The Moor's Last Sigh Study Guide

The Moor's Last Sigh by Salman Rushdie

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Moor's Last Sigh tells the family history of Moraes Zogoiby, known as "the Moor." He is the last survivor of a family descended from the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (ca.1469-1524), who sailed to India in search of spice and whose offspring grew rich in shipping it to the West. Among his ancestors, Moraes also numbers Boabdil (Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad XI, ca. 1460-1527), the last Muslim king in Spain, forced in 1492 to surrender his city to Ferdinand and Isabella. The spot from which Boabdil gazed for the last time at Granada is today a tourist attraction, known as 'The Last Sigh of the Moor.' His descendents, who made their way to southern India, took, as their family name, his nickname, "Zogoiby" - "The Unfortunate." Another branch of the family descended from Black Jews who immigrated to Cochin, India, and built a synagogue in 1568. It, too, is a famous landmark, preserved to this day. Moraes concentrates on the last four generations of his ancestors, spanning the first eight decades of the twentieth century. At every point in this fictional tale, authentic history is interwoven.

We first meet Moraes at age thirty-six in Spain, breathless, on the run, and determined that his quirky family's story will not perish when he dies. He introduces first his mother, Aurora, as a young girl and offers detailed depictions of her close relatives that help us understand how she could evolve into the strong, difficult character who would destroy the one true love of her only son's life, cast him out of her home and life, and, unreconciled, suffer a tragic, accidental death. The pain of these events fills Moraes' story long before the circumstances are relayed.

As we grow familiar with Moraes' maternal relatives, "the battling da Gamas of Cochin" - great grandmother, Epifania, and her husband, Francisco, grandmother, Belle, and her husband, Camoens, great aunt, Carmen, and her husband, Aires - we experience life in late, colonial India, an era of growing change.

Moraes gives less detail about his paternal line. His father, Abraham Zogoiby, is introduced as a manager in the Gama Trading Company warehouse. Aurora falls in love with him and seduces him away from his Jewish heritage. We meet his conniving mother, Flory, and witness their split over his decision. We see Abraham taking control of the business and returning it to prosperity (in the dangerous, early days of World War II) with financial help from Flory. Her condition on the loan is that he turns his first-born son over to her, to be raised as a Jew. Agreeing to this creates a rift with Aurora, whom we follow to Bombay and great success in the worlds of art and politics, as India comes to independence in 1947. Again, historical figures - Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru - are skillfully woven into the narrative.

Only after Flory's death do Abraham and Aurora reunite, and we are introduced to their four children, Ina, Minnie, Mynah, and Moor (Aurora intended the humor in their names), and the servants who care for the prosperous Bombay household. We meet a fellow artist, Vasco Miranda, who takes up residence in the house and helps Moraes come to grips with the forces that form his personality: a malformed right hand and a rare condition that causes him to physically age at twice the rate he develops chronologically

and emotionally. Doorkeeper Lambajan teaches him to box. Ayah (the title of native nursemaids in India) Jaya Hé introduces him to the city's vibrant streets. Tutor Dilly Hormuz unleashes his sexuality. A cruel critic of his mother's work, Raman Fielding, brings us into the volatile mix of religion and politics that thrive in Mother India. Sitting for his mother's Moor paintings, and listening to her chatter, helps Moraes understand her personality. Like magnets, mother and son attract and repel one another. Abraham remains, for a long while, a distant, indistinct character; it is only hinted that they will some day reconcile and Moraes will learn - and dutifully relay - the dark details of his father's business.

Finally, as the first part of the novel ends, we are introduced to the long-anticipate lover, Uma Sarasvati. She is a mysterious, contradictory figure, who utterly shatters the Zogoiby family. Aurora, alone, is never taken in by her charms. How Uma can cause such a violent rift between her and her son remains a mystery for much of the book. The reality of it, however, is that Moraes must set upon a new, independent chapter of his life.

This chapter begins in prison, following Moraes' arrest for Uma's murder and involvement in his father's black marketeering in narcotics. He is rescued by Raman "Mainduck" Fielding, who is closing in on his goal of political mastery of Bombay. Moor becomes "Hammer," as a member of Fielding's elite goon squad that terrorizes and intimidates anyone who opposes the interests of the Hindu majority. For the first time Moraes is comfortable with his deformed right hand and administers savage beatings to foes, not just obediently, but enthusiastically and with relish. We meet Hammer's colorful, sadistic colleagues: Sammy "the Tin Man" Hazaré and Chhaghgan "Five-in-a-Bite."

Following Aurora's death, "Hammer" leaves Fielding's camp, which further unravels when the beauty queen Nadia Wadia drives a wedge between commander and Hazaré. "Moor" reconnects with Abraham and allies with him to bring peace to his mother's still tormented soul. Through a private investigator, we learn that both parents have had multiple sexual partners and harbored a multitude of secrets. While these unravel, it appears that Aurora's death was not an accident. "Hammer" once more goes into action, murdering Fielding, the presumed perpetrator.

Simultaneously, Abraham's commercial empire bursts asunder when its illegal underpinnings are uncovered. In a rapid denouement, all of the main characters, except Moraes, perish in an orgy of fire bombings that level much of Bombay.

