE LEVEL OF THE STORY

**Repetitions at the level of the story can be divided into the following types:**

a) Repetition of physical and mental characteristics.
b) Repetition of utterances of characters.
c) Repetition of events.
d) Repetition of patterns from history.
e) Repetition of patterns from myth.

**a) Repetition of physical and mental characteristics in characters:**

The narrator's two and a half paragraph long encomium on his grandfather's nose, alerts us to the importance of this organ in the history of his family:

> My grandfather's nose: nostrils flaring, curvaceous as dancers. Between them swells the nose's triumphal arch, first sweeping up and out, then down and under, sweeping into his upper lip with a superb and at present red- tipped flick … Doctor Aziz's nose - comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed god Ganesh - established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch. (MC, 8)

Ilse Lubin had called it "A proboscissimus", and Ingrid had said: "you could cross a river on that nose".

Aadam Aziz's nose is passed down the generations. While on Aadam Aziz it assumes a patriarchal aspect, it looks noble and a little long-suffering on Naseem, snobbish on Aunt Emerald and intellectual on Aunt Alia. On Hanif, it is the organ of an unsuccessful genius. Mustapha made it a second-rater's sniffer. Saleem's nose endows him with magical powers – an ability to hear voices in his head and become a sort of ham-radio, and later, after he lost this gift, an uncanny ability to smell out emotions, things, odours and thoughts of other people.

Other "inheritances" include the blue eyes of Saleem and Aadam Sinai, from Aadam Aziz, the booming laugh of Hanif from Boatman Tai, his "explosive, innocent anger (MC, 167) " from Aadam Aziz, Ahmed Sinai's unpleasant body odour from Tai, Brass Monkey's relationship with birds from Aadam Aziz's father, Amina Sinai's tenacity and resilience in the face of hardship from her grandmother, Amina Sinai's and Shiva's ability to make others confess their darkest deeds to them, from Reverend Mother, who used to sit all day long at the gas-station and listen to confessions. A special feature of the family is early aging. The narrator says: "Like Tai, like Amina, like Ahmed, Saleem too was old before his time … there hung around him an air of great antiquity (MC, 418)."

The hole is a legacy of Aadam Aziz, whose inability to believe or disbelieve the existence of God knocks a hole into him, 'a vacancy in a vital inner chamber (MC, 4).' Aadam Aziz sees himself '… as a crumbling old man in whose centre, when the light was right, it was possible to discern a gigantic shadow (MC, 224).' The hole in Aadam Aziz is temporarily filled by his love for Naseem. Old age, Reverend Mother herself, the absence of like-minded

friends and the withering away of the convictions of his youth contribute to the reappearance of the hole in Aadam Aziz's body.

Saleem inherits this hole from Aadam Aziz. The hole in Saleem is filled by the voices in his head. The debt of Mary's guilt weighing on Joseph D'Costa's ghost causes his disintegration, beginning with a hole in his stomach, the size of an egg. Musa, Ahmed Sinai's old servant who had wished leprosy upon himself, if he had robbed his master, contracts the disease, and is described by the narrator as having a body which 'lacked fingers and toes and was littered with boils and holes (MC, 351).' In the last days before his death, Aadam Aziz, having seen Joseph D'Costa's ghost claims to have seen God with holes in his hands and feet.

Boatman Tai had once told Aadam Aziz: "The ice is always waiting, Aadam baba, just under the water's skin (MC, 7)." Saleem similarly, knows that cracks are waiting to claim him at the end of his story. Cracks are a legacy for Aadam Aziz. Aadam Aziz's eyes show a 'delicate tracery of colourless lines against the blue (MC, 330).' The cracks spread from his eyes as a network of fissures beneath his leathery skin, and before long his skin 'had begun to split and flake and peel; he could hardly open his mouth to eat because of the cuts in the corners of his lips; and his teeth began to drop (MC, 330).' Finally, his bones disintegrate into powder, as a part of his inheritance from Aadam Aziz.

**(b) Repetition of utterances of characters**

(i) Certain sentences are repeated verbatim by different characters, at different places and different times.

- On the train to Bombay from Delhi, Ahmed and Amina hear bangings and voices crying out "Maharaj! Open for one tick only! Ohe! from

the milk of your kindness, great sir, do us a favour (MC,103)!" On the train from Agra to Bombay, they hear voices: Öhe Maharaj! Open up, great Sir (MC, 225)!" Amina and Ahmed hear voices saying "Let us in, Maharaj! Maharajin, are you there, ask your husband to open (MC, 74)", on her first journey from her parent's house to the house in Old Delhi. Saleem finds himself hanging for dear life and begging "Ohe Maharaj! Open! Let me in, great sir, Maharaj!" on his way back from the Widow's Hostel in Benares, while a voice utters familiar words: "On no account is anyone to open. Just faredodgers that's all (MC, 526). "

- Musa about Amina's baby: "It's going to be a real ten-rupee baby; yes, sir! A whopper of a ten- chip pomfret, wait and see (MC, 116)!" Dr. Bose about Vanita's baby "…it's a real ten-chip whopper all right (MC, 135)!" Picture Singh about Saleem's son: "…It's going to be big big: a real ten-chip whopper for sure (MC, 497)!", and "Don't you worry, Captain! Everything will be fine! A ten-chip whopper, I swear (MC, 498)!"

- Mary Pereira's song at Saleem's cradle-side: "Anything you want to be, you can be. You can be just what all you want (MC, 148)." Ahmed Sinai tells Saleem: "Great things! My son what is not in store for you! Great deeds a great life (MC, 180)." Reverend Mother tells Saleem: "Just pull up your socks, whatsitsname, and you will be better than anyone else in the whole wide world (MC, 180)." Ahmed's words and Mary's song plays in Saleem's ears as he

reminiscences in the washing chest (MC, 184). When Saleem returns from his exile he finds Mary singing the song for the Monkey (MC, 304). Saleem remembers Mary's song in Parvati's wicker- basket (MC, 457). Finally he sings the song at baby Aadam's bedside (MC, 501).

- The Monkey shouts "Home again! … Hurry! ... Back-to-Bom (MC, 223)" on their way back from Agra. Saleem yells: "Back-to-Bom! …Back-to-Bom! (MC, 356)", on the way back from Pakistan, and again on the way to Bombay with Picture Singh (MC, 539).

- Nussie-the-duck says: "I told you so, Amina sister, the end! The end of the world!" as she left Methwold Estate (MC, 319), after her husband lost Commander Sabarmati's case (MC, 17), and during the great cat invasion (MC, 269). Amina is visited by spectres from the past in her old–age, and among them is Nussie-the-duck with her "The end, Amina sister! The end of the world (MC, 403)."

- Ahmed Sinai tells his wife: "Wife … this country is finished (MC, 365)", before they leave for Pakistan and "Begum Sahiba, this country is finished. Bankrupt Funtoosh (MC, 361)!" on hearing the results of the Indo-China war. Mary Pereira cries: "Funtoosh! … It's finished; funtoosh!" when she thinks she sees Joe D'Costa going up the stairs to Ahmed Sinai (MC, 335). Lifafa Das says about the Raj: "They're funtoosh! All finished (MC, 93)!"

- Saleem sitting cross-legged and praying "… don't let her die don't let her die … (MC, 498)" is reminiscent of Wee Willie Winkie squatting in a corner and rocking to and fro saying "…will she live? won't she… (MC, 134). "

**(ii)The narrator notes words and phrases that are often repeated by certain characters:**

- "'Let's get organized!" he would exclaim' – the narrator about General Zulfikar (MC, 343).
- Parvati's oft-repeated phrase: "Midnight's children, yaar … that's something, no (MC, 454)?"
- "And above their cacophony sounded the cries of itinerant fruit-sellers: "Come all you greats -- O, eat a few dates --O (MC, 77)!"
- "Dugdugee men: all over India, they shout, "Dilli dekho", "come see Delhi (MC, 83)!"
- Buddha forgets his name during amnesia and repeats: "Not fair, not fair, NOT FAIR (MC, 443)!"
- Shaheed too repeats the words "It's not fair" in the minaret (MC, 451).
- Ahmed Sinai, under the delusion that a painted talking budgie was a bulbul, keeps telling it: "Sing, little bulbul! Sing (MC, 243)!"
- Naseem uses 'whatsitsname' as a leitmotif in her speech (MC, 42).
- The monkey falls asleep after having asked Saleem a thousand times: "But what did you do it for, Saleem? You who're always good and all (MC, 199)?"

- The white beggar woman, who accosts Amina Sinai on her way to Ramram Seth, says interminably "Give something. Begum Sahiba … (MC, 92)."

**(c) Repetition of events:**

**1)Events which are repeated once:**

- Boatman Tai's death has a precedent in Oskar Lubin's death. Oscar Lubin goes to talk to the army and tell them not to be pawns in the hands of those in power. As he crosses the street he trips and falls. A staff car hits him and he dies. Similarly, Tai, infuriated by India and Pakistan's struggle over his valley, goes to Chhamb valley to give the opposing forces a piece of his mind. They shoot him down.
- Amina Sinai constructs in Old Delhi a replica of her underground Taj Mahal. With soft cushions and draperies over windows, with chick–blinds lined with black cloth, she recreates an underground chamber she loved.

> Under the influence of a painstaking magic so obscure that Amina was probably unaware of working it, Ahmed Sinai found his hair thinning, and what was left becoming lank and greasy; he discovered that he was willing to let it grow until it began to worm over the tops of his ears. Also, his stomach began to spread, until it became the yielding squashy belly… [Of Nadir Khan, her first love]. (MC, 76)

- Ahmed Sinai on hearing the birth of his son lets fall the chair he was holding, and consequently smashes his big toe. Miss Kapadia, a teacher at

Breach Candy Kindergarden similarly, is so alarmed on seeing Saleem's nose on his first day at school, that she drops the duster she is holding, smashing the nail of her big toe.

- Amina Sinai falls under the spell of the telephone as does Ahmed Sinai.
- Ahmed Sinai loses the pigmentation of his skin like the Rani of Cooch Naheen. The narrator tells us that 'during the first nine years after the Independence, a similar pigmentation disorder afflicted large numbers of the nation's business community (MC, 212). "
- Ahmed Sinai's streak of good fortune in his financial speculation is similar to Amina Sinai's success on horses, years before.
- Saleem was once tricked into the doctor's clinic with proposals of a picnic. Similarly, Padma and Mary Pereira make an offer of a picnic in an attempt to take Saleem to the doctor.
- Aadam Aziz's senility reminds Saleem of the craziness of Professor Schaapstekar.
- Aadam Aziz's death echoes Dr. Narlikar's death, as both of them die protesting against idol worship.
- There are echoes of the past in Reverend Mother's oath that she would not let any food pass her lips until Pia shows her husband some respect and love and sheds some tears, in his memory.
- Tai-Bibi the ancient whore claims she is five hundred and twelve years old, reminding the reader of boatman Tai who claims to have seen Isa when he came to Kashmir, to have watched the mountains being born and Emperors die.
- President Iksander Mirza has to go through the ignominy of having a pistol shoved into his "rump" and escorted naked to the airfield in

General Zulfikar's coup attempt. Similarly, during Bangladesh's war for independence, Sheikh Mujib too has to suffer a similar treatment.

- Like Mary, Alia raises the impregnation of food with emotions to the level of an art form, and Saleem Sinai claims to have outdone both at his pickle factory.
- Ahmed Sinai begins mistreating servants and takes to drink again during the ruination of Amina Brand Towels. And once again, the old obscenities of the Methwold days are heard.
- Like the Rani, Nadir Khan, Mumtaz and the old men in Agra and Old Delhi, Saleem too, plays games of hit-the-spittoon, expectorating red pan fluid when he becomes Buddha**.**
- The boat which Ahmed Sinai and the rest of the family take to go to Karachi, after they leave Methwold Estate for Pakistan, is S. S. Sabarmati. Its sister which they pass just before they reach Karachi harbour is Sarasvati. The narrator draws our attention to the recurrence – "We steamed into exile aboard the Commander's [Commander Sabarmati of Methwold Estate] namesake ship, proving once again that there was no escape from recurrence (MC, 342)."
- Mustapha Aziz is denied the headship of his Department no less than forty seven times and his wife is driven insane by having to "… be a chamcha" …to forty-seven separate and successive wives of number–ones whom she had previously alienated by her manner of colossal condescension when they had been the wives of number–threes… (MC, 467)."
- Before the Emergency, certain high-ups in the government and "( … certain unelected sons of prime ministers) (MC, 471)" acquire the power

of replicating themselves so that there would be gangs of Sanjays all over the country, a few years later.

