Heat and Dust Study Guide

Heat and Dust by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

A young English woman goes to India to reconstruct the life of Olivia, her grandfather's first wife. Olivia had married Douglas in England some 50 years earlier and moved with him to Satipur, India. After she first met the Nawab—at a dinner party at his palace in Khatm—she was certain he would, within the week, visit her in Satipur. She was correct (he arrived with his full retinue and stayed the day). It was after that first visit she began writing Marcia.

Olivia and the Nawab first become friends and then lovers. When she realized she was pregnant, she told the Nawab and then her husband Douglas and she had the Begum, the Nawab's mother, arrange an abortion. Following the abortion, she went directly to the palace in Khatm and the Nawab later purchased and maintained a house for her in X, a small village in the steep foothills of the Himalayas (he never spoke of her again publicly). Olivia died in the 1950s, a few years after the Nawab, a quarter century before the narrator arrived in India. Against British custom, Olivia had also had her body cremated and her ashes spread on the mountainside.

The young woman who came to India to discover more about Olivia is the narrator—neither her name nor the exact year she arrived are ever stated. She takes a room in Satipur and visits the house in which Olivia and Douglas had lived (it had been subdivided into several government offices, in one of which Inder Lal, her new landlord, works). She first visited the Nawab's palace with Inder Lal. She first visited the shrine of Baba Firdau on the day of an annual fertility festival (the "Husband's Wedding Day"), with Inder Lal's mother and her friends. When she subsequently visits the shrine with Inder Lal, the two become lovers (near the spot where Olivia and the Nawab had become lovers in 1923). The midwives in Satipur can tell the narrator is pregnant before she herself realizes it. The novel concludes with the narrator, whose choice is to carry her child to term, having arrived in X (she has taken a room; she has stood inside Olivia's house). The narrator has heard there is an *ashram* further up the mountain although she does not know how long she will stay, she says she rarely looks down.

Part 1 Section 1

Part 1 Section 1 Summary

The narrator introduces herself as the granddaughter of Tessie—whom she remembers quite well—and Douglas—whom she hardly remembers at all. While they had lived in India, neither Tessie nor her sister Beth would speak of Olivia, Douglas' first wife. In time both women had returned to England and been widowed. It was then, after they were all quite old, that Harry, who had been in touch with Marcia, gave them Olivia's letters. That is how the narrator came to have them. She had brought them with her to India and kept a journal to record her impressions.

Part 1 Section 1 Analysis

The narrator introduces herself and tells the reader this is not her story, but Olivia's. It was not a story Tessie and her sister spoke of they until after they had left India. The narrator is grateful for her journal of first impressions, because her memories of then are not the same— because she herself is not the same.

Part 1 Section 2

Part 1 Section 2 Summary

The date of the narrator's first journal entry is February 2nd. She had just arrived in Bombay, which was not at all as she had imagined. She spent her first night in a missionary hostel, in a room with seven other women. The one woman who is awake tells her to always boil her water, never eat any of "their" food and be careful with her possessions. This strange woman said she had been in India for 30 years; she spoke of her Christian devotion and the little chapel in a growing town dominated by the textile industry; she lamented the changes—all for the worse—she had observed over the years: higher wages have generated greater liquor consumption, more selfishness but, she added, one cannot expect the Indians to behave any better than the British themselves. The narrator, who was also awake, had no choice but to listen as she intoned that, although she had thought there was some hope 30 years ago, she now thinks there is none.

To demonstrate her point, she urges the narrator to look outside their dormitory window. The narrator sees the bright street lights and some people asleep on the sidewalk; she sees several crippled children; some people stand eating while others look to what's been thrown away, into the gutters, for something to eat. The talkative old woman then directs the narrator's attention to the other window, out of which she sees the A's Hotel, which she had heard about before arriving. She looked and saw mostly derelict appearing Europeans. The older woman continues that there may be hope for the younger ones (if they return to England in time). She recalls having seen a monkey delouse a young European man and having lived through a Hindu-Muslim riot, a smallpox epidemic and numerous famines: She concludes that no one can live in India without Jesus, because nothing human, means anything in India.

Part 1 Section 2 Analysis

The narrator, newly arrived, is told by a woman who had been a missionary for 30 years that, in India, nothing human is important. The missionary woman's professed Christianity—coupled with her saying she'd survived a "Hindu-Muslim" riot—suggests India is a land of many religions.

Part 1 Section 3

Part 1 Section 3 Summary

The date of this journal entry is February 16th. The narrator has found a room in Satipur. Although she shares the bathroom in the yard with the other people living above the cloth shop, she feels very private in her own room, where she can look down at the bazaar from her single window. Her furniture consists of her sleeping bag and a small desk the height of a footstool, on which she has placed her papers: her Hindi grammar book, her journal and Olivia's letters. She fears that her sparse furnishings disappoint her landlord, Inder Lal, who happens to work near the house where Olivia had lived with Douglas: Their old house had been "divided and sub-divided." It currently housed the Municipal Water Board, the Health Department and a Post Office sub-station.

Part 1 Section 3 Analysis

The narrator sees no need for pictures on the walls since she can look down at the bazaar outside. She contrasts her spartan room with what Olivia's and Douglas' house must have been like, smothered in flowers, portraits and rugs.

Part 1 Section 4

Part 1 Section 4 Summary

The narrator's next journal entry is dated February 20th. When she visited Inder Lal's mother and his wife Ritu, she thought, how rapidly young children that age can make it so "untidy." She could imagine Inder Lal's mother having gone wife shopping for him (and notices how swiftly Ritu obeys her commands). The narrator tries out her Hindi, unsuccessfully and thinks the old woman has appraised her (and found her lacking). She is though by now accustomed to being appraised, because everyone does it. How strange for Indians, she thinks, seeing the British living among them and wearing their style of clothing (which was cheaper and cooler). One of the first things she had done after settling in her room in Satipur was to purchase Indian clothing for herself. She now wears a knee-length shirt and baggy trousers tied at the waist like the Punjabi peasant women. She also has a pair of men's sandals (the women's sizes are too small).

The word most often called after her was "*hijra*," a word whose meaning she knew from one of Olivia's letters: She had, Olivia had written, asked the Nawab what the word meant: he had clapped his hands, given an order and shortly thereafter, a troupe of male eunuchs had danced before them. On one walk, Inder Lal indulged the narrator's curiosity, leading her under an arched door through a narrow passage and into an open courtyard. She had watched them dancing and singing, dressed like women but, she noticed, with sad faces having that worried look of people wondering if they'll be paid for their work. Inder Lal is impatient with the performance, which he regards as common.

Part 1 Section 4 Analysis

Although the narrator cannot speak comprehensibly in Hindi, she does understand one of the words said about her: she had learned it when she was still in England, from reading Olivia's letters. An open courtyard at the end of a narrow passage suggests a world that can be surprising.

Part 1 Section 5

Part 1 Section 5 Summary

The date of this journal entry is February 24th. On this Sunday, Inder Lal had volunteered to take her to the Nawab's palace in Khatm. The narrator wonders how Ritu makes it, living in two small rooms with her husband, mother-in-law and three small children (she has only seen her outside those rooms occasionally—and then, always with her mother-in-law). The bus they take is the same as the others on which she's traveled: an old vehicle filled beyond capacity. The terrain between towns is also the same, flat and dusty. Khatm, she immediately thinks, is a wretched place. Unlike Satipur, which seems to have grown according to its needs, Khatm is just in the shadow of the Nawab's palace. Its streets are narrow and dirty. There are numerous beggars.

In contrast, the walls of the Nawab's palace mark off spacious grounds with tall trees. The now vacant palace is maintained by a watchman. She and Inder Lal sit under one of its trees beside a pavilion. He does not know much more about the Nawab's family than she does. When he died in 1953, his nephew Karim, then an infant, inherited the palace (the narrator had met him in London just before leaving for India). Since the family and the government had not been able to agree on a price—and there were no bidders—the palace has not been sold. Inder Lal, the narrator observes, is not eager to discuss the Nawab: Yes, he had heard the stories about his "dissolute bad life," even rumors about the scandal—but, he says, it was so long ago that no one cares.