- Chisti Khan, a fakir in the magician's ghetto surrounds his shack with a "fabulous creation of bamboo–sticks and scraps of brightly-coloured paper, so that his home looked like a miniature, multicoloured replica of the nearby Red Fort (MC, 478)."
- Saleem's impotency has precedents in Nadir Khan and Hanif Aziz. Saleems's death-wish has a precedent in Ilse Lubin.
- Parvati becomes Laylah following the example set by Nadir Khan who becomes Quasim and Mumtaz who becomes Amina. The narrator comments "… she took a name… so that she too was caught up in the repetitive cycles of my history, becoming an echo of all other people who have been obliged to change their names (MC, 495)."
- In the heydays of Shiva's philanderings many ladies have to persuade their husbands that they were the father's of their sons, like Amina had to do when blood proved otherwise. Shiva's "whoring" in the capital is reminiscent of Saleem's lambretta rides in Karachi.
- Parvati standing on the steps of the Friday Mosque so that all could see that she was pregnant has an antecedent in Amina's public announcement that she was with child.
- Saleem fears what is growing inside Laylah's stomach, just as once Amina had feared that she would bear a two-headed monster.
- In the last pages, a character called Maharaj of Cooch Naheen makes his appearance reminding of the reader of the Rani of Cooch Naheen.
- Like baby Saleem who does not shed a single tear, Aadam Sinai also refuses to cry.

- Saleem is afflicted by typhoid during his infancy and Aadam Sinai by tuberculosis.
- The initials of Midnight's Children's Club, makes their appearance once again, in a black leather folder in Mustapha Aziz's house.
- There is a curse of violent death on people associated with Saleem. His whole family is wiped out in Pakistan, Jamila vanishes and Parvati is killed by the demolition squad.
- Durga, Picture Singh's wife, grows like Naseem towards the end, while Picture Singh begins to look old and forlorn like Aadam Aziz did.
- The glimpse Saleem catches of himself in a mirror above the bus garage reminds him of Aadam Aziz on the day he told the family about his vision of God.

**(2)Certain events recur several times in the novel.**

**(a)Midnight is the time when all important events occur in the novel.**

- Saleem is born at the stroke of midnight on the night of Independence.
- The Midnight's Children's Club meets at midnight.
- Aadam Sinai is born at midnight, on the night that Emergency is declared in India.
- Saleem's family is eliminated at midnight by bombs.
- Sheikh Mujub is captured, and taken to Pakistan at midnight.
- President Iksander Mirza's rule is overthrown at midnight.
- Saleem goes to his sister's bed to confess his love for her at midnight.
- Aadam Aziz sees Joe D'Costa's ghost at midnight.
- Saleem sees Aadam Aziz's dream at midnight.
- Joe D'Costa is nabbed in the clocktower at midnight.

- The Sundarban's offer Ayooba, Farooq and Shaheed four houris at midnight.

**(b) Hallucinations and mirages:**

Hallucinations and mirages can be considered as repetitions of the second type following Deleuze.

- Mary Pereira burdened with her sense of guilt, is plagued by the ghost of Joe D'Costa, a ghost with holes in his feet, and eyes filled up with egg-whites. She sees him often in the drawing room amongst the cut-glasses vases and Dresden figurines and the rotating shadows of ceiling fans. At times she sees him lounging in the soft armchairs. Once she sees him in Amina's bed in the afternoon, lying down next to Amina and she bursts out: "Hey you! Go on out from there! What do you think, you are some sort of lord (MC, 245)?"
- Aadam Aziz is similarly afflicted. Reverend Mother says about him: "He talks to people who are not there… How he calls out, whatsitsname! In the middle of the night! ... Ho, Tai? Is it you (MC, 330)?" On the twenty third day of the mourning period for Hanif, Aadam Aziz gathers together the family members in order to make an announcement. Imagining himself in the past, he says: "Yes, Rani? You are here? And Abdulla? Come, sit Nadir, this is new – where is Ahmed? Alia will want him here…I have seen God (MC, 331). "Aadam tells them that under the light of the setting moon, he had seen someone with shining dust on him. He claims that he saw holes in the hands and perforations in the feet of the apparition, as in a picture of Jesus Christ. Only Mary knows that Aadam

Aziz had actually seen Joe D'Costa, who, decayed by his responsibility for her crime, had holes in his hands and feet.

- The Sundarbans make Ayooba, Farooq and Shaheed lose their hold on reality. Ayooba sees a translucent figure of a peasant he had shot down, one night: a figure, with a hole in his heart and a scythe in his hand, staring at him. A colourless fluid leaks out of the hole in his heart, on to Ayooba's gun arm, paralyzing it. The forest sends them new punishments each night, in the form of accusing eyes of the men they had tracked down and seized, the screaming and monkey gibbering of children left fatherless by their bullets, lamentations of families whose members they had killed, pain-filled voices of their victims and ghostly monkeys singing the words of "Our Golden Bengal", a song they had heard in Bangladesh during the war.
- Under the influence of the forest, Ayooba, Farooq and Shaheed regress towards infancy. Memories of their childhood come back to visit them, and they see visions of the past. Ayooba sees his mother offering him ladoos. But as he reaches out for them, she scurries away and swings from a high branch of a sundry tree by her tail. Night after night, Ayooba sees this white wraith-like monkey with the face of his mother. Farooq sees his brother running wildly through the forest at dusk one day, and Shaheed is visited by a monkey with the face of an ancestor. But all Shaheed is able to see, is his father instructing him to earn his name.
- The forest plays one last trick on them, in the form of an illusion. The illusion so ensnares them, that they not realized then, that they were becoming translucent like the animals in the forest, they would have become prey to the machinations of the forest. Fed by the sensuous

friezes of coupling men and women on the monumental Hindu temple of carved rock, they dream up four beautiful women who lie with them night after night and give them incredible pleasure.

- In her last days, Amina Sinai too is afflicted by hallucinations. The narrator tells us: "…in her last days [she] would be visited by things which had no business to return (MC, 330)." Amina sees the old washing-chest in a vision the night the bombs strike. "So its you again", she tells it, "Well why not? Things keep coming back to me these days. Seems you just can't leave anything behind." Among the other specters of the past that visit her, are Lila Sabarmati's pianola, the ghost of her brother Hanif, a pair of hands which dance moth-like around a flame, Commander Sabarmati with his curious baton and Nussie-the-duck with her "The end, Amina sister! The end of the world (MC, 403)!"
- Nadir Khan comes to visit Saleem in his shack, to warn him of the demolition crew and Shiva. The dream-spectre of Nadir Khan warns him: "Hide. There is little time. Hide while you can (MC, 510)."
- Saleem sees in Parvati's features, the features of his sister whom he loves, making it impossible for him to sleep with her. In Mustapha Aziz's house, Saleem sees Parvati's features changing into those of Jamila as he kisses her, but is consoled by the fact that the spectre had begun to rot and "dreadful pustules and cankers of forbidden love were spreading across her face (MC, 473)."
- Throughout Saleem's childhood in Bombay, whenever bad times came to Bombay, there would be a report of Juhu, Chowpatty and Trombay being littered with pomfrets and of someone having seen the statue of Shivaji come to life and gallop through the city.

**(c) Public announcements:**

The series of public announcements are begun by Amina Sinai who announces: "I am with child" to the Muslims who are out to kill Lifafa Das. Saleem's announcement: "You should be the first to know…I heard voices yesterday. Voices are speaking to me inside my head. I think – Ammi, Abboo, I really think – that Archangels have started to talk to me (MC, 194)", is followed by Aadam Aziz who claims to have seen God. Mary Pereira's is the last announcement in this series. Having mistaken old Musa for the ghost of Joe D'Costa, Mary calls everybody into Ahmed Sinai's room and makes her confessions, revealing what had been kept secret for years.

**(d) Silences:**

- Naseem has recourse to silence when Aadam Aziz burns her veils.
- She inflicts silence as punishment on herself and the family when Nadir Khan is allowed to stay in their house.
- Alia, following the footsteps of her mother, stops speaking to Mumtaz when Ahmed marries Mumtaz instead of her, until just before they both die, when she sees her chance for revenge.
- The Monkey is sentenced to silence, day after day, as Amina abhors the idea of beating her children and is temperamentally incapable of raising her voice. The narrator sees this as 'some echo, no doubt, of the great silence with which her own mother had tormented Aadam Aziz… (MC, 179). "
- Saleem too develops a penchant for lasping into long broody silences which prefigures the time he meditates under a tree like Buddha.
- Silence so pervades the house during Naseem's great silence that the cooks too, receive their instructions in sign language. When a boiling pot of gravy fell

on their cook Daoud's leg, he "opened his mouth to scream but no sound emerged (MC, 64)."

- Rashid the rikshaw wallah imitating the Gaiwallah, screams silently, frightening Nadir Khan who had hidden himself in the cornfield.
- When Saleem's nasal passages are drained Saleem says: "Silence outside me… Silence inside me…A connection broken…Can't hear anything (nothing there to hear). Silence like a desert… (MC, 364). "
- The fight between Dr Narlikar and the language marchers is characterized by silence.
- The ghetto falls into a terrible hush when Parvati's baby fails to come out even after nine days of intensive labour.
- During the early months of Emergency, Picture Singh too gets caught in the clutches of silence and he neglects to lecture his audiences as he had done in the past. When questioned he replies: "This is a time for silence, Captain (MC, 508)."

**(e) Fire:**

- In Amritsar, Aadam Aziz nearly sets his room on fire, while attempting to burn his wife's purdahs.
- Ahmed Sinai leaves for Bombay as a consequence of the workings of the Ravana gang – "Damnfool Hindu firebugs", who set his leathercloth godown on fire. Other Muslim owned factories, warehouses and shops among them, the Arjuna Indiabike godown too, are burnt down.
- The Brass monkey, Saleem's sister, loves to set shoes on fire. She successfully burns not only her father's shoes but also those of Nussie-the-duck, Homi

Catrack, Dubash, Lila Sabarmati and General Zulfikar. Much later, fires recur once again during Bangladesh's war for independence.

(f)**Flight:**

- "In my family, we always go when we are pushed (MC, 102)." Aadam Aziz's flight from the valley as a consequence of boatman Tai's machinations is the first of a long series of flights in the novel.

  • Jallianwalla Bagh and Mercurochrome chase Aadam Aziz from Amritsar.

  • The accidental discovery of Mumtaz's virginity after two years of marriage to Nadir Khan, leads to his flight from the underground cellar in Adam Aziz's house, and Mumtaz's (Amina's) departure from Agra.

  • The Ravana gang helps push Ahmed Sinai to Bombay.

  • The Narlikar women and the war in 1962 are responsible for Sinai's emigration to Pakistan.

  • Buddha along with Farooq, Ayooba and Shaheed flee the scene of battle in Bangladesh, into the Sundarbans.

  • Saleem escapes from Bangladesh in Parvati's wicker-basket.

  Other instances of characters fleeing are: Lifafa Das from the Muslims, Nadir Khan from the crescent knives, Mary Pereira after the confession of her guilt and old Musa after the discovery of stolen articles among his belongings. "Vanishing seems to be yet another of those characteristics which recur throughout my history…" says Saleem to the other midnight's children who are imprisoned along with him at the Widow's Hostel and he lists the instances where people connected to him have vanished.

> Nadir Khan vanished from an underworld, leaving a note behind, Aadam Aziz vanished too, before my grandmother got up to feed

> the geese: and where is Mary Pereira? I in a basket, disappeared, but Laylah or Parvati went phutt without the assistance of spells.
>
> And now here we are, disappeared-off-the-face-of-the-earth. The curse of vanishment, dear children, has evidently leaked into you. (MC, 518)

**(g)Things falling from the skies:**

The narrator Saleem says: "In my family, we have always been vulnerable to things which fall from the skies… (MC, 393). " The first instance of something falling from the skies is on the night the Ravana gang burns down Ahmed Sinai's leathercloth godown. Ahmed Sinai is slapped full in the face, by a barely-chewed Parsee right hand, dropped by a vulture in the night sky.

- On the night of September 22nd, 1965, air-raids take place over every Pakistani city. Of the only three bombs to hit Rawalpindi and explode, the first lands on the bungalow in which Naseem Aziz and Pia were hiding under a table. The second bomb tears off a wing of the city jail in which Zafar, Saleem's cousin is imprisoned. The third bomb falls on Emerald Zulfikar's mansion killing the Nawab of Kif and his 'unmaturing' daughter, who were visiting her that night. Of the three bombs that fall in Karachi, one annihilates Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif and his seven Puffias. The second bomb finds Alia, Ahmed Sinai, Amina Sinai and her unborn child, who is a week away from starting life. The last bomb lands on the house they are building on Korangi Road. Thus the whole family in Pakistan, except Saleem and Brass Monkey, his sister, are obliterated by "what-falls-out-of-the-sky (MC, 409)." Saleem escapes death but is wiped clean of the past, as he loses his memory after he is struck on the head, by his mother's silver spittoon during the bomb explosion.

• Shaheed Dar, a member of the CUTIA unit too is vulnerable to "what-falls-out-of-the-sky". He sees his death in the form of a bright pomegranate, which floats in mid-air behind him, following him everywhere and biding its time. In the Sundarbans, the falling red nipa fruits, which are larger than coconuts, make him fear that his pomegranate dream would materialize there. Shaheed's pomegranate death is realized, in his death by a stray grenade, which literally "falls-out-of-the-sky".

**(h) The disease of optimism is another recurring feature in the novel.**

• Doctor Aadam Aziz contracts the disease in the late summer of 1942. The narrator says that the epidemic is caused by one person called Mian Abdulla.

• The optimism virus attacks the Midnight's children, during the early days of the M.C.C.

• Later, after the M.C.C. had begun its disintegration, Saleem finds himself still being plagued by optimism. "(But optimism, like a lingering disease, refused to vanish; I continued to believe- I continue now-- that what-we-had-in-common would finally have outweighed what- drove- us-apart …) (MC, 358)."

• The whole country is fired by optimism during the Indo-China war of 1962.

• Amina and Ahmed Sinai are among the worst victims of the disease, as they contract it through their late-flowering love for each other.

• When Ahmed Sinai says to his son: "Come son, come here and let me love you (MC, 360). " Saleem too falls prey to optimism in a frenzy of happiness, and remains a victim of optimism till he is drained of his "nose-given-telepathy (MC, 364)."

• Later, in spite of being in the clutches of the Widow, in the Widow's hostel, optimism rises within Saleem's heart: "Yes, here is optimism, like a disease: one

day she'll have to let us out, and then, and then, wait and see, maybe we should form, I don't know, a new political party, yes, the Midnight Party… (MC, 520). "

• Optimism rises within Saleem's heart in the final pages of the novel, when under the influence of Padma, Saleem begins to wonder whether it was possible to alter the ending of his story, his death by cracks, to that of a happy marriage with Padma.

**i)Giving birth to fathers:**

Ahmed Sinai renames Mumtaz as Amina. The narrator says, Ahmed Sinai "…had renamed and so reinvented her thus becoming in a sense her father as well as her new husband … (MC, 73)." Saleem too has a gift of giving birth to fathers. In the absence of William Methwold, Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker Saheb, General Zulfikar, and Picture Singh form a series of father-figures for Saleem. In spite of the revelations by Mary, Ahmed Sinai looks upon Saleem as his son. Since Hanif Aziz and Pia did not have any children, Saleem is pressed into the role of their unborn son (MC, 291). " Sharpsticker Sahib claims his right to fathership as he had saved Saleem's life with snake poison when Saleem had been in the clutches of death as a baby (MC, 309). Let down by his weak-bladdered son, General Zulfikar gives Saleem gives Saleem the privilege of being called "sonny" and "my son (MC, 348). " Picture Singh is the last in the line of men who willingly become Saleem's fathers (MC, 452). Saleem says about this unusual phenomenon: "…giving birth to parents has been one of my stranger talents-- a form of reverse fertility (MC, 291)."

**(j) Transformations occur when Saleem is in enclosed places.**

As an embryo, he grows into "…the incarnation of the new myth of August 15, the child of tick-tock". He emerges as the "the Mubarak, the Blessed Child (MC, 456)." In a wash-room after his birth, name-tags are switched. In a washing chest with a draw string up one nostril, having seen the Black Mango, he sniffs a little too hard, turning into a kind of supernatural ham-radio. Later at the doctor's clinic, surrounded by doctors, nurses and anaesthetic masks, he suffers drainage of his sinuses and consequently a drainage of his supernatural powers, but is given extraordinary olfactory abilities instead. In a small abandoned hut, squashed under the body of Ayooba, he learns the meaning of fair and unfair. In the basket of invisibility, he discovers anger. Thus we find that enclosed spaces have a significant role to play in Saleem's life.

**(3)Certain actions are repeated interminably:**

Tai plying his boat standing in a hunched position across the Dal and Nageen Lakes since time immemorial (MC, 9), Tai's interminable chatter, Aadam Aziz sitting at Tai's feet listening day after day to his stories (MC, 12), Padma stirring the pickle vats all day (MC, 21), Aadam Aziz's weekly visits to Naseem the landowner's daughter (MC, 22), Naseem's "inexhaustible complaints (MC, 23) ", references to Tai having neither bathed nor washed himself for three years (MC, 25), Saleem's working at the pickle vats and at his story by night (MC, 38), Aadam years (MC,25), to Saleem's working at the pickle-vats by day and at his story by night (MC,38), to Aadam Aziz whistling while he rides his bicycle through the streets in Agra in the summer of 1942, (MC, 38), Aadam Aziz's constant requests to Naseem to move beneath him (MC, 41), to Naseem's grip upon her household down the years (MC, 42), and references to the game of hit-

the-spittoon played by the old men in Agra (MC, 45) indicate actions that are nearly daily occurrences, in the first chapter "The Perforated Sheet" in MC.

**(d) Repetition in patterns from history**

The text of Nehru's letter to Saleem reads as follows: "…We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own (MC, 143)." The narrator weaves an intricate web of correspondences between the history of Saleem's family and that of the nation. He forges tenuous connections and draws our attention to the similarities and correspondences. "Our lives …were shaped by correspondence (MC, 157)", says the narrator at one point in the novel. Dieter Reimenschneider lists some of the correspondences which Saleem weaves:

- Saleem's grandparents, on their way from Kashmir to Agra, stopover in Amritsar, where Aziz experiences the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre and on the same day realizes how different his wife is from what he imagined her to be.
- Saleem's parents marry on the day in 1945 when the first atom bomb is being exploded to destroy thousands and to usher in the nuclear age.
- They depart from Bombay on 4 June 1947, the day partition and the date of independence is announced by Nehru and Mountbatten.
- They acquire their own house on 15 August 1947, the day Saleem is born, from the Englishman, Mr Methwold, who claims that his ancestors were instrumental in establishing British rule in India.
- Saleem's grandfather returns to Kashmir on the same day in December 1963 that the Prophet Mohammed's hair is stolen from the shrine in the Hazartbal Mosque in Srinagar.

- On 23 September 1965, India's airforce strafes Rawalpindi and Saleem's family is exterminated.
- Shiva, the narrator's powerful adversary, moves in with Parvati-the-witch on the day in May 1974 when India explodes its first nuclear test bomb.
- Aadam is born on 25 June 1975, the day Emergency is declared.[1]

**Here are a few other instances where Saleem's history is linked to an historical event:**

- While Nasser sinks ships at Suez, thereby 'slowing down movements of the world', Saleem's sister 'impedes the progress' of her family by incinerating their shoes.
- When Indira Gandhi begins to 'abuse her opponents in language of which a Koli fishwife would have been proud', Parvati finds 'the energy to issue a string of foul-smelling oaths (MC, 499).'
- While the contortionists urge Parvati to 'push push push', J.P. Narayan and Morarji Desai are 'forcing Mrs Gandhi to push', says the narrator (MC, 499).
- While the 'head' of Parvati's child is coming out, the Central Reserve Police is arresting the 'heads' of the Janata Morcha (MC, 499).
- Parvati's thirteen day labour coincides with thirteen days of political tumult in India before the declaration of Emergency.

**(e) Repetition of patterns from myth:**

- Saleem finds a precedent for Homi Catrack and Lila Sabarmati and obliquely for Nadir Khan and Amina Sinai, in Rama and Sita, Radha and Krishna and Laila and Majnu.

- Saleem travels the byways of Bombay through his mother's thoughts and escapes to India from Bangladesh, travelling disembodied in Parvati's wicker basket. He claims a precedent for this in Caliph Haroun-al-Rashid who is said to have travelled incognito amongst the people of Bagdad.
- A precedent for Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz's iconoclasm is Sikander-But-Shikan also an iconoclast, who at the end of the 14th century destroyed every Hindu temple in the Kashmir valley.
- Saleem under the chinar is prefigured by Buddha.
- Padma repeats an archetypal gesture when she searches for the herb of virility that the Gandharva had looked for, once in the mythical past.
- Mary tells Saleem that she had heard reports of an old Sikh woman in Kurukshetra, who had seen the war of the Kurus and the Pandavas happening outside her house. Besides, many headed monsters were also reported to have been seen. In the above instances, we find a re-enactment of the original myth itself.
- We find the modern myth of Superman being played out in Saleem's Bombay, with Cyrus becoming Lord Khusro. Mrs. Dubash reworks the modern myth of Superman from a comic book in order to launch Cyrus into his new role. Timothy Brennan sees this as Rushdie's rejection of sectarianism and a ruthless parody of religious charlatanism.[2]
- The Sundarbans with the four beautiful houris parody the myth of the perfumed garden in Islamic mythology, in which four beautiful houris are promised to men, and the women are promised four equally virile males. In the Sundarbans, Ayooba, Farooq, Shaheed and Buddha find four beautiful girls who make their sweetest dreams a reality. The price they have to pay for this is that they start becoming hollow and translucent. Unwilling to make such a big

sacrifice as the sacrifice of their bodies, the four flee from the houris and the jungle. Symbolically, they flee the perfumed garden.

- Saleem Sinai's character is formed from four archetypes: Muhammed, Moses, Ibn Sina and ibn Sinan. Saleem hears voices in his head in a washing-chest. The narrator points out precedents in myth, when Muhammad and Moses had heard voices. Muhammad had heard voices saying "Recite!" and the Koran came into existence. Saleem on the other hand, heard voices and became a sort of ham-radio. The narrator is being audaciously parodic in identifying Muhammad as his precedent. He later qualifies his claim by establishing other precedents.

  Discussing the importance or significance of names, Saleem says – 'Our names, contain our fates (MC, 364).' He is condemned to be a 'prophet in the wilderness' by virtue of his name: 'like Maslama, like ibn Sinan! No matter how I try, the desert is my lot (MC, 71).' Khalid ibn Sinan had a following for some time, but lost importance after a few years. 'Prophets are not always false simply because they are overtaken and swallowed up by history. Men of worth have always roamed the desert (MC, 365).' The narrator relates his name also to the 'master magician', the tenth century Arabic philosopher and Sufi adept Ibn Sina. After grandiosely comparing his abilities to those of the Prophet, he nullifies the positive associations gained, by yoking himself to Ibn Sina. Finally, accepting that he is not even a magician, Saleem says, Sinai is 'the name of the desert – of barrenness, infertility, dust: the name of the end (MC, 365).' Saleem's name therefore predicts his 'special doom' – impotence, infertility and dust.

  Characters like Shiva, Parvati and Aadam Sinai echo their mythic prototypes. Saleem's son, Aadam, is actually the son of Shiva and his own wife Parvati following the mythic pattern. Aadam has elephantine ears like the

mythic Ganesh. Aadam Aziz's nose is 'comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed Ganesh (MC, 8)', says the narrator. Shiva is the god of creation and destruction, of fertility and talents of war, these traits characterize Major Shiva. Shiva is a 'stud', a 'notorious seducer'; a ladies-man; a cuckolder of the rich (MC, 487);" who strews 'bastards across the map of India (MC, 488).'

Shiva and Saleem embody two opposing and irreconcilable principles, Shiva and Brahma, according to Brennan[3]. Shiva and Saleem are rivals from birth. Their rivalry signifies the tensions between the upper and lower classes. Saleem means 'gentleman'; he is a product of mission schooling and Methwold Estate. Shiva is a lower-class bully who is rough of tongue, has crude ideas, is unprincipled, who indulges in 'terrifying, nonchalant violence (MC, 262)', who participates in election fraud and is even responsible for the death of some prostitutes. While Saleem envisages Midnight Children's Club as a federation of equals, Shiva wants it to be a dictatorship where "Everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees". While Saleem argues for a purpose to dedicate themselves to, Shiva says "you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die… (MC, 264) ". Nevertheless, they do share some commonalities. Like Shiva, Saleem too is a traitor. He too is a murderer. (Saleem claims Jimmy and Homi Catrack as his victims).