When the watchman returns with the keys to the palace, the narrator is able to see for herself what she had only been able to imagine. Although the palace was now practically empty, she could walk its marble halls. Inder Lal is impatient and can think only of his problems at his office: he would prefer to be left alone, but people do not leave him alone to perform his duties—he is forced to take sides (since he is favored by his commander, his fellow officers try to tear him down). The watchman points out an upper gallery, the purdah quarters, where the ladies of the household would sit behind curtains and peak at the entertainment in the chamber below. The narrator touches one of the old curtains: it had looked like a rich brocade but felt both dry and moldy. She had wanted to visit the Nawab's private mosque, but Inder Lal and the watchman thought she should see his small personal Hindi shrine: They stooped to get into the small room crowded with several others. The narrator made a donation of 5 rupees and was anxious to leave: Inder Lal made his obeisance to the three smiling gods in the shrine. The watchman pressed some bits of rock sugar and a few flower petals into the narrator's hands. On the bus trip back to Satipur, she discreetly drops them out the open window.

Part 1 Section 5 Analysis

Although the narrator discarded the sugar and flower petals, they left a "lingering smell of sweetness and decay" still present when, later, she wrote about the trip in her journal: she had for the first time walked the marbled halls that she had imagined from Olivia's letters.

Part 2 Section 6

Part 2 Section 6 Summary

It is 1923. Olivia had been in Satipur a few months and was beginning to get bored. Douglas was always busy. Most of her time she spent alone in her big house, doors and windows closed against the dust. The Nawab had invited two couples—Douglas and Olivia and Mr. and Mrs. Crawford—to a dinner party. Olivia was excited (she wore a special traveling costume for the journey). The others has already been to the palace and did not look forward to the 15-mile drive each way. She and Douglas, of course, went with the Crawfords: She was happy thinking ahead of others soon seeing her in her evening dress and jewels. When she was led into the dining room and saw the candelabra, pineapples, complete silver service and golden bowls, she felt she had at last come to the right place. There were three other guests: someone named Harry who was then the Nawab's house guest and another English couple who lived near Khatm, Major and Mrs. Minnies. Like the Crawfords, they had been in India for over 20 years, since before the Mutiny. Olivia did not understand how people leading such exciting lives—administering provinces and fighting battles—could be so dull: but that was what she was beginning to think about the "old India hands" and their wives. Douglas though, she thought, was different from them—and quite right. He set straight and his suit fit impeccably. The Nawab sat forward as though completely engrossed in Major Minnies' story. Olivia noticed though how his gaze went from guest to guest, as if he had already formed his own conclusions about them. She had also noticed, when they had first arrived, that he had, "although he checked himself immediately," noticed her: she was glad that at least one person in India thought her interesting.

After the dinner party, Olivia felt better about being alone in the house all day. She knew the Nawab would come calling and he did, four days after the dinner party. She was playing Chopin when she heard his car outside and, of course, welcomed him with a delighted surprise. The Nawab and his entourage stayed most of the day—which, for Olivia, went by in a flash. She seemed to remember that Harry had done most of the talking and that she and the Nawab had laughed at his amusing stories. She told Douglas, who knew she was lonely and thought it "decent" of the Nawab to have visited. The next day brought another dinner invitation from the palace: if they would do him the honor of accepting, he would send his car for them. Douglas was at first confused—we always go with the Crawfords—but Olivia set him straight: "you don't think they've been asked?" she asked. The Crawfords not having been invited made Douglas nervous. He and Olivia argued throughout the day, into the evening and through the night: he knew she was lonely and bored and told himself he was a total "brute" when, the next day, he "regretfully declined" the Nawab's invitation.

Part 2 Section 6 Analysis

The silver and gold made Olivia feel she was in "the right place," as did the Nawab's acknowledgment of her physical presence. She knew he would come calling and he did. Douglas was uneasy, because the Crawfords had not been invited, which, evidently, to him, broke some social order: He declined the Nawab's invitation formally, with "regret." Olivia's wishes—she had even woken him in the middle of the night to continue their argument—did not dissuade him from doing the right thing.

Part 2 Section 7

Part 2 Section 7 Summary

The next date in the narrator's journal is February 28th. One of the old British bungalows had not been converted into office space, instead maintained as a rest-house for travelers. The watchman who maintained the house was not though keen on these duties: whenever someone arrived without the official permit he demanded, he dismissed them and walked away. She saw one such group, all English—a young man dressed like an Indian ascetic in an orange robe (and another young man and his girlfriend): they had spread themselves out on the verandah. The first young man, named Chid, was as indignant as the other two. The girl was particularly angry (all Indians are dirty and dishonest). The narrator asked her why she had come to India: "to find peace," she responded, "but all I got was dysentery." The couple then launched into a list of their misadventures: robbed in Amritsar, cheated in Kashmir and again in Delhi, molested by Sikh youths in Fatehpur—and then in Goa, after they had been menaced by a mad Dane with a razor, he contracted jaundice and she had contracted ringworm. Chid, dressed in his orange robe, explained that he didn't mind being robbed of his possessions and turning to the world with only a begging bowl (when it did not turn out well, which was most of the time, he wired home for money). His main problem was the crowds of young children that followed him jeering and throwing stones. He could not sleep under trees as instructed by his guru—on his holy pilgrimage to the holy cave of Amarnath—and so had had to stay in hotel rooms, where he had to bargain hard for a decent price.

The watchman came out onto the verandah to announce that it was illegal for them to camp there but, when challenged, said it would cost 5 rupees. The watchman retreated inside. The young man then went on to explain to the narrator that he and his girlfriend had become deeply interested in Hindi religious thinking after hearing a swami lecture in London on universal love. The two had afterwards concluded that they must find the enlightenment they needed by going to India without delay. The watchman returned to the verandah and said that the price for staying had been reduced to 3 rupees. The three travelers eventually persuade him to unlock the travel-house— although it turned out to be more pleasant on the verandah since inside was quite stuffy and "smelled dead" (they did find a dead squirrel beside an inlay of George V). The view from the back verandah was of a Christian graveyard. Easily visible was the enormous gravestone the Saunders had purchased for their dead baby when they had lived there, during Olivia's time. While they had lived there, the Italian angel statue had been shiny and new. Now, the angel was headless and without arms and the baby had lost several appendages as well. In contrast, the Indian Christian graves at the front of the cemetery were well maintained.

Part 2 Section 7 Analysis

India is an ancient country with many established religions. The idea of young people from foreign countries listening to an inspirational lecture about universal love and then arriving on the next plane is superficial. Similarly, someone who sets on a holy quest across the Indian subcontinent with only a begging bowl (and phones home whenever he needs money) is trite. Just so, time has shown the ways of the earlier British inhabitants, in the form of the decaying gravestone, to be inadequate.

Part 3 Section 8

Part 3 Section 8 Summary

The year is 1923. Graveyards had had an effect on Olivia even back in England, where she would wander through the rows, reading inscriptions and occasionally sitting on the head stones. She thought the graveyard at Satipur "evocative." It contained mostly the graves of children—most recently the Saunders' baby, marked by the crumbling Italian angel statue. A few adult graves dated back to the Mutiny, when the gallant British officers had died "defending their women and children." Others came from the outer provinces where there were no Christian cemeteries.

After she had first seen that baby's grave, she had shut herself in her stiflingly hot room (in tears at the thought of having a child that would die). Douglas had had to devote an entire evening to consoling her: children rarely die these days (that is only how it was). The next day Olivia visited Mrs. Saunders, a bleak woman. She finds Mrs. Saunders' home quite to her dislike: Had none of the servants produced a vase for the pretty flowers she'd brought because there was no vase? Olivia sat at her bedside and listened to Mrs. Saunders talk solely of her ill health since the baby's death, a topic Olivia thought distasteful. She was startled by Mrs. Saunders' vigorous angry response to a servant who entered the room wearing shoes (a sign of disrespect Douglas would never allow she thought to herself). Mrs. Saunders then launched into a description of how the servants conspired to deceive and cheat their masters behind their backs. She began weeping and Olivia comforted her, by this time weeping herself.