In the above analysis we find that the narrator makes the novel into a space where mythical re-enactments are possible. Parvati, Shiva, Saleem, Padma, Aadam Aziz, Aadam Sinai, Cyrus, Lila Sabarmati and Homi Catrack have precedents in myth. Certain events too have precedents in myth. The mythical patterns played out belong to both Hindu and Islamic mythology, and Saleem is unable to resolve the dilemma as to whether he is Hindu or Muslim. Different facets of Saleem's character are highlighted in the repetitions from

different archetypes as we have seen above. Seeking help in myth does not solve the dilemma for Saleem. It only exacerbates it.

**Notes**

1. Reimenschneider, Deiter, 1984. 'History and the Individual in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children'*, *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 203.
2. Brennan, Timothy, 1989. *Salman Rushdie and The Third World: Myths of the Nation*, London: Macmillan, 95.
3. Brennan, 113.

# CHAPTER 3

## REPETITION AT THE LEVEL OF THE NARRATION

**Repetition at the level of the narration can be divided into the following types:**

a) **Repetition of words.**
b) **Repetition of colors.**
c) **Repetition of images.**
d) **Repetition of narrative statements.**

**a)Repetition of words:**

**i)Blood:**

We find a predominant repetition of the word 'blood' in the chapter 'Alpha and Omega' in MC. Here is an example:

> Blood, then, was spilled in the circus-ring. Another rejected title for these pages – you may as well know – was 'Thicker Than Water'. In those days of water shortages, something thicker than water ran down the face of Evie Burns; the loyalties of blood motivated the Brass Monkey; and in the streets of the city, rioters spilled each other's blood. There were bloody murders, and perhaps it is not appropriate to end this sanguinary catalogue by mentioning, once again, the rushes of blood to my mother's cheeks. Twelve million votes were coloured red that year, and red is the colour of blood. More blood will flow soon: the types of blood, A and O, Alpha and Omega – and another third possibility – must be kept in mind. Also other factors: zygosity, and Kell antibodies, and that most

> mysterious of sanguinary attributes, known as rhesus, which is also a type of monkey. (MC, 270-271)

The blood, shed when the Monkey exacts her terrible revenge on Evie Burns, provides the occasion for this long passage on blood. This meditation on blood serves to warn the reader of the pivotal role blood is to play in the life of Saleem. Blood reveals the fact that he is not the son of his father, and the truth concerning his birth. The repetition of the word 'blood' in this chapter which is titled 'Alpha and Omega', alerts us to "beginnings…and all manner of ends… (MC, 267) " precipitated by the shedding of Saleem's blood.

Saleem's comment at the end of this passage is significant: 'Everything has shape, if you look for it. There is no escape from form (MC, 271).' On examination of the passage we find that Saleem begins the passage with an account of the Monkey's fight with Evie Burns. The fight leads to the shedding of blood. His meditation on the composition of blood leads him to the rhesus factor in blood, rhesus being again, a type of monkey. The narrative, we find, is circular. It is an example, on a small level, of the narrative in MC on the whole. The narrative leads one from one point to another, till we return to the point where we have started. This example shows us that the repetition that occurs here, is not of the first type, but of the second type. The second reference to 'monkey' is not to Saleem's sister, but to the animal signified by the term 'monkey'.

**(ii)Silence:**

The word 'silence' and related words are predominant in the description of Narlikar's death:

> A silence fell and exerted its powers. Silence guided marcher-feet towards the gleaming gynecologist, who stood between the tetrapod and the waiting women. In silence the marcher's hands reached out towards Narlikar and in deep hush he clung to the four legged concrete as they attempted to pull him towards them. In absolute soundlessness, fear gave Dr. Narlikar the strength of limpets; his arms stuck to the tetrapod and would not be detached. The marchers applied themselves to the tetrapod…silently they began to rock it; mutely the force of their numbers overcome its weight. In an evening seized by demonic quietness the tetrapod tilted, preparing to become the first of its kind to enter the waters and begin the great work of land reclamation. Dr. Suresh Narlikar, his mouth opening in a voiceless A, clung to it like a phosphorescent mollusk … man and four legged concrete fell without a sound. The splash of water broke the spell. (MC, 210) [emphasis added]

In the above passage we find that the word silence occurs thrice and related words like 'hush', 'soundlessness', 'silently', 'mutely', 'quietness', 'voiceless', and 'without a sound', are used, all in a space of eight sentences. The narrator, by repeating the word silence and related words so many times, stresses the fact that the whole incident took place silently.

An incident of this sort, with hundreds of language-marchers rocking the tetrapod with Dr. Narlikar clinging to it, could not have taken place in 'absolute soundlessness'. In excising sound from this incident, the narrator succeeds in making the whole episode a clipping of a silent movie. It is the soundlessness of

the incident that makes it stand out among the other narrated incidents. It functions as a word-picture, an image or an icon – a picture of the state of affairs present in Saleem's India. On the other hand, we have the processions of the language-marchers – one group rallying for the inclusion of Bombay in Gujarat and the other, rallying for the inclusion of Bombay in Maharashtra. The language marchers have forgotten their differences and become one – one against Dr. Narlikar, who has abused the women worshipping the tetrapod, which they have transformed into the Shiva lingam; one against a person who has offended their religious sentiments and kicked away the dia-lamps, who even tried to physically push the worshipping women away from the tetrapod. On the other hand, we have Dr. Narlikar who has actually arranged for the tetrapod to be placed on the sea-wall as a kind of icon pointing the way to the future. Dr. Narlikar therefore, quite justifiably sees the women as retrogressive. Besides, Dr. Narlikar is a stiff opponent of fertility and it therefore 'seemed to him that all the old dark priapic forces of ancient, procreative India had been unleashed upon the beauty of sterile twentieth – century concrete … (MC, 209).'

The language-marchers and the women, representing the vast populace of India unite against progress, against technology, against sterility, against the future. The narrator, in drawing our attention to the silence of the episode, by repeating the word and related words, is able to make it an image representing the regressive tendencies of Saleem's India.

**iii)Repetition of the song 'Amar Sonar Bangla'**

The account of Bangladesh's war for independence is interspersed with snatches of R. Tagore's song, 'Amar Sonar Bangla', or 'Our Golden Bengal'. The words of a part of the song run as follows: 'During spring the fragrance of

your mango-groves maddens my heart with delight.' The Pakistani army unit first hears the song on the last stage of their journey to Dacca. The soldiers tap their feet to the tune; little realizing that it is a patriotic song of Bangladesh (MC, 424). Three pages later we find a reference to the 'voice of Pakistan' Jamila Singer and the anonymous singer of 'Amar Sonar Bangla' fighting 'a battle of their own on the air-waves'. The soldiers now get 'maddened' with hate (MC, 427). In the Sundarbans, plagued by guilt and shame at their ghastly deeds during the war, Shaheed, Ayooba and Farooq hear ghostly voices singing 'Amar Sonar Bangla' in the Sundarbans (MC, 437). Other references to the song occur in connection with the celebrations in Bangladesh (MC, 451, 452).

We find that each reference to the song functions differently. The soldiers enjoy the song when they first hear it, since they are unaware of its meaning. Later, on realizing its meaning, they are filled with hate and anger. In the Sunderbans, the song makes them feel ashamed of their ghastly deeds. The song playing during the celebrations in Bangladesh embodies the defeat of the Pakistani army and the victory of the enemy.

**b)Repetition of colors**:

1**) Saffron and green**

As saffron, green and white are the colours of the Indian national flag, the predominant colors of the night of India's independence, as described by the narrator, are saffron and green. The night of India's independence is also the night of the birth of Saleem Sinai. Since the narrator's main contention is that 'Saleem is India', Saleem's birth too is described in terms of saffron and green:

> Suddenly everything is saffron and green. Amina Sinai in a room with saffron walls and green woodwork. In a neighboring room,

> Wee Willie Winkie's Vanita, green-skinned, the whites of her eyes shot with saffron, the baby finally beginning its descent through inner passages that are also no doubt, similarly colourful. Saffron minutes and green seconds tick away on the clocks on the walls. Outside Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home, there are fireworks and crowds, also conforming to the colours of the night – saffron rockets, green sparkling rain; the men in shirts of zaffaran hue, the women in saris of lime. On a saffron-and-green carpet, Dr. Narlikar talks to Ahmed Sinai … saffron shirted, green skirted, they [the absentee employees of Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home] throng the illuminated streets … wicks float in the lamps which line every balcony and rooftop, and these wicks, too, conform to our two- tone colour scheme: half the lamps burn saffron, the others flame with green…. (MC, 132-133)

Similarly, the uniforms of the occupants in the police cars are described as being 'transformed by the unearthly lamplight into saffron and green (MC, 133)'; green pistachio and saffron ladoos are eaten; trains burn with green flames from the blistering paint and saffron from the fired fuel. The din of independence hangs 'saffron and green in the night sky" according to the narrator, and Mary Pereira wraps Vanita's baby in saffron and Amina's baby in green.

The words saffron and green are used eighteen times each and once as zaffran and lime in the course of the approximately four pages devoted to Saleem's birth. The repetition of these colors serves to bind together, the simultaneous birth of the nation and Saleem in the readers' memory. The

significance of the narrator's usage of saffron and green can be gauged by meditating over Mary Pereira's action. Mary wraps Vanita's baby in saffron and gives it to Amina. (Though Vanita's husband, the Hindu streetsinger Wee Willie Winkie is supposed to be the father, the child is most probably the Englishman Methwold's son). Ahmed and Amina Sinai's baby, she wraps in green and gives to the Hindu street singer. Mary Pereira in the baby switch thus, gives the Hindu child wrapped in saffron, to the Muslim couple and the Muslim child, wrapped in green, to the Hindu couple.

The narrator tells us that 'when the Indian flag was first raised, … a rainbow appeared above that Delhi field, a rainbow of saffron and green; and we felt blessed (MC, 360) ." The rainbow of saffron and green symbolizes the hope of the nation in the aftermath of the partition riots – peaceful coexistence of Hindus and Muslims in secular India. The hope of peaceful coexistence symbolized by the rainbow remains a dream in Saleem's India, as Saleem and Shiva are bitter enemies throughout their lives. Shiva's only goal in life is the destruction of Saleem, even if it implies the destruction of his own self. The lack of peace between the Hindus and the Muslims in Saleem's India, is presaged by the absence of white in the rainbow and the colour scheme chosen by the narrator for the night of India's independence. White peace is split into clashing orange and green.

**2) Green and black**

Rustom Bharucha points out a sentence which links Shiva and the Widow together: 'While Major Shiva reeled from whore to whore, the Indira Congress was reeling too."[1]Dieter Reimenschneider points out another significant fact. The Widow chooses Benares, one of the most holy places of Shiva worship, as

the place where 'ectomies' would be performed on the midnight's children.[2] Saleem and the rest of the children are thus sacrificed at the altar of Shiva. They are the victims of Shiva's hate and the Widow's insecurity.

Mary had wrapped Shiva in green after his birth. Since the Widow is inextricably linked to Shiva, the colour the narrator chooses for her is green too. The venom pouring out of Saleem's pen is directed at the Widow. She is the epitome of all evil in Saleem's India and therefore the colours he chooses for her are green and black – black signifying evil.

Green and black are consequently the colours of Saleem's darkest dreams. Fragments of Saleem's nightmares are reproduced below:

> No colours except green and black the walls are green the sky is black … the stars are green the Widow is green but her hair is black as black. The Widow sits on a high-high chair the chair is green the seat is black the Widow's hair has a centre-parting it is green on the left and on the right black … Between the walls the children green the walls are green the Widow's arm comes snaking down the snake is green the children scream the fingernails are black they scratch the Widow's arm is hunting see the children run and scream the Widow's hand curls round them green and black … Now only she and I and no more screams the Widow's hand comes hunting hunting the skin is green the nails are black towards the corner hunting hunting while we shrink closer into the corner our skin is green our fear is black … and splash of black and up into the high as sky and laughing Widow tearing …. (MC, 249-250)

The actual description of the castration occurs towards the end of the novel where we find these same words recurring in the lines: 'I might be able to tell it as a dream. Yes, perhaps a nightmare: green and black the Widow's hair and clutching hand and children mmff and little balls … (MC, 503)" and later in:

> On New Year's Day, I had a visitor. Creak of door, rustle of expensive chiffon. The pattern: green and black. Her glasses, green, her shoes were black as black … she was the Widow's Hand which one by one and children mmff and tearing tearing little balls go … greenly-blackly, she sailed into my cell …. (MC, 521)

The repetition of the two colors, the repetition of sounds like "mmff', the repetition of certain actions like 'reaching reaching', 'tearing tearing' and 'hunting hunting', the incomplete and incoherent sentences, the piling up of phrases and sentences that run into one another which reproduces the blabbering of a terribly distraught person and show the trauma experienced, contribute to create the nightmarish effect the narrator endeavors to create. The repetitive, non-linear and disjointed narrative forcefully expresses the horror associated with the castration and the Widow.

**c) Repetition of images:**

**(i)The fisherman's pointing finger.**

The fisherman's pointing finger is a recurrent image in the novel. Millais's The Boyhood of Raleigh is one of the earliest memories of Saleem, as it hung on his bedroom wall since his childhood. We have seen in the

Introduction that the picture shows two boys listening in rapt attention to the tales of a fisherman, who has his right hand outstretched, with his finger pointing toward the sea. The narrator says that the picture on Saleem's wall is forecast by Tai the boatman, also a teller of tales, when Aadam Aziz asks him his age and Tai points towards the mountains in reply. When Evie Burns points at the language marchers and says she is interested in watching that and not Saleem, the narrator thinks of the fisherman's pointing finger. When Brigadier Dodson's staff car knocks over a spittoon full of expectorated pan juice, the narrator describes it as a red hand the 'points accusingly at the retreating power of the Raj (MC, 45).'

There is a long meditation on what the fisherman's pointing finger really means in the chapter 'The fisherman's pointing finger'. Saleem fears that the pointing finger points out his 'special doom (MC, 142)'; he says that it could be seen as pointing to the letter by Nehru to him, which was framed and hung adjacent to Raleigh's picture; as drawing attention to the text of Nehru's letter: "You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own." Saleem's life is fated to be intrinsically yoked to the fate of India – what happens to India happens to Saleem. This is his "special doom".

Saleem wonders whether the finger points to the sea, not the sea in the picture, but the sea on which the poor Koli fisher folk eked out a living. The fisherman's finger, Saleem thinks, could be 'an accusing finger, then, which obliged us to look at the city's dispossessed (MC, 144).' Saleem also fears that it could even be 'a finger of warning, its purpose to draw attention to itself (MC, 144)'. It could be, says the narrator, a prefiguring of another finger, which

would 'release the dreadful logic of Alpha and Omega … (MC, 144)'. The finger could be seen as predicting the means by which the truth about Saleem's birth would be told – his finger, which would spout alien blood.

Describing troubled times of communal tension in Agra, the narrator says: "Look: the cloud of disaster … rises and gathers like a ball in the discoloured morning sky. See how it thrusts itself westwards into the heart of the old city; how it is pointing, good lord, like a finger, pointing down at the Muslim muhalla near Chandni Chowk (MC, 82)." The dark cloud points to a place where trouble is brewing, where Lifafa Das is going to be the next victim of communal hatred.

The shadow of the minaret is also described by the narrator as "… the mosque's pointing finger (MC, 394)." Under the pretext of waging a 'holy war', the soldiers commit indescribable atrocities on the people – old people are shot, houses burnt, lady doctors are bayoneted before they are raped and raped again before they are shot, all in the shadow of the minaret. The mosque's pointing finger, we see is accusatory, and points out the duplicity of the Pakistani soldiers and the war.

**(ii)Kolynos Kid**

Another image that is recurrent in the novel is that of the Kolynos Kid. Past Thomas Kemp and Co. (Chemists), beside the Air India rajah's poster is the poster of the Kolynos Kid, 'a gleam toothed pixie in a green elfin, chlorophyll hat who proclaimed: "Keep Teeth Kleen and Keep Teeth Brite! Keep Teeth Kolynos Super White! (MC, 182)." Saleem, fated to be the mirror of the nation sees himself as a sort of Kolynos Kid, 'squeezing crises and transformations out of a bottomless tube, extruding time on to my [his] metaphorical toothbrush, clean, white time with green chlorophyll in the stripes (MC, 288).' On the way

to Aunt Pia's place after the revelations of 'Alpha and Omega', Saleem sees once again the poster of the Kolynos Kid squeezing toothpaste onto a bright green brush, proclaiming: "Keep Teeth Kleen and Keep, Teeth Brite, Keep Teeth Kolynos Super White!" At Aunt Pia's place, Saleem is offered a white, soft sofa with green stripes and he considers this as an early proof of his transformation into the Kolynos Kid. Saleem's sudden accelerated growth at Aunt Pia's house is described by the narrator as the Kolynos effect. '… I had actually attained my full adult height, as if someone had grasped me by the folds of my puppy-fat and squeezed them harder than any toothpaste-tube, so that inches shot out of me under the pressure (MC, 289).'

**(iii)The perforated sheet**

Saleem claims that his narrative is guided by the memory of a large white bed sheet with a roughly circular hole cut into its centre, measuring about seven inches in diameter. This perforated sheet is Saleem's 'talisman', his 'open sesame'. Saleem's history begins with this perforated sheet, as his grandparents meet each other and fall in love with each other, thanks to the perforated sheet. The perforated sheet held up by two muscular women, offers glimpses of Naseem's body, and gradually Aadam Aziz finds that 'his heart had fallen through a hole some seven inches across (MC, 26).' The mutilated sheet, according to the narrator, is stained in the course of time with three drops of blood signifying the union of his grandparents and the beginning of his 'history.'

The perforated sheet reappears years later, held up again by two muscular figures, this time, heavily embroidered in gold brocade and religious calligraphy, with the hole cut out in its centre, embroidered in the finest gold

thread, measuring three inches in diameter. The perforated sheet acts as a veil for Saleem's sister Jamila Singer. Echoing what had happened in the past once before, 'Pakistan fell in love with a fifteen year old whom it saw only through a perforated sheet (MC, 374).'

Saleem dreams of the perforated sheet, in the last chapter 'Abracadabra', in the form of a perforated cloud, with Naseem waiting for his death so that she could weep a monsoon for forty days.

**iv)Cracks**

Cracks recur all through the novel. We have seen earlier, that Saleem's cracks are an inheritance from Aadam Aziz. The cracks on Saleem's body recur on the land and in the M.C.C. – The Midnight Children's Club. As India and Saleem are condemned to be mirror-images of each other, the cracks on Saleem's body find a mirror image in the cracks on the roads. Saleem says: 'Dust ate at the edges of the roads, and on some days huge gaping fissures appeared in the midst of macadamed intersections (MC, 39)'. Saleem's finger loss results in the M.C.C.

**(v)Spittoon**

The lapis lazuli encrusted silver spittoon is another recurrent image in the novel. The silver spittoon provides a tangible link between Saleem and Aadam Aziz. The spittoon passes through several hands before it reaches Saleem. It once belonged to the Rani of Cooch Naheen, a friend of Adam Aziz. The Rani gives the spittoon to Nadir Khan and Mumtaz, as a wedding present. It forms a part of the dowry carried by Amina (Mumtaz).The bomb explosion which exterminated

the rest of his family, gives Saleem the spittoon which had been hidden away for years.

**d) i)Repetition of narrative statements:**

The narrator reiterates that he is 'the centre of the universe" and that 'by the time I [he] had finished, I [he] would give meaning to it all … (MC, 148) ', several times in the novel:

- "That's enough for the moment, about the first days of Bombay Saleem …already my presence is having an effect on history; already Baby Saleem is working chance on the people around him…. (MC, 152)"
- "Horn-templed, cucumber-nosed, I lay in my crib and listened; and everything that happened, happened because of me …. (MC, 155)"

**(ii)The narrator at times, uses the same phrases and sentence structures to describe different incidents.**

A striking example is the description of the birth of Saleem and that of his son. Describing his birth Saleem says:

> I was born in the city of Bombay … once upon a time. No that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more …On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at

> independence, I tumbled forth into the world … A few seconds later my father broke his big toe; ….(MC, 3)
>
> This is the description of Aadam's birth:
>
> He was born in Old Delhi … once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: Aadam Sinai arrived at a night-shadowed slum on June 25th, 1975. And the time? The time matters too. As I said: at night. No, it is important to be more … On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock hands joined palms. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at Emergency, he emerged …. (MC, 500)

This repetition serves to emphasize the fact that Aadam too was born at midnight, a son who was not his father's son, like his father; who is linked to the history of the nation like his father; who will also be a father to a son who will not be his son; who will also be born at midnight, who will also be linked to the history of the nation 'until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died… (MC, 552).'

A passage similarly constructed describes the arrival of the telegram which would bring about the end of Saleem's magical powers:

> Amina Sinai was cutting verrucas out of her feet when the telegram arrived … once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: my mother, right ankle on left knee, was scooping corn-tissue out of the sole of her foot with a sharp-ended nail file on September 9th, 1962. And the time? The time matters too. Well then: in the afternoon. No, it's important to

> be more… At the stroke of three o'clock, a bearer brought her an envelope on a silver dish. A few seconds later, far away in New Delhi … (MC, 353)

**(iii)There are some incidents that happen only once but are referred to more than once by the narrator.**

**a)Aadam Aziz hiting his nose:**

The very first incident which the narrator describes is repeated three paragraphs later. The incident narrated is that of Aadam Aziz hitting his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. It is first told without giving the reader Aadam Aziz's thoughts, and later repeated, with a filling in of the details of his past years in Germany, the change in him since, and his inability to believe or disbelieve the existence of God. The filling in of the details explains why Aadam Aziz vowed never "… to kiss earth for any God or man (MC, 4)."

**b) Saleem's widening cracks:**

The narrator draws our attention several times in the course of the novel to the cracks that are claiming him. Early on in the novel, he says: 'My own hand, I confess, has begun to wobble; … because I have noticed a thin crack, like a hair, appearing in my wrist, beneath the skin … (MC, 36).' Soon after he says: 'Please believe that I am falling apart … I have begun to crack all over like an old jug … my poor body … has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating … I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust (MC, 37).' When Padma leaves Saleem he '…feel [s] cracks widening down the length of [his] body …' and 'cracks spreading all over … radiating

like a spider's web from … [his] navel; … (MC, 197).' 'Cracks widen within – I can hear and feel the rip tear crunch – I begin to grow thinner, translucent almost; there is not much of me left, and soon there will be nothing at all (MC, 458). ", says the narrator, and a little later again: 'Rip crunch crack … I … am being hurried towards disintegration (MC, 459).'

There are other instances:

**c)Amina Sinai 's blush:**

'And now, what expression is this, staining her face the colour of drying blood (MC, 188)?'

'On my tenth birthday, we were visited by my uncle Hanif, who made himself excessively unpopular at Methwold's Estate by booming cheerily, "Elections Coming! Watch out for the Communists (MC, 246)!" '

'On my tenth birthday, when my uncle Hanif made his gaffe, my mother (who had begun disappearing on mysterious "shopping trips") dramatically and unaccountably blushed (MC, 246).'

'Nothing is without meaning: not without reasons are blushes red. My uncle Hanif said, "Watch out for the Communists" and my mother turned scarlet; politics and emotions were united in her cheeks (MC, 259).'

'To sum up in the high summer of 1957, at the peak of an election campaign, Amina Sinai blushed inexplicably at a chance mention of the Communist Party of India (MC, 260).'

'When the Communist peril was discussed on our hillock, my mother continued to blush (MC, 265).'

'Adults never trusted him [Hanif] to behave with decorum ("Watch out for the Communists!" he bellowed, and they blushed) … (MC, 287).'

We find that the narrator makes references to Amina's blushings, at least six times in the novel, once each on page numbers 188, 259, 260, 265 and 287 and twice on page 246.

**d)Hanif's death:**

The circumstances associated with Hanif's death are mentioned at least thrice in the novel.

'Uncle Hanif, who would one day, without warning, take a walk off the roof of his home (MC, 287).'

'Deprived of the income he had received from Homi Catrack, my uncle had taken his booming voice and his obsessions with hearts and reality up to the roof of his Marine Drive apartment block; he had stepped out into the evening sea-breeze, frightening the beggars … (MC, 325-326).'