She was pleased to accept the invitation passed on by cheerful Beth Crawford, an invitation from Nawab's mother, the Begum. This time she and Mrs. Crawford were ushered into the ladies quarters. Mrs. Crawford, who set straight in her chair, knees together, hands in white gloves clasped together over the handbag in her lap, spoke enough Urdu to carry on a conversation. Olivia would have preferred lounging but feared doing so wouldn't have been proper etiquette. All the other women in the room also played their respective roles well. Olivia kept wondering if the Nawab would enter the room. That did not happen: when it was the "right" time, Mrs. Crawford excused them and their hosts protested just the "right" amount. After leaving the palace, the two women stopped on the edge of Khatm to see Mrs. Minnies. She and Mrs. Crawford were close friends and, although they tried to include her, Olivia did feel excluded and worse, bored with their advise about how servants should wash crepe blouses and the like. When she asks them whether the Nawab was married, their conversation paused. Mrs. Crawford finally answered that the Nawab did not live with his wife, who was incapacitated, "mentally." But, Mrs. Minnies added, things could have turned out much worse (there was the matter of the dowry). Olivia finds more answers elsewhere: from the Nawab's houseguest, Harry. He arrived one morning and stayed the entire day. The Nawab, he explained, had ruled since he was 15 when his father died suddenly of a stroke. He was accustomed to getting what he wanted when and how he wanted it, which had been too much for Sandy. Her family had been against the marriage. When

they thought Sandy was getting too fond, they traveled from London to Paris, as did the Nawab, who was following them. The Nawab, he continued, is a person motivated by generosity, someone who wants the best for his friends. The Nawab, he explained, really wanted to give a party at which she and Douglas were guests. He finally speaks of the Begum: it is by then late afternoon and the house is hot. Olivia wishes Harry would leave.

On festive occasions, the rich men of Satipur would pay their respects to Douglas (Olivia would listen to their voices on the verandah from inside). Douglas later told her that they thought themselves "frightfully cunning," but were really naive like children. He further explained that it is only in Hindustani that he can insult them, laughing at the thought of Olivia doing similarly: delivering deadly insults, he proclaimed, is a man's game.

The Nawab later made a trip to tell Olivia his palace was not happy that Douglas had turned down his invitation. He came with his whole retinue but this time, would not stay. He invited her for a small drive or picnic—making the invitation sound like many levels of honor were involved—and she did want to go. Harry sat with the chauffeur in the front seat of the Rolls, the Nawab and Olivia in back, him smoking cigarette after cigarette. The Nawab was silent the entire drive, which disturbed Olivia. After driving, they hiked a narrow trail to a grove whose ground his servants had covered with carpets and pillows. Olivia did like it when he acted like she was the only person there who mattered to him. His own ancestors, he explained, were desperadoes who had looked for the pickings they could find in "free-for-all between the Moguls, the Afghans, the Mahrattas and the East India Company." He took her to his private shrine and told her she was the same type of person as he was, that they were different from Mrs. Crawford (a thought which made them both laugh). They returned to the grove with the others and feasted, after which they played musical chairs using cushions: Olivia and the Nawab were the last two players. He won and was "tremendously pleased" about it.

Part 3 Section 8 Analysis

Olivia thought of herself as someone with aesthetic sensibilities. The Nawab makes his first—an invitation to her and Douglas—and second—an invitation to her—moves. He appears to be accustomed to getting what he wants. Olivia is herself shown to be young in the sense of inexperienced, easily influenced and swayed. Olivia is certain she likes visiting graveyards and feeling she's the only person in the room in others' eyes. There is a sense of the kind of monotony only dusty flat lands can bring. The flat plains contrast with the uphill hike up to the grove spread with carpets and cushions (and the promise of mountains in Simla).

Part 3 Section 9

Part 3 Section 9 Summary

The date is March 8th. The narrator notes that Olivia's letters to Marcia really began at this time. She had written Marcia before but infrequently and without great detail: After the Nawab's picnic, she wrote as though relieved to have someone in which to confide (she had meant to tell Douglas about the picnic but had not). The narrator wonders at how strange and far off her letters must have seemed to Marcia, who was, at the time, living in France and getting involved with increasingly "difficult" people. The narrator's mornings in Satipur have developed a routine: she wakes up and listens to the temple bells, waits until the fires have been lit, purchases food at the bazaar, cooks herself a meal and works on her papers—her journal and Olivia's letters to Marcia. Some days she visits the post office, which was in what had been Olivia's breakfast room. Often she waits for Inder Lal whom, she thinks, was initially embarrassed to be seen with her—had welcomed her only as a way to practice his English. Now though he is more like a friend. While he could speak honestly with his mother on most topics, not so with his wife, whom his mother had selected largely because she was uneducated. The narrator thinks Ritu a pretty woman, but Inder Lal is unsure. He cites several situations demonstrating, he says, her generally poor judgment and intellect. As she has gotten to know Inder Lal, the narrator has noticed the many unfulfilled longings and desires under his resigned exterior.

Part 3 Section 9 Analysis

The March 8th date is significant, because that had been the date of the Nawab's picnic in 1923, after which Olivia had begun writing Marcia. Inder Lal and Ritu's marriage contrasts with that between Douglas and Olivia, one woman demeaned and the other on something of a pedestal.

Part 3 Section 10

Part 3 Section 10 Summary

The date is March 10th. The narrator has been working on her Hindi and can now carry on basic conversations with Ritu (who is shy). It is hot enough now that no one sleeps inside. The narrator had been reluctant to sleep outside but joined Inder Lal's family and the others in the courtyard. It usually takes the narrator several hours to fall asleep: she enjoys those peaceful hours. The night before she had woken to a high pitched wailing sound, which she was sure was not human—but was: it was Ritu, who, for unknown reasons, had screamed out. By the time the narrator got to her bed, her mother-in-law already had her hand clamped over Ritu's mouth. The two helped Ritu inside and Inder Lal's mother sprinkled some rice on Ritu's head and uttered some incantations. Ritu is again fine and the three return to their beds in the courtyard.

Part 3 Section 10 Analysis

The narrator resists sleeping in the open courtyard but adapts out of necessity because of the heat. The only thing that makes her certain that she didn't dream Ritu's wailing is the rice she sees in her hair the next day.

Part 3 Section 11

Part 3 Section 11 Summary

The date is March 20th. In the last few days, the narrator and Inder Lal's mother have become friends: she bullies the merchants in the bazaar into getting the narrator the best vegetables at the best prices. The narrator likes it best when Inder Lal's mother speaks of herself: she is about 50 and healthy; she is proud that her son works in an office unlike his now dead father who sat in a stall; she and her friends laugh and gossip (while their daughters-in-law trudge wearily behind); one day she takes the narrator to the suttee shrine, for widows who had thrown themselves on their husbands' burning funeral pyres. The practice had been outlawed in 1829 but was practiced through Olivia's time in India.

Part 3 Section 11 Analysis

When the narrator was in Satipur, widowed women in their 50s had more freedom and fun than did their daughters-in-law. Inder Lal's mother is, however, respectful of the suttee shrines.

Part 4 Section 12

Part 4 Section 12 Summary

The year is 1923. The last time had been when Mr. Crawford was away and Douglas in charge of the district: a wealthy grain merchant's family had forced his widow to her death. Douglas had run to the scene on hearing the news, but he arrived too late: all he could do was arrest a priest, as well as the woman's sons and her brothers-in-law. Olivia had not told him about the Nawab's picnic—or his subsequent visits (he came every second or third day now, usually with his full retinue). One day he stayed on. When Douglas arrived home, the Nawab handled the situation perfectly, saying he had driven over to extend his congratulations for his handling of the recent suttee death. Douglas' prompt handling of that affair was also the main topic at the dinner party the Crawfords held later (also attending were the Minnies and Dr. Saunders—his wife was, of course, too ill to attend—the only British in the district). Douglas respected his commanding officers and so their praise was to him meaningful. Olivia thought that the china, the silver and the waiters—who were wearing turbans—looked grand. Douglas had told her few details—he would hear the woman's screams until the end of his days—but wanted to spare her. Olivia challenges those at the dinner party: what if a woman wants to throw away her life (it is part of "their religion"). The others—except for Douglas and Dr. Saunders—discussed her point and concluded that suttee a rather gruesome form of suicide. Dr. Saunders said that some of the mutilations he'd seen were enough to make him proud to call himself an atheist.

Part 4 Section 12 Analysis

The old practice of suttee is the topic at the dinner table and the subject of this section. The reader learns that its roots were religious. Ironically, Olivia proclaims that she wouldn't want to continue living were Douglas dead. The Crawfords and Minnies agree that suttee was a form of suicide and Dr Saunders thinks it's barbaric like everything else in India. Douglas being praised for his actions is different from Olivia praising the silver and china.

Part 4 Section 13

Part 4 Section 13 Summary

The date is March 30th. Although Inder Lal has attempted to dissuade her, the narrator investigates the loud groaning she hears from inside one of the royal tombs, which had no external walls but— enclosed with numerous arches and lattices—were very dark inside. She recognizes one of the young men she'd met on the verandah of the supposed travelers' lodge a week earlier: Chid, the one with the orange robe who called home for cash on an as necessary basis when trying to follow his spiritual quest of begging his way across India. He had fallen ill and drug himself inside: he is feverish. Inder Lal asked why the young man was dressed in an orange holy robe (because, stated the narrator, he is a *sadhu*).

Part 4 Section 13 Analysis

Inder Lal encounters a young British man who had "studied the Hindu religion." He does not know the young man calls home for money when needed. He respects his opinion on all matters. The narrator says he is *sadhu*, but someone saying something does not make it so.

Part 4 Section 14

Part 4 Section 14 Summary

The date is April 10th. Chid has recovered from his fever but lingers in the narrator's room. She has locked up her papers not because she minded him reading them but because he left them scattered and covered with dirty finger-marks. He takes what he wants of what she has and is content with everything she gives him. The town treats him as a holy man—and to her goes the honor of housing such a one. When someone gives Chid a guava or banana, he eats it all himself and leaves the peel on the floor (which he meekly picks up when she asks). Chid is always hungry, for both food and sex. The narrator in unsure why she indulges him since she could easily fight him off. She is "reminded of the Lord Shiva whose huge member is worshipped by devout Hindu women."

Part 4 Section 14 Analysis

Those who have nothing need the most would be one perspective on the events of this chapter, which shows Chid taking from the narrator what she offers and more. An irony is that Chid was earlier introduced as someone who wired home for money when the begging yielded insufficient money. Perhaps the banana is a phallic symbol—or perhaps it simply signifies that Chid is anything but holy.

Part 4 Section 15

Part 4 Section 15 Summary

The date is April 15th. Things get mixed up in India (such was the case, the Nawab had explained to Olivia, with Baba Firdau's shrine: It was built on the palace grounds by one of his ancestors to honor someone who had given him shelter, but it later became sacred, for one day a year, to women wanting to become pregnant). On the day of that year's "Husband's Wedding Day," the narrator accompanied Inder Lal's mother and her friends on their "pilgrimage" to the shrine: the women shared food and had a good time. The narrator is at ease with these new friends.

Part 4 Section 15 Analysis

The narrator does not see the actual shrine, because too many people are crowded into the grove trying to see it. Not even the Nawab knows how the shrine came to be associated with fertility one day a year. The shrine survived both its creator and the reason for its creation. For Inder Lal's mother and her friends, it is a good enough reason to have a good time.

Part 5 Section 16

Part 5 Section 16 Summary

The year is 1923. The "Husband's Wedding Day" was a problem for Major Minnies since the shrine was on the Nawab's land. Although assured by the Nawab that all would be well, the Major worried, because Khatm had a large Muslim population, the Nawab and his family among them. They did not like their shrine being taken over by Hindu worshippers and there was always a disturbance, often about something else and often occurring somewhere else, like the bazaar. It did not help that the season of summer heat was just beginning. One riot occurred Olivia's first summer in Satipur (not that much trickled into her shuttered house). Everyone though was uneasy—even her servants argued—and Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Minnies had stopped by to reassure her: they faulted the Nawab for failing to prevent violence when he had the opportunity to do so, blaming it on his being a "Mohammedan." Olivia protested that he was just as modern a person as they, totally "emancipated." She mentioned how disgusted the Nawab had sounded when talking about suttee (other than that, Olivia did not argue with them although she thought she knew the Nawab better than they). To them he was just an Indian ruler they had to deal with officially, but to her he was a friend. After the two other women left, Olivia began a letter to Marcia.

When Harry later stopped by, she tried to get him to tell her what exactly was happening in Khatm: he responded, initially, that he lived in the palace, where nothing ever happened, that he had spent the last day and a half in his room and felt somewhat mad himself—it had been the same last year and the year before. Harry spoke of the Nawab's welcoming the "ruffians" that entered his palace, rocking on his heels when he laughed, looking "devastatingly handsome." Although Douglas didn't come home until late that day, Harry was still talking with Olivia. Douglas insisted that Harry spend the night—not travel the roads that night—and dine with them. Harry stayed several days: he and Olivia entertained each other. When Mrs. Crawford stopped by, he agreed with her that the summer heat is unbearable: the Begum, however, does not like the Nawab's mountain chalet (and so he's only been there once). He urges Olivia to go with the others to Simla to escape the heat. To Mrs. Crawford, he confesses his desire to see his own mother again: the Nawab, he explains, does not like people leaving him (he had only planned on being gone for six months—but has been in the palace for three years). Again he says that the Nawab does not like people leaving him—because he has such a generous heart. Mrs. Crawford replies that some of her acquaintances will soon be shipping out—and that single berths were not always booked months ahead. Harry is grateful, hopeful at this information.

The Nawab himself comes for Harry while Douglas and Olivia are at church. The Nawab carelessly mentions that there had been a little trouble, but it was now safe for Harry to return. Douglas knows that the Nawab is an independent ruler—and that the only person who can address him is Major Minnies. All he can say is that he had seen the "casualty lists." The Nawab tells Harry to get dressed; Douglas tells him that his berth

has been arranged; the Nawab says those plans have been canceled. Douglas addresses Harry. Harry says he's changed his mind. The Nawab laughs and calls Harry childish.

Part 5 Section 16 Analysis

Readers with different religious convictions will read this chapter differently: the narrator interjects that, in 1947, the Muslims were either killed or fled to Pakistan and that suttee was a Hindu custom. Harry's relationship with the Nawab is not religious. Olivia does not doubt the Nawab's sincerity and is slightly jealous of Harry's place in his heart. The conflict between Douglas and the Nawab is as much a contest of different versions of reality as one of will: Douglas says Harry's mother is not well; the Nawab says the Begum herself has written her, in Urdu, a formal invitation to the palace, which he has himself translated and sent (he laughs at how well it had all turned out).

Part 5 Section 17

Part 5 Section 17 Summary

The date is April 25th. The narrator and Chid now blend into Satipur, which is used to assimilating different elements. Dust storms have begun blowing day and night: leaves that were once green are now ashen, dried by the hot winds. Chid though is unaffected by the weather: but, for the narrator, it is too hot for sex (and Chid does not bathe). She first tried throwing Chid out of her room, but he returned. His mindless chanting has become increasingly unbearable. Ritu made a rare visit to the narrator's room, then curled in a corner and started shrieking as she had done that one night: her shrieks and Chid's chants sounded like warring religious sects.

Part 5 Section 17 Analysis

Harry had, in the previous chapter, tried to leave the Nawab, but he could not. The narrator tries to rid herself of Chid, but she cannot. Chid's chants and Ritu's shrieks make the narrator's room sound like a religious war (although Chid's sounds are only quasi-religious in origin and Ritu's are cries of despair).

Part 5 Section 18

Part 5 Section 18 Summary

The date is April 30th. Ritu continues shrieking, but none are bothered, especially not Chid. When Ritu's shrieks turn to bloodcurdling screams, Chid explains that her body is being treated: she is being rid of evil spirits by having a red-hot iron placed on her arms and feet. The narrator resolves to discuss "psychiatric treatment" with Inder Lal the next day. He explains that although he doesn't believe in evil spirits, his mother had recommended Ritu's body be rid of them (besides, nothing else they had thought to try had given Ritu any relief).

Part 5 Section 18 Analysis

At one level, Chid shows religious tolerance by objectively describing Ritu's treatment (at another level, he is completely indifferent to Ritu's suffering). At one level, Inder Lal does not believe in evil spirits (at another level, he is preoccupied with his own interoffice intrigues and has room in his thoughts only for thinking that none of his coworkers are trustworthy).