'Deprived of a livelihood by spurning the cheap-thrill style of Bombay cinema, my uncle strolled off the edge of a roof … (MC, 328).'

**e)The Prime Minister's letter:**

The narrator records the whole text of the Prime Minister's letter on page 143 and later repeats a part of it on page 199. The letter is referred to several times, in the course of the novel.

**(iv)Previews and Synopses:**

Two devices are frequently employed by the narrator, one of which is what Uma Parmeshwaran calls 'periodic preview of events to come'[3] and the other is synopsis. The first device offers glimpses of the future, and the second offers a summary of events already described.

**Previews:**

Nancy E. Batty identifies three kinds of previews used by the narrator:

a) what Genette calls 'repetitive prolepses'

b) passages that are self-consiously used to create suspense and

c) a larger structuring kind of preview.[4]

**a)Repetitive Prolepses:**

Repetitive prolepses occurs when references are made 'in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place.'[5]

'(… And already I can see the repetitions beginning; because didn't my grandmother also find enormous … and the stroke, too, was not only … and the Brass Monkey had her birds … (MC, 7).' The above passage is an example of what Genette calls repetitive prolepses. Here the telling of Aadam's mother's enormous strength in the hour of adversity reminds the narrator of a similar show of tenacity by another character as yet undescribed. Similar repetitive prolepses occur intermittently in the novel. For example:

- 'In the brandy bottle of the boatman Tai I see foretold, my own father's possession by djinns … and there will be another bald foreigner … and Tai's gas prophesies another kind, which was the consolation of my grandmother's old age, and taught her stories, too… and pie-dogs aren't far away…. (MC, 12)'
- 'Tai's laugh, emerging to infect Aadam – a huge booming laugh (my Uncle Hanif inherited this laugh…) (MC, 13).'

**(b)Passages that are self-consciously used to create suspense**:

'I'm not finished yet! There is to be an electrocution and a rain-forest; a pyramid of heads on a field impregnated by leaky marrow and bones; narrow escapes are still coming, and a minaret that screamed (MC, 414)!'

Saleem himself calls these passages 'movie trailers (MC, 414).' In a parenthesis he says, 'How I loved them at the old Metro Cub Club! O smacking of lips at the sight of the title NEXT ATTRACTION, superimposed on undulating blue velvet! O anticipatory salivation before screen trumpeting COMING SOON! – Because the promise of the exotic futures has always seemed to my mind, the perfect antidote to the disappointments of the present (MC, 414).' The narrator Saleem uses these passages, which offer a glimpse of the future, to create suspense and to hold the wavering attention of his narratee, Padma. Padma is thus lured into listening to Saleem once again.

Batty says '…one criterion which may be applied to the successful creation of suspense is that of duration between promise and fulfillment'. She quotes Pierre Macherey, on the novel of mystery, in support of her statement: 'The narrative progresses only by the inhibition of the truth; its movement is an ambivalence, an effort to postpone rather than to hasten revelation.'[6] There is a consistent postponement of the revelation of important facts or events by Saleem. For example, the Widow's identity is kept a carefully guarded secret till the end of the novel. Saleem says "I'm keeping [her] for the end". She is introduced on page 249 and her identity is revealed only on page 502.

**c) 'Larger, structuring kind' of preview:**

A third kind of prefigurative passage is Ramram Seth's prophesy, which according to Batty is '… an example of a larger, structuring kind of trailer as opposed to other more straightforward and more quickly fulfilled narrative premises …' Ramram Seth's cryptic prophesy, which functions like the oracle in Greek drama is fulfilled in the following pages of the book. Ramram Seth

prophesies the time of Saleem's birth, Shiva's knees and Saleem's nose, the headings in the newspaper , his two mothers Mary and Amina, the escapade with his bicycle and the language marchers, his hiding in the washing chest and the voices he hears, his mutilation and betrayal by blood, his "braining" by a spittoon, the doctors and the jungle, wizards , soldiers and tyrants that play a role in his life, the fact that he would have a son without fathering one, that he would be "old before the is old" and that he would "die before he is dead" – in other words, all important events of his life are prophesized by Ramram Seth .

**Synopsis:**

The other device which is used to complement the 'periodic previews' is synopsis. Genette calls such passages 'repeating analepsis'. '… in these the narrative openly, sometimes explicitly retraces its own path.'[7] Such passages abound in the novel.

Examples:

- 'My mother came to Delhi, worked assiduously at loving her husband; was prevented by Zohra and khichri and clattering feet from telling her husband her news; heard screams; made a public announcement. And it worked. My annunciation saved a life (MC, 86).'
- 'Let me sum up: at a crucial point in the history of our child-nation, at a time when Five Year Plans were being drawn up and elections were approaching and language marchers were fighting over Bombay, a nine year old boy named Salem acquired a miraculous gift (MC, 204).'

- 'Once upon a time there was a mother who, in order to become a mother, had agreed to change her name; who set herself the task of falling in love with her husband bit by bit (MC, 256).'

Extended, repeating analeptic passages are seen on pages 409-410 and 443. These passages aid the reader's memory as they provide cogent summaries of what has been narrated. Besides they also help to order the events into a pattern and provide connections that were not evident in the earlier narration. An example of this is the analeptic passage in which Saleem explicates his responsibility in the death of Nehru (MC, 334). Analeptic passages are also sometimes used for the postponement of revelation of facts – 'deferral of disclosure' in Batty's words -- to create suspense. An example of this function of analeptic passages can be seen when, in the chapter 'Methwold', we have the narrator promising Padma and the reader that he would describe his birth in the next chapter 'Tick Tock', and yet, in the chapter 'Tick Tock', we have a synopsis of all the events leading up to the birth, this time seen as his inheritance. And ironically, we have Padma naively saying after around three and a half pages of 'deferral of disclosure', 'At last … you've learnt how to tell things really fast (MC, 126).'

**Notes**

1. Bharucha, Rustom, 1986. 'Rushdie's Whale', *The Massachusetts Review*, No. 2, 231.

2. Reimenschneider, Dieter, 1984. 'History and the Individual in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children'*, *World Literature Written in English*, Vol.23, No. 1, 203.

3. Parmeshwaran, Uma, 1983. 'Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art ', *ARIEL*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 38.

4. Batty, Nancy E., 1987. 'The Art of Suspense: Rushdie's 1001 Mid-nights', *ARIEL*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 56- 59.

5. Genette, Gerard, 1980. *Narrative Discourse*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 73. Other examples of this type are found on pages 3, 42, 87, 90, 93, 100, 108, 112, 128, 205, 213, 219, 254, 293, 370, 391.

6. Batty, 51.

7. Genette, 57-8.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE PARADOXICAL WORKINGS OF REPETITION

Saleem has a very complex identity -- Hindu, Muslim, Anglo-Indian, upper class, underprivileged, Catholic and Marxist. Hindu, as he is ostensibly the son of Wee Willie Winkie, the Hindu street singer and Vanita; Muslim, since Ahmed and Amina Sinai bring him up as their own; Anglo- Indian, since Saleem is actually the son of the Englishman Methwold and Vanita; upper class, as Ahmed Sinai is a wealthy businessman; underprivileged, because the Hindu street-singer is poor; Catholic, as he is educated in a convent and his nurse is Mary Pereira; Marxist, as Mary Pereira had switched the babies fired by love for Joe D'costa, a Marxist. Such a complex identity makes it impossible for Saleem to have a coherent sense of self. The repetition of images like cracks, the hole and the spittoon represent this impossibility in MC.

The spittoon on the one hand, is an object which gives Saleem a sense of identity since it is a family legacy. In Parvati's basket of invisibility, Saleem managed to save himself from actually 'disappearing- off-the-face-of-the-earth' by holding on to his spittoon. The loss of the spittoon deprives Saleem of the last object connecting him to his past. Without his spittoon, which Saleem calls 'beauteous lost receptacle of memories (MC, 535)', Saleem feels disconnected and rootless. On the other hand, the spittoon also represents impotence, as it is associated with Nadir Khan, Amina's first impotent husband. The spittoon prophesies Saleem's castration and consequent impotence.

The hole in the centre of Aadam Aziz 'suggests the development of a fractured self' according to Maria Couto.[1] The cracks of Aadam Aziz and

Saleem depict this fragmentation on a literal level. Saleem says: 'I will soon be thirty-one years old. Perhaps. If my crumbling, over-used body permits. But I have no hope of saving my life … (MC, 4).' Saleem's prophesied death is the ultimate image of fragmentation in the novel. He will be the bomb in Bombay exploding into 'specks of voiceless dust (MC, 552).'

In Chapter 1 we have seen how Saleem traces the recurrence of physical and mental characteristics of his ancestors, the utterances of characters, events from the history of his family, and patterns from mythology in his life. Saleem, we have seen, also notes correspondences between the history of his family and the history of the nation. In his Chapter "Tick, Tock", Saleem gives the reader a list of what forms a part of his inheritance:

> … the blue of Kashmiri sky which dripped into my grandfather's eyes; … the long sufferings of my great-grandmother which would become the forbearance of my own mother … my great-grandfather's gift of conversing with birds which would descend through meandering bloodlines into the veins of my sister the Brass Monkey … the ghostly essence of … [the] perforated sheet, which doomed my mother to learn to love a man in segments, and which condemned me to see my own life – its meanings, its structures -- in fragments … [Tai's] brandy bottle … odours of the unwashed boatman … the game of hit-the-spittoon … [the] optimism disease … cracks … wars of starvation and silence … washing-chests … [the] silver spittoon … the gift of inventing new parents … fare dodgers … Amina's assiduity … [and] public announcements … (MC,123-126)

form part of his inheritance. All form "part of the luggage I brought into the world…", "… all these made me… Saleem reaffirms (MC, 126). "

Saleem traces recurrences, forges connections and claims inheritances in order to prove that he belongs to Aadam Aziz's family; to prove that he has a definite identity; that he is Ahmed and Amina's son. The identity that he claims includes Aadam Aziz's Western intellectualism and iconoclasm, and Methwold Estate's cocktail hours, budgerigars and Oxford drawls, which represent the Indian elite divorced from Indian reality in the aftermath of Independence. His identity also includes Tai's opposition to progress and Western science and Naseem's orthodoxy and traditionalism. But the truth of the matter lies in the fact that Saleem is not Ahmed Sinai's son. The history he finds connections with, is not his, but Shiva's, since Mary Pereira had switched Ahmed and Amina Sinai's baby with the child of Vanita, the poor Hindu street- singer Wee Willie Winkie's wife. The child is actually not even Wee Willie Winkie's, but the son of the Englishman Methwold who had seduced Vanita. Saleem is only brought up by Ahmed and Amina Sinai.

The revelation made by the alien Rhesus factor in Saleem's blood and the confessions of Mary Pereira, precipitate his life-long search for identity. Saleem's quest for identity is represented in the novel as a search for a father-figure. Ahmed Sinai, Hanif Aziz, Sharpsticker Sahib, General Zulfikar and Picture Singh become substitute father-figures for Saleem in the absence of his real father Methwold. Saleem is obsessed by the conviction that 'what you are, is forever who you were', and therefore Saleem desperately draws connections and traces inheritances to establish a sense of identity for himself. Aruna Srivastava says:

> The impulse to narrate and to create stories is an impulse to order, to make sense of an apparently chaotic world, to create a coherent sense of self. Midnight's Children is about Saleem's struggle to make himself and his country into a unified subject, to assert his lineage, his family and national ties, and alliances.[2]

Saleem fears absurdity. He is an attempt to create a coherent sense of self: 'I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning--yes, meaning -- something. I admit it: above all things. I fear absurdity (MC, 4).' Saleem's fear of absurdity and his desperation to mean 'something' are the driving forces behind his narration. The tracing of repetitions is thus an attempt to forge a sense of identity.

In Chapter 1, Section d, we noted the correspondences that Saleem traces between the history of his family and that of the nation. We saw in the above analysis that Saleem traces recurrences of physical and mental characteristics, utterances, events, and mythical patterns in order to form a coherent sense of self, to make himself an identity. Similarly, Saleem traces correspondences with the nation to show that he is connected, that he is linked to the nation. Saleem claims:

> I was linked to history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our … scientists might term "modes of connection" composed of "dualistically- combined configurations" of the two pairs of opposed adverbs given above. This is why hyphens are necessary: actively-literally, passively-metaphorically and passively- literally, I was inextricably entwined with my world. (MC, 286)

Saleem claims these four modes of connection in order to prove conclusively that he belongs, that his roots are here in India, though the facts of his birth proclaim otherwise.