Part 5 Section 19

Part 5 Section 19 Summary

The date is May 2nd. The village women have decided that Ritu should go on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas, accompanied by her mother-in-law—and, best of all, Chid. Maji explains that, after weeks and months of traveling, the pilgrims will reach the base of the mountains. Then they will climb past the tree line to bathe in icy runoff water. Some will faint with joy.

Part 5 Section 19 Analysis

If time heals all wounds, then the time taken to reach the Himalayas would be therapeutic. If "beauty is its own excuse for being," then the sight of the mountain would also be therapeutic. People though can faint from both joy and oxygen deprivation.

Part 6 Section 20

Part 6 Section 20 Summary

The year is 1923. Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Minnies have already left for Simla. Olivia had refused—and Douglas enjoyed their days and evenings together. She had learned that, when he arrived home, he did not want to talk about India. Harry usually arrived early, in one of the Nawab's cars, shortly after Douglas left. He would drive her to the palace. She and the Nawab spent most of their time in the large drawing room (which could be viewed from the gallery above it). On one such occasion, the Nawab invited her to play his piano, which was at the end of a long maze of halls and rooms. She followed him—he had not invited the others—and noticed rusting camera equipment and the like—purchases from Europe that had not arrived soon enough to sustain his attention—and two pianos, purchased, he told her, for his wife. Both pianos were in considerable disrepair. He asked Olivia if she knew he had been married—and then said, sadly, that there will always be those who condemn him, no matter what he does. He explains that Sandy was, like herself, a modern woman. He asks her to play despite the piano's being out of tune: she does and he rapidly loses interest. When he turns to leave the room, she follows, not invited but unsure she could find her way back alone.

It was at this time—her growing friendship with the Nawab—that she and Douglas began discussing having children. They would, of course, remain in India. When she asked about Mr. Gandhi, he dismissed the idea that anything would change: India needed the British. That evening, she entertained Douglas, Mr. Crawford and Major Minnies, whose wives were in Simla. The men discussed "you know who," who is bankrupt and now resorting to robbing his subjects. All understand except Olivia who wonders what "dacoit chief" means.

Part 6 Section 20 Analysis

Olivia feels uneasy but sees only a passing contradiction between her friendship with the Nawab—she knows the road to Khatm so well now—and her marriage with Douglas. Douglas and the other men though do not think highly of the Nawab. And Douglas does not know about her almost daily visits to the palace. As to Mr. Gandhi, Douglas' opinion did not reflect subsequent history.

Part 6 Section 21

Part 6 Section 21 Summary

The date is June 12th. The narrator has received many letters from Chid: He writes of religious ecstasy being broken by something factual—like his being robbed by someone—and concludes with requests—at first, having forgotten his drinking cup, asking her to send it to him via registered post express. They are totally anonymous letters, unlike Olivia's which, although addressed to Marcia, were as much letters to herself. Inder Lal at least appreciates Chid's letters: what he doesn't understand is why the narrator has come to India. She tries to explain to Inder Lal—who thinks most would regard his way of living as "primitive"—that she is one those weary of the materialism of the west but who does not feel any spiritual calling: She is looking for a different kind of life. Inder Lal sees everywhere around him superstitious minds and no progress. The narrator contrasts his protestations with Karim's: she had visited the Nawab's heir and nephew before leaving for India. His room had been full of young people who thought modern India was an impossible place in which to live—and spoke of the kinds of "family treasures" easily smuggled out of India for subsequent sale.

Part 6 Section 21 Analysis

The scandal about Olivia and the Nawab was seen by those she asked as belonging to an India more livable and more interesting than the present. The narrator reveals another personal reason for being in India (besides Olivia's story): she is dissatisfied with the materialism of the west—she is not seeking spiritual enlightenment but a more natural way to live. She has difficulty imagining the Nawab's nephew Karim anywhere in India, even Bombay.

Part 7 Section 22

Part 7 Section 22 Summary

The year is 1923. Since Harry was not in good health, it was only the chauffeur who came to fetch Olivia now. Harry is though well enough to quarrel with her: he says she shouldn't be at the palace; she says Douglas says the same about him. He mentions having quarreled with the Nawab (over his not having introduced her to the Begum). H tells Olivia how the Nawab avoids questions he doesn't want to answer, first by laughing at the questioner and then at the question. The Nawab later tells Olivia that she should direct all her questions explicitly to him. Sundays though she spends with Douglas. In the evenings, they usually walk in the graveyard. When she asks him about the "dacoits," he does not respond.

Part 7 Section 22 Analysis

Olivia is troubled that she's not yet pregnant. She wants children. Douglas wants children. The Nawab is a friend. Harry is a friend. They have fun together. The palace is opulent.

Part 7 Section 23

Part 7 Section 23 Summary

The date is June 15th. The narrator had noticed that one of Satipur's beggars was an old woman who never spoke: she held out her hands only when she was hungry. She was not rooted to a particular area. The narrator notices her lying in the same place first when she drops off her clothes and later when she picks them up. She initially wondered if the woman was dead—concluding that she might be but that it was not her job to do anything about it (at this thought, she wonders at how she had changed, not even having bothered to see if the woman was alive). She later ascertains that the woman is alive and walks to the hospital. The doctor there is more than polite but can do nothing. Where, asked the narrator, should the old woman die? She walks through the hospital corridor; its floors covered with patients for whom there are no beds. She surprises herself again by thinking that the old woman was "dispensable"—and that she, who would never have previously allowed such a thought, is changing. She is surprised to learn that the old woman has a name: Maji knows her name and her history.

Part 7 Section 23 Analysis

The old woman has a name and a story: she was evicted by her in-laws when her husband died and again later when her family died in a small pox epidemic. She had fallen ill in Satipur about a decade earlier. She was not strong enough after that to move on. She died at dusk in Maji's arms, the narrator looking on.

Part 8 Section 24

Part 8 Section 24 Summary

The year is 1923. Olivia told Douglas that Harry was ill in Khatm and that she was going to visit him. Douglas merely replied with an "oh," which Olivia interpreted as meaning that he knew she frequently traveled to Khatm. She no longer hurried to get home before he arrived (there was little need since he was keeping longer and longer hours at his office). Olivia was usually up long after Douglas went to bed and asleep when he left in the morning. One morning though she did rise with him (they quarreled). After Douglas left, she looked towards Khatm and later walked over to see Dr. Saunders herself: he had already left and Mrs. Saunders, to her surprise, was out of bed: She warns Olivia that "they" only want to "you-know-what with a white woman." Olivia leaves quickly—the Nawab's car will arrive any minute. Later, at the palace, she laughs at Dr. Saunders with Harry and the Nawab (although she and Harry tire of his joke before he does). Olivia later begs the Nawab not to judge all British by pompous Dr. Saunders: she feels, momentarily, that he does, already has. But the remainder of the afternoon is absorbed by gaiety.

Part 8 Section 24 Analysis

Olivia is not troubled by the heat, feels instead an inner well spring that keep her fresh and gay. She tells Douglas twice that she wants Dr. Saunders consulted—first for Harry, who is still ailing and second for herself, since she is not yet pregnant. Olivia can only stare at Mrs. Saunders' surprising warning—but not for long since the Nawab's car would be waiting. She knows the Nawab well enough to recognize a display of excessive politeness signifies contempt. She and Harry tire of the joke sooner than the Nawab, who often seems to laugh at what he despises.

Part 8 Section 25

Part 8 Section 25 Summary

The date is June 20th. The heat is particularly intense before the monsoons begin. By that time, all are too beaten down by the heat and dust to do more than simply accept the weather that comes. There are, additionally, compensations: the hotter the temperature, the sweeter the mangoes. The narrator and Inder Lal travel to Baba Firdau's shrine on the palace grounds for a picnic (she was last there when the grove was crowded with pilgrims on the "Husband's Wedding Day" festival). She and Inder Lal both tie red strings to the lattice around the shrine and make wishes. Although both are initially timid, they become lovers, in the grove as the sun sets.

Part 8 Section 25 Analysis

The narrator thinks her life too lacking in too many essentials to focus on a single simple wish. Having sex—at the shrine of Baba Firdau, thought by some a fertility god—might be ironic but is absolutely necessary for fertility to occur.

Part 9 Section 26

Part 9 Section 26 Summary

The year is 1923. Olivia notices she has not played the piano for quite some time. One day, Harry again accompanies the Nawab's chauffeur. His reluctance to leave contrasts with her eagerness. She and the Nawab later leave Harry in the palace. They first drive and then walk the remaining distance to Baba Firdau's shrine. They touch for the first time. They walk over to the grove of trees. They, too, become lovers: afterwards, the Nawab makes a "Husband's Wedding Day" joke.

Part 9 Section 26 Analysis

Olivia and the Nawab both tie red strings at the shrine and make wishes. They, too, become lovers in the grove.

Part 9 Section 27

Part 9 Section 27 Summary

The date is July 31st. Maji has informed the narrator that she is pregnant. She also reveals that she had been a midwife and knew the safe ways of inducing abortion, should that be the narrator's choice. The narrator skips through puddles back to her room: the heat has passed and monsoon season has begun.

Part 9 Section 27 Analysis

The narrator had previously been surprised to learn that the old beggar woman, who had died in Maji's arms, had a name and a history. Now she is surprised to learn Maji's story. She doesn't quite believe she is pregnant—Chid at least cannot be the father since he left at the beginning of May.

Part 9 Section 28

Part 9 Section 28 Summary

The date is August 15th. Chid, who cannot be the father, has returned: he has changed his orange robe for khaki pants and become a Christian. He is also ill. Inder Lal, who had been visiting the narrator's bed at night, is initially shy in Chid's presence (as well as disappointed by the disappearance of his Hindu ascetic words). The narrator is now certain that she is pregnant but does not discuss it with Inder Lal, whose company she increasingly enjoys when the two are alone (ignoring Chid, who is either asleep or groaning).

Part 9 Section 28 Analysis

The narrator is pregnant. She does not tell Inder Lal, the father, because she does not want to spoil things between them (his mother and wife Ritu are still on their pilgrimage: how Chid was separated from the two is not stated).

Part 10 Section 29

Part 10 Section 29 Summary

The year is 1923. When Olivia realized she was pregnant, she did not tell Douglas—although she had meant to—until after she had told the Nawab (Douglas had been so very busy). At the palace, she saw the Nawab leaving a meeting with Major Minnies and—for the first time—called to him by name. After she told him she was pregnant, it seemed fair that she tell Douglas, too and so she did, later that same evening. Her visits to the palace become even more frequent. While there, neither she nor the Nawab make any pretense about their relationship. Outside of the palace, her relationship with Douglas continues as before, smooth on the surface.

Part 10 Section 29 Analysis

Olivia had earlier expressed disappointment that she was not yet pregnant. At this point, she does not appear to care who fathered her child. Both the Nawab and Douglas ask her similar questions: was she really willing to do this for him? Was she afraid?

Part 10 Section 30

Part 10 Section 30 Summary

The date is August 20th. The first thing the narrator relates is that Douglas did later have a son—her father—with his second wife, her grandmother: Her father had spent his first decade in India and then, upon Indian Independence, returned to England with most of the remaining British (and later became an antique dealer). After Douglas died, his second wife, Tessie, moved in with her sister, Beth Crawford: they kept in touch with friends still in India like the Minnies, but most of their generation was now long dead.

Chid is now the one anxious to return to England, but his health is not improving. The narrator helps him into a crowded hospital ward, where he gets a real bed.

Part 10 Section 30 Analysis

Chid, the first in his family to visit India, is anxious to leave and not at all interested in the narrator's family history. He manages to get the bed of a man who has just, as was expected, died.

Part 10 Section 31

Part 10 Section 31 Summary

The date is August 27th. The narrator visits Chid daily. One day she helps the man in the bed next to Chid (she empties his bed pan, after which everyone, including the man himself, seem to regard her as unclean). She has written Chid's family for a return ticket. The only thing he says about what's wrong with him is that he "can't stand the smell" (the doctor—who always welcomes English conversation—lists a number of diseases, beginning with dysentery, which Indians rarely notice, because they also suffer from so many other diseases). The narrator wonders whether the doctor is right about Indian germs being reserved for Indians: Although Chid's health makes it obvious that he should not be here, other British have stayed on.

Part 10 Section 31 Analysis

The narrator does not think of Olivia as a religious person. She does not think she had any special attributes, other than vanity, when she arrived in India: but, like the missionaries, she had stayed. Increasingly, the narrator wants to know what happened to Olivia—she could not have remained the same person she had been when she arrived in India.

Part 11 Section 32

Part 11 Section 32 Summary

The year is 1923. The landscape that had been heavy with dust a few weeks earlier now drips with water from the monsoons. Harry tells Olivia that the Nawab had said Douglas and the others would be astonished when her baby was born: she asks Harry if he thought the Nawab had meant the color (how could he be sure?). She has not thought about this. She sticks her hand out the window to feel the rain—and tells Harry that she is thinking about an abortion and would he please help her find out where to go (perhaps the Begum would know).

Part 11 Section 32 Analysis

Seasons ebb and flow. The hot dust storms of the summer have been replaced by the monsoon rains. Olivia had wanted to be pregnant when she wasn't. She now wants to not be pregnant, knowing now that she is.

Part 11 Section 33

Part 11 Section 33 Summary

The date is August 31st. The narrator is surprised to be followed by another woman as she walks to the bazaar. She stops by Maji's hut and the woman walks on. Maji is in a state of *samadhi*, submerged in the bliss of a higher state of consciousness. Maji again reminds her that now would be a good time that even a skillful massage might suffice, if that is her choice. The narrator recognizes her pregnancy as the source of a completely new feeling, rapture and does not want it terminated.

Part 11 Section 33 Analysis

Maji has twice offered to induce abortion. When the narrator asks her to stop the message, she does so immediately. In the interim, she had seemed to the narrator like one of the Hindu gods balancing life and death in opposing arms.

Part 12 Section 34

Part 12 Section 34 Summary

The year is 1923. Parts of Satipur were slummy, as was all of Khatm. Olivia had been instructed to don a burka and follow one of the servants down the dark alleys. Olivia arrives and listens to the midwives talk: one describes how a nearby house had collapsed a week earlier, just as the bridegroom in a wedding procession had passed by. The midwives instruct Olivia to lay down on a mat and begin massaging her abdomen. The midwives, who are skillful and professional, are interrupted by someone at the door: it was the Begum, accompanied by only one attendant. The Begum is as interested in looking into Olivia's eyes as she is in returning her gaze. Finally though Olivia closes her eyes to the pain.

Part 12 Section 34 Analysis

The midwives begin as Maji had done. They were relaxed and professional, performing a task that needed to be done. The Begum's interest is different. Her curiosity has brought her to see Olivia directly, not, as before, from behind the wall of curtains.

Part 12 Section 35

Part 12 Section 35 Summary

The year is 1923. Dr. Saunders had not been reticent about speaking. He had seen many women whose miscarriages had been induced: often he slapped them around before throwing them out of his hospital. He had always known there was something "rotten" about Olivia and he now had proof. Everyone believed the Nawab had used Olivia for revenge (but that was not enough to excuse her). Olivia did not return to Douglas after being thrown out of the hospital. She went straight to the palace. Shortly thereafter, Harry returned to England.

Years later, Major Minnies published a small monograph about the influence of India on the European character. The major argued that those most vulnerable were those who loved India best. Beth Crawford had not allowed herself to speak of Olivia until after many years had passed. She had never been interested in the "mysteries" that went on in the Begum's purdah quarters, nor did she think of the alleys of Khatm—nor of Olivia after she had crossed through them.

Harry saw the Nawab on his later trips to England and found him much changed, his circumstances much reduced. Olivia never returned to England and lived in a house the Nawab had bought for her in the mountains. Harry had been shocked when he'd seen the Nawab: Although still a ruler in name, a colonial court decision had gone against him. He spent his time either with Olivia, his wife Sandy—he'd reconciled with her family—or the Begum, who, too, had left the palace. Sandy's health was not good. Nor was the Nawab's (although he lived for another 15 years), finally dying of a stroke in the ancient Begum's arms (in her New York apartment). Although Olivia had continued writing Marcia—the briefest of letters—she wrote no more after the Nawab died. She died a few years later and, at her request, was cremated, her ashes spread on the mountainside.