Saleem's quest for identity, for a sense of self, remains only a quest since he is 'Condemned' to a 'life of fragments… (MC, 141).' In the first paragraph of his first chapter 'The Perforated Sheet' itself, Saleem alerts us to the fact that '… there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me … I was left entirely without a say in the matter. I, Saleem Sinai … had become heavily embroiled in Fate… (MC, 3)'

Saleem says fragmentation is his 'inescapable destiny (MC, 143).' In another comment concerning his destiny, when Padma proposes marriage, Saleem draws our attention to one significant point : 'How can I say, there are other plans for that day, I am have always been in the grip of a form- crazy destiny which enjoys wreaking its havoc on numinous days … (MC, 531).' Saleem reveals here that he himself is the artificer. He alone is both Brahma and Shiva – creator and destroyer. He shapes his own and the nation's destiny.

As seen earlier in Chapter 2, the images that are most often repeated are those of the fisherman's pointing finger, the Kolynos Kid, and the perforated sheet. We have seen in the Introduction itself that Saleem is conscious of, and draws attention to his role as the narrator, by comparing himself to the fisherman in Millais's picture. Saleem asks himself: "Is this what the fisherman would have said (MC, 90)?" before narrating his stories. Saleem similarly sees himself as a sort of Kolynos Kid, 'squeezing crises and transformations out of a bottomless tube, extruding time on to… [his] metaphorical toothbrush ( MC, 288).' Saleem is an artificer and his work an artifact.

Dieter Reimenschneider says: "Through the symbol of the perforated sheet we are made aware of man's imperfect perspective."[3] Saleem draws attention at the very outset, to the fact that the perforated sheet is 'his talisman, his open sesame (MC, 4).' He does not allow the reader to forget that his work is necessarily only one version of reality -- one version among other possible versions of reality. It is necessarily, in Rukmini Bhaya Nair's words, a 'selective juxtaposition', a 'partial viewing', and a 're-creation'. At one point in the novel, Saleem says, '… I must interrupt myself, I was not going to today, because Padma has started getting irritated whenever my narrative becomes self-conscious, whenever, like an incompetent puppeteer, I reveal the hands holding the strings; … (MC, 72)'

Very often in the novel, Saleem reveals the fact that he holds the strings of his narrative. One very obvious example could be given. In the last pages of his work, Saleem mentions a character that he describes as the 'champion defecator.' Around midnight, Saleem sees a man carrying a folded black umbrella walking towards his window from the direction of the railway tracks. The man, noticing Saleem calls out "Watch this!" and proceeds to extrude the longest turd that Saleem has ever seen. "Fifteen inches" he calls and asks Saleem: "How long can you make yours?" Saleem notes down:

> Once, when I was more energetic, I would have wanted to tell his life-story; the hour and his possession of an umbrella, would have been all the connections I needed to begin the process of weaving him into my life, and I have no doubt that I'd have finished by proving his indispensability to anyone who wishes to understand my life and benighted times; but now I'm disconnected,

> unplugged, with only epitaphs left to write. So, waving at the champion defecator, I call back: "Seven on a good day," and forget him. (MC, 546) [emphasis added]

Rushdie himself, in his *Imaginary Homelands* (henceforth IH) draws our attention to the various 'errors" in MC:

- Saleem during his account of the evolution of the city of Bombay tells us that the city's patron goddess Mumbadevi has fallen out of favour with contemporary Bombayites. As a matter of fact, the calendar of festivals does include a Mumbadevi Day.
- In Saleem's India, Lata Mangeshkar is heard singing, as early as 1946.
- It was Jagjit Singh Arora who accepted the surrender of the Pakistani Army at the end of the Bangladesh war, while in Saleem's India, it is General Sam Manekshaw.
- Saleem alleges that the brand of cigarettes State Express 555 is manufactured by W.D. & H.O. Willis.
- Concrete tetrapods were used in Bombay only to protect the sea wall along the Marine Drive promenade, never as part of any land reclamation scheme.
- The train that brings Picture Singh and Saleem from Delhi to Bombay could not have passed through Kurla as it is on a different line.
- Dyer entered the Jallianwala Bagh with fifty white troops in Saleem's India, while actually the troops were Indian.[5]

Rushdie says: 'Midnight's Children is far from being an authoritative guide to the history of post-Independence India" [6] and Saleem is 'no dispassionate, disinterested chronicler ….'[7] The small errors in the text can be read as clues, as indications that Saleem is capable of distortions both great and

small. 'He is an interested party in the events he narrates.'[8] "Saleem's story 'is not history, but it plays with historical shapes.'[9]

In order to forge connections and correspondences, Saleem does not hesitate to make alterations and modifications in the recounting of the history of the nation. For example, Saleem records Mahatma Gandhi's death as having occurred on the wrong date. Saleem confesses: 'Re-reading my work, I have discovered an error in chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date. But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been; in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time (MC, 198).

Saleem asks himself: 'Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything -- to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role (MC, 198)?' The narrator, we find, is willing to distort the history of the nation, is ready to make modifications and alterations in order to forge connections and correspondences with his personal life. Saleem admits that the work is not a faithful record of even his own life. He confesses that he has made alterations even in the recounting of the facts of his life.

Saleem says at one point in the novel:

> I told you the truth ... Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also, but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events and no sane human being can ever trust someone else's version more than one's own.(MC, 253) [emphasis added]

Rushdie, in IH says that he had originally started off with a Proustian ambition to

( … unlock the gates of lost time so that the past appeared as it usually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory) what I was actually doing was a novel of a memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: "my" India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions. I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honourable and suspect ….[10][emphasis added]

Saleem's and Rushdie's notions of memory surprise us in their echoing of Benjamin's idea of the second kind of memory. Benjamin's second kind of memory is 'constructive, fictive and falsifying', it creates a 'vast intricate network of lies', 'a world that never was.' Saleem's memory 'selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies'; it 'creates its own reality.' Rushdie's 'imaginative truth' is 'simultaneously honourable and suspect.' Saleem's representation of his personal history and the history of the nation is not a 'dry historical record of facts' but only 'opaquely similar' to it in fact -- a work of involuntary memory.

Benjamin says that Proust 'turned his days into nights, devoting all his hours to undisturbed work in his darkened room with artificial illumination, so that none of those intricate arabesques [the tapestry woven by the workings of involuntary memory] might escape him.'[11] Saleem too, interestingly, also writes only at night, in a 'pool of Anglepoised light'. It is therefore not 'daylight, willed memory' that 'works logically, by way of similarities which are seen as identities, one thing repeating another and grounded in a concept on the basis of

which likeness may be understood' which characterizes the first kind of memory, rather it is the dreamlike, involuntary memory of the second kind.

Benjamin reminds us that:

> Only the actus purus of recollection itself, not the author or the plot, constitutes the unity of the text. One may even say that the intermittence of author and plot is only the reverse of the continuum of memory, the pattern on the backside of the tapestry.[12]

Though MC resembles the workings of involuntary memory, it differs in a significant way. What must be noted is that Saleem's memory is deliberate, and voluntarily fictive and falsifying. The author and his motivations are the driving forces behind the remembering.

Saleem considers the art of writing a pickling process, wherein memories are embalmed in spice and vinegar, like fish, vegetables and fruit. 'The art', Saleem says, 'is to change the flavor in degree: not in kind; and above all (in my thirty jars and a jar) [his thirty-one chapters] to give it shape and form -- that is to say, meaning (MC, 549).'

Saleem is willing to sacrifice Truth to 'shape and form' of the narrative.

> As a people, we are obsessed with correspondences. Similarities between this and that, between apparently unconnected things, make us clap our hands delightedly when we find them out. It is a sort of national longing for form. (MC, 359)

The narrator makes modifications and alterations so that he can weave correspondences and thus a pattern of repetitions throughout the text. He

believes that the repetitions give shape and form to the text. 'Form -- once again, recurrence and shape! -- no escape from it (MC, 524).' says Saleem.

'Everything has a shape if you look for it. There is no escape from form', says the narrator (MC, 271). The narrator in MC does certainly look for it. When Padma suggests that they get married on his thirty- first birthday, he admits that he is 'form- crazy', as we have seen earlier; 'I am have always been in the grip of a form-crazy destiny … (MC, 531).' The narrator proposes to let cracks claim him on his birthday so that there is a certain 'form' to his life, so that he can set the precedent for the thousand and one midnight's children who will follow him.

We have seen in Chapter 2 that the repetitions do not occur only at the level of the story, but at the level of the narrative too. In spite of the 'Padma-pressures of what- happened-nextism' goading him into the world of linear narrative. '… Saleem must always remind himself to tell his story 'the right way up', 'in the proper order', 'as simply as possible', not to get ahead of himself by allowing effects to precede causes …" says Ireland. Saleem recognizes this problem himself, and says: 'Interruptions, nothing but interruptions! The different parts of my somewhat complicated life refuse with a wholly unreasonable obstinacy, to stay neatly in their respective compartments (MC, 95).'

Saleem's narrative is characterized by innumerable previews and synopses and repetition of narrative statements, as we have seen earlier. They contribute a sense of balance and unity, shape and form to the narrative. Sterne says commenting on Tristram Shandy, that any unusual mode of narrative 'needs to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the

reader's fancy.'[14] The innumerable 'interruptions' in the narrative serve to give a sense of unity and tightness to the text.

Any ordering of material to give unity, balance, shape and form, in the words of Barbara Ewell, '…any scheme imposed on the past …' and any 'attempt to fix the past still' will be accompanied by 'the aura of mental construction and distortion.'[15] We have noted that the intricate web of correspondences knit by the narrator gives shape and form to the narrative. But then, these very correspondences highlight the distortion of facts, and the distortion of life. They draw attention to the constructedness and the artificiality of the narrative, its status as fiction.

Rushdie's earlier novel Grimus has a character called Elfrida whose views regarding the art of novel writing are noted below:

> I don't like it … It's too pretty, too neat, I do not care for stories that are so, so tight. Stories should be like life, slightly frayed at the edges, full of loose ends and lives juxtaposed by accident rather than some grand design. Most of life has no meaning -- so it must surely be a distortion of life to tell tales in which every single element is meaningful? … How terrible to have to see a meaning or a great import in everything around one, everything one does, everything that happens to one! [16](Grimus, 149)

The text of MC is 'too pretty' and 'too neat'. It does not have any loose ends. Each and every thread is neatly woven into the 'grand design' that the novel is.Each and everything around Saleem, everything he does and everything that happens to Saleem is part of the grand design.

The constructedness of the text points to the fact that there is no shape and form to Saleem's story. Everything is meaningless, unconnected and absurd. The narrative is shaped out of 'Scraps, shreds, fragments (MC, 510).' Similarly, Saleem too has no identity. His attempts to ward off meaninglessness and absurdity come to naught. His is a life of fragments.

We examined how repetition functions to highlight the text as an artificial construct, as an aesthetic object or artifact having form and unity. I now intend to show another way repetition works in MC. As opposed to the first function which situates the text in the realm of art, repetition paradoxically also works to return the text to the 'world'.

MC, we have seem, is a fictional representation of his life, by the narrator Saleem. We have noted the alterations and modifications that Saleem makes in his narrative. Saleem's MC is a grounded as well as an ungrounded repetition of his life. Similarly, MC is a grounded as well as an ungrounded repetition of the geographical, historical, political etc. reality of India, making the text an allegory or an ironic parody of the nation.

Linda Hutcheon defines parody in the language of repetition. What distinguishes it, she feels is '… its constant ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity.'[17] Saleem's allegory is highly ironic and parodic. Though there is no clear one-to-one correspondence between Saleem's history and that of the nation, MC can be read as an allegory. Saleem says that he has a 'lust for allegory' which he has inherited from his actual father William Methwold who agreed to transfer Methwold Estate, only on the day the British left India. Allegory can be considered as repetition of the second kind. Jameson's description of allegory in his "Third – World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" brings it close to the second form of repetition:

> … the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol. Our traditional conception of allegory … is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one correspondences; this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of the signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text …. [18][emphasis added]

The description of allegory as 'discontinuous' and a 'matter of breaks and heterogeneities' of the 'multiple polysemia of the dream' echoes Benjamin's description of the second kind of memory, which we have referred to earlier.