Part 12 Section 35 Analysis

Olivia's miscarriage had been induced in the previous section, in Khatm. In this section, she fled the hospital in Satipur—directly to the palace in Khatm: she was a pariah to her British peers. This section begins in 1923—Olivia still a young woman—and ends close to the narrator's time, after all the characters in her letters have died. Why had Olivia stayed? What did she do for another quarter century? The author provides no clues.

Part 12 Section 36

Part 12 Section 36 Summary

There are no new dates in the narrator's journal. She has told Maji that she will be leaving Satipur. Maji laughs, asking if she was planning to leave like Chid—everything about him amused her—and is pleased to hear she was headed for the mountains. Maji approved of the destination although the monsoon season was not a good time for traveling, the roads made impassable by frequent landslides.

There was a cluster of houses above the town of X, on the steep side of one mountain in the Himalayas—barely accessible even during good weather: Olivia had lived in one of those houses. The narrator has stood inside it. She has taken a room in X. She is anxious for the season to change, to begin climbing. She knows there is an *ashram* further up the mountain. She has heard that any sincere seeker can go up and stay for however long. She does not know how long she will stay. Certainly though it will take some time to get down again, should she ever want to do so.

Part 12 Section 36 Analysis

Olivia's last section had begun in 1923 and ended near the narrator's time period. The narrator's section began with the journey to X and ended with her standing where Olivia had lived her final quarter century. Will she, too, remain?

Characters

The Narrator

She is the granddaughter of Douglas and Tessie Rivers. Since the two had one child, a son, her last name is probably Rivers (her first name is never mentioned). She is in her 20s. She travels to India to learn what had happened to Douglas' first wife, Olivia. She travels light, arriving with little more than basic necessities, her journal and the letters Olivia had written to Marcia back in 1923. One of the first things she does after renting a room in Satipur is purchase Indian clothing—loose pants and a long shirt—at the bazaar (because they are more practical).

When summer arrives, she sleeps with the other inhabitants of her building in the open court yard (because the heat makes sleeping inside unbearable). She is befriended by her new landlord's mother, who introduces her to the other women of Satipur. She and Inder Lal later become lovers (near the spot where Olivia and the Nawab became lovers). Only she and the Satipur midwives know she is pregnant. The narrator concludes her journey in X, the small village in the Himalayas where Olivia had lived the rest of her life. Her plans, as the novel ends, are to go further up the mountains.

Olivia Rivers

The first wife of the narrator's grandfather. She and Douglas lived in Satipur (she was newly arrived while he had grown up in India). On the trip to the Nawab's palace in Khatm for the dinner party, she looked forward to everyone seeing her in her evening gown and jewelry. After the Nawab first visited her in Satipur—as she knew he would—she began writing detailed letters to Marcia. Her visits to the palace became more-and-more frequent. She and the Nawab became lovers. When she realized she was pregnant, she decided on an abortion and the English Dr. Saunders was outraged (Olivia fled to the palace). The Nawab bought and maintained a house for her in X, on the steep foothills of the Himalayas (he never after spoke of her publicly; she did not accompany him on his subsequent travels). Nothing more about her is known other than that she lived there a quarter century and, at her request, when she died, a few years after the Nawab, her body was cremated—and her ashes thrown along the mountainside—instead of added to one of the many British cemeteries in India.

Douglas Rivers

The narrator's grandfather. He grew up in India and served as a junior officer in the British colonial government (which—there, then—included, in addition to himself and Olivia, Dr. Saunders and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Crawford and Major and Mrs. Minnies). Sincere and hard working, he had the respect of both British and Indians. After he divorced Olivia, he married Tessie, Beth Crawford's sister. They had one son: the

narrator's father—when he was twelve, the entire family returned to England (the author's age when her family had emigrated there there from Germany).

Tessie Rivers

The narrator's grandmother. After Indian Independence, the Rivers and the Crawfords—Tessie and Beth were sisters—returned to England. Long after Tessie and Beth had been widowed, Harry gave them Olivia's letters (which Marcia had given him).

The Nawab

He became a prince when he was 15, when his father died of a stroke. He was married but not living with his wife Sandy (Zahira). After many daily visits—whiling away time in pleasant pursuits in the pleasant surroundings of the palace—the Nawab and Olivia became lovers. The British colonial governors were all convinced that the Nawab was generally a cad (if not a criminal) and had exploited Olivia to exact his revenge on them and their government. He died childless—and close to penniless—from a stroke in 1953, in the arms of his mother the Begum, who by then lived in New York City. His nephew Karim, who lived in London, inherited the palace (and had sold off most of its furnishings long ago).

Harry

Harry, whose last name is never mentioned, had been with the Nawab for 3 years, as a semi-permanent guest in the palace: Harry sometimes wanted to return to England—his mother was ill—but couldn't (or the Nawab wouldn't allow him). He finally returned (or escaped) shortly after Olivia's "disgrace." Many years after everyone—Douglas, the Nawab, Olivia—had died, he gave Olivia's letters to Beth, who, by that time, shared a house in England with her sister Tessie, Douglas' widow, the narrator's grandmother.

Inder Lal

He lived in Satipur during the narrator's time, with his unnamed mother and his wife Ritu and young children. He is at first the narrator's landlord (she thinks the only reason he talks to her is to practice his English). His mother becomes the narrator's friend and through her, she meets the other women of the village, especially Maji (who—she describes herself as a retired midwife—can bring herself in and out of the bliss of *samadhi*). Inder Lal's mother and his wife go on a pilgrimage, accompanied by Chid—a young British man who had studied some Hindu religious texts, donned an orange robe, proclaimed himself an ascetic and sponged off whomever he could (including the narrator). Inder Lal and the narrator, who had become friends, become lovers. The narrator does not tell him, before she leaves Satipur for X, that she is pregnant.

Objects/Places

Satipur

City where the narrator rents a room from Inder Lal. City where Olivia and Douglas had lived together in 1923.

Khatm

A squat little town that had grown up in the shadow of the Nawab's palace. The Begum arranges for Olivia to visit the midwives in the back alleys of Khatm.

The Nawab's Palace

The palace is described as rising like a jewel above ugly Khatm. On it is Baba Firdau's shrine, built by one of the Nawab's ancestors to acknowledge one who had once given him shelter when he had desperately needed it. The shrine becomes religiously significant—many make pilgrimages to it—once a year, on the "Husband's Wedding Day," an annual fertility festival. It is near here that Olivia and the Nawab—and the narrator and Inder Lal—become lovers. Since the Nawab left no heirs, his nephew Karim inherited the palace and its grounds in 1953.

X

The village in the steep foothills of the Himalayas where Olivia lived the quarter century after she had miscarried in the Satipur hospital and fled to the palace.

Themes

Appearances and Realities

Each region on the globe has its own aesthetic: as suggested by the narrator, many British loved India like no place on earth. As Martin Heidegger once said, beauty is in itself sufficient to bring a world to stand (perhaps that is why some of the British stayed on). There were always warnings about everything from dysentery to the most intimate condition of one's soul: One must not give in to India; India will squash the humanity out of those heeding her call, especially those who are either unlucky or unaware (or conned). Although they often succumbed to simple physical diseases like dysentery, it was perhaps a changing or new world order that the British feared most. Although Douglas believed that India would never change—that it needed the British—history and Mr. Ghandi proved him wrong.

Fertility

The narrator's pregnancy contrasts with Olivia's: should the reader conclude anything from both women probably having become pregnant near the shrine of Baba Firdau (a site that was the scene for an annual fertility festival called the "Husband's Wedding Day")? The author suggests not since the shrine had been founded by one of the Nawab's ancestors, a "desperado" looking for the pickings that could be found in the "free-for-all between the Moguls, the Afghans, the Mahrattas and the East India Company." This ancestor had erected the shrine, because Baba Firdau had given him shelter (when someone else was trying to gun him down). There is no reason that explains how this particular shrine came to be associated, once a year, with fertility. Nevertheless, of all the pleasant retreats on the palace grounds, Olivia and the Nawab first become lovers near the shrine of Baba Firdau.

The narrator first visited this shrine with Inder Lal's mother and her friends, which included Maji, the "retired" midwife whose mother and grandmother had taught her all she knew: these women treat the festival like a picnic on a holiday—a time for fun. The narrator later visits the shrine with Inder Lal, after his mother and wife have left on a pilgrimage: they, too, become lovers.

The midwives' business is to give women choices. These midwives can be contrasted with the custom of suttee—and the Italian marble angel statue, the one the Saunders' had had imported to commemorate a child who died in infancy, a gravestone that by the narrator's time, was beheaded, without arms and otherwise crumbling. They can also be contrasted with Dr. Saunders, who was outraged by Olivia's decision.

Religions

On one side of the road into Satipur are the old Muslim tombs and on the other side, the Hindu suttee stones, the bodies of those who died belonging to one religion and those who died because of a different one. What is religion? Dr. Saunders said that some of the mutilations he'd seen were enough to make him proud to call himself an atheist. Was Chid a "*sadhu*," because he had spent a little time studying Hindu scripture and wore an orange robe? Inder Lal was impressed by what he said while Maji found everything about Chid amusing. Most of Satipur's inhabitants are depicted as too busy meeting the basics—food, clothing and shelter—to be overly zealous about any religion: intellectually interested, yes; fanatic, no. Another perspective is that of Inder Lal's mother and her friends, who take the narrator to Baba Firdau's shrine on the "Husband's Wedding Day"—it is more like taking a holiday at a resort than performing a sacred ritual. The Christians, in contrast, are shown to be a particularly pious lot (except for the ailing Chid, after he'd changed his orange robe for checkered pants, after he'd converted). Their graveyards are well maintained: the bodies of Christians who lived in heathen lands were transported for proper burial with other Christian bodies. There were, the narrator noted, many British cemeteries in India. Yet, the first warning she receives after arriving in India is from a Christian missionary: there is no hope.

Materialism

Most of the young people in Satipur have a pinched look that, the narrator thinks, comes from worrying about their ability to sustain their lives. Additionally, both Inder Lal and the doctor at the Satipur hospital long for modern materials slightly beyond their grasp. The narrator though has fled the materialism of the west—and the novel concludes with her contemplating seeking asylum in an *ashram* further up the mountain. Chid, in contrast, is content to traverse India with his begging bowl (he can phone home for more money when he needs it). The Nawab, however, was a genuine Indian "prince"—a title respected by the British colonial government insofar as what his ancestors had done to get it was outside their jurisdiction: the Nawab had only enough money to indulge a few of his many material tastes. His opulent palace, however, by the time the narrator sees it, is nearly empty: The Nawab had died nearly destitute and his nephew, Karim, who had inherited the palace, had sold all he could (to live in London).

Style

Point of View

The narrator's parts of this novel are told in the first person. She relates Olivia's parts sometimes in the first person but usually in the third. The points of view are those of women. Their voices are separate in time by about 50 years. The events forever changing Olivia's life occurred in 1923. The precise year that the narrator's life changed is never stated.

Setting

India: the towns and roads between Bombay, Satipur, Khatm and X. Khatm is about 15 miles from Satipur and X is somewhere on the steep foothills of the Himalayas.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in English, which is occasionally compared to other languages: poems written in Urdu come out flat in English; Douglas delivers "deadly insults" to the rich men of Satipur in Hindustani (since English would be unsuitable for doing so); the Nawab uses extremely polite English to express contempt. Some of the words used are of religious origin (the narrator encounters Maji in a state of "*samadhi*;" she thinks of seeking refuge in an "*ashram*"). Curiously, some people and things are not named: we do not know the narrator's first name (although her last name is probably Rivers, because Douglas and his second wife had a son); the old beggar woman in Satipur who died did have a name (but none other than Maji knew it); X was the name of the town where Olivia lived the rest of her days—and the exact year the narrator arrived is never stated.

Structure

This novel is divided into twelve unnumbered major parts. The first is untitled and the other eleven are titled with the year "1923." In the first part, the first date—in the narrator's journal—is "2 February" and the last, "24 February:" She has just arrived in India. She was in India, because that is where Olivia had lived when she wrote Marcia. Before the end of this first part, the narrator has taken a room in Satipur, the town where Olivia had lived when she began writing. Each of the remaining eleven parts in the novel is titled "1923," because that was the year when Olivia had begun writing Marcia (about herself and the Nawab)—and this, the narrator says repeatedly, is Olivia's story: since she had brought the letters with her to India, the reader can reasonably conclude that Olivia's sections are the narrator's synopses of what she had written Marcia some 50 years earlier. More journal entry dates follow each synopsis: "24 February" in the first part is followed by "8 March" in the second part and "31 August" in the eleventh. In the

twelfth part—like the others titled "1923" and beginning with Olivia's section (but this time ending in the 1950s)—the narrator has entered no dates in her journal: she has reached X and the house in which Olivia had lived, in the steep foothills of the Himalayas, after she had stopped writing letters about herself and the Nawab (in the 1950s).

Quotes

"Douglas' voice, firm and manly, rose above the rest. When he spoke, the others confined themselves to murmurs of agreement. He must have made some jokes, because every now and again they all laughed in polite unison. Sometimes he seemed to speak rather more sternly and then the murmurs became very low and submissive till he made another joke whereupon they dissolved in relieved laughter. It was almost as if Douglas were playing a musical instrument of which he had entirely mastered the stops." Section 8, pg. 37

"It seems ludicrous to bracket her with religious seekers, adventurers and Christian missionaries: yet, like them, she stayed. I still don't think there was anything very special about Olivia; I mean, that she started off with any very special qualities. When she first came here, she may really have been what she seemed; a pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure-seeking, a little petulant. Yet to have done what she did—and then to have stuck to it all her life long—she couldn't have remained the same person she had been." Section 31, pp. 159-160

"Maji was in the state of *samadhi*. To be in that state means to have reached a higher state of consciousness and to be submerged in its bliss. At such times, Maji is entirely unaware of anything going on around her. She sits on the floor in the lotus pose ... Her breathing is regular and peaceful as in dreamless sleep. When she woke up—if that's the right expression which it isn't—she smiled ... as always at such times, she was like a person who had just stepped out of a revivifying bath, or some other medium of renewal. Her cheeks glowed and her eyes shone." Section 33, pg. 163

"Satipur also had its slummy lanes, but Khatm had nothing else. The town huddles in the shadow of the Palace walls in a tight knot of dirty alleys with ramshackle houses leaning over them." Section 34, pg. 165

"Great-Aunt Beth knew where lines had to be drawn, not only in speech and behavior but also in one's thought. In the same way she had never let her mind dwell on the Begum and her ladies .... She had no desire to speculate about what went on in those purdah quarters ... Beth felt that there were oriental privacies—mysteries—that should not be disturbed, whether they lay within the Palace, the bazaar of Satipur, or the alleys of Khatm. All those dark regions were outside her sphere of action or imagination—as was Olivia once she had crossed over into them." Section 35, pp. 168-169

Topics for Discussion

Maji is described as being in a state of "*samadhi*" while Chid was described as wearing an "orange robe." Who was the more religious?

What does the author mean by leaving certain people and places unnamed? The narrator's last name is probably "Rivers," but her first name is never said. Inder Lal's mother's name is unsaid, as is Harry's last name. After 1923, Olivia lived in X. Why doesn't the author name everything?

What is the significance of the old woman who had a name known only to Maji?

How did the British colonial government "live long and happy lives" in India?

What do you think intrigued the narrator most about Olivia's story? What might she have written to Marcia?

Why might Olivia have chosen to terminate her pregnancy and the narrator to carry hers to term?

The story is either told from the perspective of either the narrator in then modern day India or Olivia in 1923. What do these women say about the male characters in the novel?

How would you describe the Nawab's character? Douglas' Inder Lal's?

What choices did Olivia have?

Why did the Begum want to watch Olivia? Why did Olivia want to watch the Begum?

What happened in India in the 50 years following 1923?

Why did Harry several times arrange passage to England but stay (at the last minute)? Why did the Begum change her mind, year after year, about summering in the mountains (at the last minute)?