Saleem stands for India; so much so that Saleem's face is compared to the map of India by his school teacher, and the tonsure on his head Uma Parmeshwaran opines, represents Kashmir![19] Saleem's quest for identity similarly, represents the nation's quest for identity similarly. Like Saleem, India has a very complex heritage composed of a multiplicity of peoples and cultures. Besides, India has been under the dominion of a host of foreign rulers including the Moghuls, the British and the Portugese, to name a predominant few, who have left their mark on India. An attempt to construct a single identity for the nation is doomed to failure. It is necessarily hybrid and complex like that of Saleem.

We have already noted the correspondences that Saleem draws between his history and the history of his country. Everything that happens to Saleem

happens to India. The correspondences woven are not exactly 'one-to-one', but 'heterogeneous' and 'discontinuous' in Jameson's words. A specific and sustained connection between Saleem and India is by way of the Widow, Indira Gandhi.

Shiva and Saleem are bitter enemies since birth. Saleem says: '… the offspring of Independence were not all human. Violence, corruption, poverty … chaos, greed (MC, 350).' All these qualities belong to Shiva. Shiva embodies for Saleem '…all the vengefulness and violence and simultaneous love-and-hate-of-things in the world.' Saleem says:

> When I hear of drowned bodies floating like balloons on the Hooghly and exploding when nudged by passing boats; or trains set on fire, or politicians killed, or riots in Orissa or Punjab, it seems to me that the hand of Shiva lies heavily over all these things, dooming us to flounder endlessly amid murders rape greed war … (MC, 358)

Shiva joins hands with the Widow in order to destroy Saleem and the other children of the midnight. The Widow declares Emergency, and all the children of midnight are caught and caged in the Widow's hostel. Saleem says:

> Might not a Widow, obsessed with stars, have learned from astrologers the secret potential of any children born at the long-ago midnight hour? ... Indira is India and India is Indira …but might not she have read her own father's letter to a midnight child, in which her own, sloganized centrality was denied; in which the role of mirror-of-the-nation was bestowed on me? (MC, 510)

He also quotes the Widow's own news agency Samachar, in which she speaks of her 'determination to combat the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been growing', and says that: 'the truest, deepest motive behind the declaration of a state of emergency was the smashing, the pulverizing, the irreversible discombobulation of the children of midnight' (MC, 510), her potential rivals. The Widow performs ectomies on the children -- not only are testicles and wombs removed, hope is murdered too, by a process which Saleem calls 'sperectomy (MC, 521). '

Since "Saleem is India", the predicted fragmentation of Saleem is prophetic of a similar fate for the nation. Saleem notes that it is the Age of Darkness – the Kaliyuga – a period in which history moves inexorably towards its own annihilation and destruction. It is a period of decay. India too moves towards annihilation and fragmentation according to Saleem. Saleem's India is fathered only by the violent Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, Mercurochrome and communal riots. The absence of the Gandhian influence (Gandhiji's non-violent struggle for freedom does not figure in the text. The events in history between 1919 and 1942, which is the period of the Mahatma, are simply elided) condemns post-independence India to violence and destruction.

The cracks in Midnight Children's Club, a microcosm of India, mirror the cracks in the nation:

> … Children from Maharashtra loathing Gujarati's and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian "blackies"; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company, Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of the untouchables; while, among the low-born, the pressures of

> poverty and Communism were becoming evident … and, on top of all this, there were clashes of personality.(MC, 306)

Shiva and the Widow are responsible for the fragmentation and destruction of Saleem and the children of midnight, as we have seen earlier. Indira Gandhi is responsible for the fragmentation of India according to Saleem. She was an autocratic and despotic ruler says Saleem:

> When the Constitution was altered to give the Prime Minister well- nigh absolute powers, I smelled the ghosts of ancient empires in the air … in that city which was littered with phantoms of slave kings and Mughals, of Aurangzeb the merciless and the last, pink conquerors, I inhaled once again the sharp aroma of despotism (MC, 506).

Indira Gandhi is 'astrology–ridden' and 'obsessed with stars'. Saleem in a very ironic comment says: '… the Prime Minister of India went nowhere without her personal astrologer (MC, 509). ' Her declaration of Emergency which deprived India of her hard–won freedom signals the beginning of the end of India for Saleem.

Rushdie in IH criticizes Indira Gandhi for her 'monarchic style of government'[20] , her 'grandiloquent … delusions of a Louis XIV', found in the notorious election slogan "India is Indira and Indira is India" , her use of the cult of the mother-goddess, political corruption, the 'godmen', 'billionaire businessmen', 'old school chums of Sanjay or Rajiv' who are powerful figures at her 'durbar'[22], 'unelected and unanswerable to anyone but the Prime Minister'[23] and the 'dynastic aspirations of the Nehru family'.[24] Rushdie feels

that the imposition of Emergency in free India 'was an act of folly'[25] comparable only to the opening of Pandora's box. He traces the many evils of present day India, especially religious extremism to the time of Emergency – 'those days of dictatorship and State violence.'[26]

In the years following Emergency, Rushdie says, Indira's major aim '… was to achieve a personal rehabilitation, to obliterate the memory of the Emergency and its atrocities, to be cleansed of taint, absolved of history …', Rushdie says that 'she told the world that the horror stories of about the Emergency were all fictions, and the world allowed her to get away with the lie.'[27] The official version of the Emergency in India was expressed by Indira Gandhi in a BBC interview, which Rushdie paraphrases as: 'She said that there were some people around who claimed that bad things had happened during the Emergency, forced sterilizations, things like that; but, she stated, this was all fake. Nothing of this type had ever occurred.'[28]

Rushdie feels that '… when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs', it is necessary then to redescribe the world. He says: '… redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it.' [29] Rushdie attempts to redescribe the history of post-independence India in MC, as the official version of events is distorted.

Rushdie quotes George Orwell in his essay 'Inside the Whale': '… a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment, is generally either a fool or a plain idiot. ' While Orwell goes on to advocate a quietist philosophy, Rushdie advocates 'political fiction', and an 'outside–the-

whale position – political, questioning and bellicose.' Rushdie says that writers and politicians are 'natural rivals', that 'Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory.' The novel is 'one way of denying the official, politician's version of truth … literature can and perhaps must give the lie to official facts.'[31] He feels that 'passivity always serves the interest of the status quo, of the people already at the top'.[32] Passivity makes those in power omnipotent. Rushdie feels that it is imperative that literature enter such arguments because

> …what is being disputed is nothing less than <u>what is the case, what is the truth and what is untruth.</u> If writers leave the business of making pictures of the world to politicians, it will be one of history's great and most abject abdications.[33]

Rushdie feels that it is vital to make a clearest possible analysis of the mistakes of the recent years as 'Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it.'[34] The Emergency Rushdie feels was a very big mistake, and a recognition of it as a mistake would prevent a recurrence of the most terrible time in the history of post- independence India.

A politics-free fictional universe is 'fake' according to Rushdie, as '… we are all irradiated by history … and politics.' He feels that:

> … works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum, and that the way they operate in society cannot be separated from politics, from history. For every text, a context.[36]

In this section, we have seen that MC comments on the historical and political reality of India, that ironic parody and allegory are means by which the narrator expresses his opinions on issues pertaining to post-independence India. Thus, from a self-reflexive artifact that draws attention to its constructedness through its use of repetition, we now have a text that is 'connected' to the world. Allegory and ironic parody, which we have considered as repetition, return the text from the realm of 'art' to the 'world'.

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# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION: TWO ALTERNATIVE READINGS

In Chapter 3 we saw that repetition, as used in MC, points to the fact that Saleem himself as well as his narrative are constructs; that the narrator forces his audience to observe the process of creation and the shaping of the text; that Saleem's attempts to construct an identity for himself, and his attempts to construct a text which has shape and form through repetition, only foreground fragmentation and discontinuity. Repetition thus highlights constructedness of the text and its status as fiction, as belonging to the realm of art.

This function of repetition is a postmodern concern. Charles Russell tells us that 'The work of [the] postmoderns is characterized by emphatic self-reflexiveness …. The text or the artwork points to itself … as a construct that explicitly says something about the process of creating meaning.'[1] Explicating this function he says: 'The self-reflexive artwork's subject, then, is its own unfolding as a construct of meaning.…The writings … force the audience to observe and critique the processes of creation, questioning, and the eventual deconstruction of the literary text.'[2]

The other function of repetition we saw brings the text back to the world, from the realm of art. Charles Russell says:

> … the significant contribution of postmodernism is to apply the model of art as a self-contained discourse to social discourse as well, and to recognize that as a language, art cannot be considered separately from cultural languages in general. It is to recognize that no matter how hermetic it may declare itself to be, any

> particular meaning system in society takes its place amongst -- and receives social validation from the total pattern of semiotic systems that structure society. So, ironically, while modernism's self-conscious formalism led it to isolate the formal concerns of art from the social referent, postmodernism's self-reflexive formalism sees language as form is intimately entwined with social discourse …. Rather than continuing the bathos of modernist alienation, the postmodern work willfully accepts the complexities of its relationship to culture and its systems of discourse. Rather than the drama of the vulnerable, self-conscious artwork confronting the meaningless existence, recent art presents us with the fact that the world, if anything, is too meaningful, that the work is unavoidably connected to the world. … Thus, paradoxically, hermetic self-reflexiveness leads to an expanded vision, a vision of interconnectedness in society …[3] [emphasis added]

Linda Hutcheon explicating this further says:

> If the self- conscious formalism of modernism in many of the arts led to the isolation of art from the social context, the postmodernism's even more self- reflexive parodic formalism reveals that it is art as discourse that is intimately connected to the political and the social.[4] [emphasis added].

Repetition thus, can be seen as a postmodern device used on the one hand to highlight the constructedness of the text and its status as art and on the other

hand, to show that the text is intimately connected to its political, historical and social context.

These two functions of repetition which we looked at as postmodern devices can be read alternatively as operations of a postcolonial 'recuperative' practice. Stephen Slemon says:

> …Western postmodernist readings can so over-value the antireferential or deconstructive energetics of post-colonial texts that they efface the important recuperative work that is going on within them … post- colonial cultures have a long history of working towards "realism" within an awareness of referential slippage, and they have developed a number of strategies for signifying through literature an "order of mimesis" … in a number of post-colonial texts – especially those texts which postmodernism has managed to canonize for itself – the referential purchase is not always so visible, at least not to readers from outside the culture. And this can result, within the postmodernist problematic, in a critical reading which is radically skewed … whereas a post–modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices … expose the constructedness of all textuality … an interested post–colonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts. It would retain for post-colonial writing, that is, a mimetic or referential purchase to textuality, and it would recognize in this referential drive the operations of a crucial strategy for survival in marginalized social groups.[5][emphasis added]

The second function of repetition we saw brings the text back to the world – to its context, through allegory or ironic parody. Jameson in his essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' looks at allegory as a characteristic of 'Third World' texts. He says that all 'Third World' texts seem to have one thing in common that distinguishes them from 'First world' texts – they are necessarily 'national allegories':

> All third-world texts are necessarily … allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, … particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation such as the novel.[6]

He explains this saying that one of the determinants of 'capitalist culture' is a 'radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between … the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx'. The relations between the 'subjective' and the 'public or political' is wholly different in Third-world culture says Jameson:

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.[7]

Though Saleem ostensibly writes his 'autobiography', giving us in the text an account of his birth, his childhood, his youth, his loves, his travails, his hopes, and fears of nearing death, it is, we have seen earlier, an allegory or ironic parody, a critique of the post–independence reality of India. Saleem's quest for identity, his attempt in the text, to construct an identity for himself, can also be looked at as a quest for cultural identity on the part of post-colonial (post-independence) India. Saleem's work, therefore, becomes an overt example of the 'recuperative' postcolonial enterprise, 'an enterprise for cultural identity and survival'.[8]

In the above analysis, I have tried to show that repetition, as used in MC, can be read, on the one hand, as a postmodern device, and on the other hand, as a postcolonial enterprise. The two readings suggested are only two ways of looking at repetition in MC. Other readings are definitely possible.

**Notes**

1. Russell, Charles, 1980. 'The Context of the Concept', *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, Harry R. Garvin ed., London: Bucknell University Press, 183.
2. Ibid. 187.
3. Ibid. 188-189.
4. Hutcheon, Linda, 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York: Routledge, 35.
5. Slemon, Stephen, 1989. 'Modernism's Last Post' *ARIEL*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Oct., 9-12.

6. Jameson, Frederic, 1986. 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', *Social Text*, Fall, 69.
7. Ibid.
8. Slemon, 10.

# CHAPTER 6

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