Moreas flies to Spain, to search for four of his mother's paintings that survived the conflagration. Three, he was certain, had been stolen by Vasco Miranda, the artist whom Aurora had dismissed from her household fourteen years earlier. Miranda's painting, which Aurora had mocked as commercial fluff, had earned him a vast fortune and international fame. He used his riches to construct a hideous fortress on a hillside in Benengeli. We follow him, wandering the city, taken in by half-sisters who claim to be the aging recluse's housekeepers. When they bring Moraes word that a parcel has been delivered to the fortress, he convinces them to smuggle him inside. There, he is taken

prisoner and locked up in the tower with a Japanese art conservator, Aoi Ué, kidnapped to remove Miranda's pedestrian over-painting of *The Moor's Last Sigh* in order to reveal the original portrait of a bare-breasted, young Aurora Zogoiby. Miranda orders his new companion to record his life story in full detail, promising that, like Scheherazade, he will be allowed to live so long as his tales amused his master. When both tasks are complete, Miranda turns his gun on them. Aoi perishes, but Moor is spared when the drug-crazed, bloated gunman's heart explodes as he had long ago predicted it would. Moor flees, nailing sheets of his story to trees and fences across the countryside, coming to rest in the overgrown cemetery where we first met him, hoping he will, in death, find peace.

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

"A House Divided," Part 1 of *The Moor's Last Sigh,* opens with the narrator, Moraes Zogoiby, called "the Moor," pausing to catch his breath in an overgrown graveyard somewhere in Spain. He had escaped from imprisonment by the artist, Vasco Miranda, and has been on the run, for reasons not initially disclosed. Cornered and resigned to his fate, he has left a trail of narratives nailed to gates, fences, and trees along his way, and he now wants to tell his tale in full, before the end comes. In breathless, staccato fashion he begins by depicting, with bitterness, his late mother, Aurora da Gama, as a renowned, quick-witted, sharp-tongued artist whom people, back in Bombay, had generally regarded as demonic. He suggests that Aurora will eventually clash with his lover Uma and this will leave him estranged from his mother. As swiftly and enigmatically, Moor indicates that this will be the story of his prominent family's history as heirs to the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama's opening of the Indian subcontinent as a commercial treasure land, ripe for exploitation by European commercial interests.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

From the first sentence, the reader realizes that this book will demand maddeningly close attention to detail. It comes out of the blocks staccato and breathless, befitting a fugitive's plight. Clever word play, on-a-dime transitions, and rich allusion establish the tone. The Moor's hastily sketched flight path and opening rest stop suggest Martin Luther's nailing of ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, and Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Such luxuriant references to history and literature will fill the entire narrative. The brief first chapter leaves the reader hungering to learn more about clearly troubled and fascinating characters and circumstances.

Chapter 1 also establishes the chief source of conflict that will fuel the plot: Mother vs. the world - her son, his lover, her rivals, and the people of Bombay. Not yet having met her, we know that she will be a formidable character.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

In Chapter 2, we begin getting to know Aurora and are introduced to "the legends of the battling da Gamas of Cochin." A brief vignette of Aurora as a tall, thin, thirteen year old, living in her grandmother's household suggests the family's troubles. Outwardly, the perfect child, she is depicted as a mutinous, inventively vicious prankster, at odds with her grandmother Epifania. The teen relishes Epifania's torment by mosquitoes that she admitted to the house by night, and by toying with her uncle Aires and father Camoens by committing acts of petty thievery and vandalism. We learn that Aurora wants to "killofy," clandestinely, the fiery, ruthless, unbalanced matriarch Epifania, whose nature she has inherited. We begin to fathom the dysfunction that has affected the family for generations, in glimpses of Aires' homosexuality and Camoens' superstitions (Aurora's pranks convince him that the house is haunted by his recently-deceased wife). The chapter concludes with a depiction of Epifania's marriage to the impractical and eccentric Francisco da Gama, whose devotion to Indian nationalism and spiritualism during the first two decades of the twentieth century drove a wedge between the spouses and polarized their sons. Two eccentric architectural additions to the mansion symbolize Francisco's rift with Epifania. It is suggested that, when grown, Aurora will revel in depicting her family's troubles in well-known works of art.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 is longer and denser than the first. We begin to understand the Moor's quirky, troubled family history, stemming back to the turn of the twentieth-century. The political factions and philosophical-religious tensions in India are suggested. Francisco's interests offer an opportunity for the narrator to deal with the historical figure of Annie Besant (1844-1933), who immigrated to India, defended women's rights, and advocated theosophy, a religious movement founded by Madame Blavatsky in 1875, incorporating such Hindu ideas as karma, reincarnation, and nirvana. Like Francisco, she joined the struggle for Indian home rule and was jailed by the British during World War I.

A prominent feature of this chapter is the da Gamas' odd speech patterns; "-ofy" is added to many verbs, "-o" to many nouns, and homonyms are twisted into humorous combinations. These serve to intensify the sense of the family's mental imbalance.

Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 takes up the family's low ebb in the 1930s. It opens contrasting the state of the family chapel before and after Francisco's death. He had allowed his French designers to obliterate the traditional Portuguese décor with a sterile, modernist motif that Epifania found not fitting for the "blood and body of Our Saviour, but only birthday cake." The day after Francisco's funeral, the chapel was restored and the household routine purged of "Gandhian simplicity."

Francisco had divided his estate and the Gama Trading Company equally between his two sons, and lawyers were unable to win control for Epifania. Aires, drowning his sorrows in carousing, and Camoens, enamored first of Leninism and later of Nehru's Party Congress, both were deemed useless by Epifania, the "most severe and least forgiving of mothers" (p. 32). She conspired with her daughters-in-law, Belle and Carmen, to seize control of the business. A male heir was deemed crucial to their success.

Aurora proved to be the only da Gama child of her generation, so, during her tenth year, new strategies had to be devised. Epifania's relatives, the Menezes, and Carmen's kin, the Lobos, were invited to Cabral Island, and the household quickly grew divided between them. Minor irritations mounted into armed conflict as the Spice Mountains, where the source of the family's fortune grew, went up in flames, like "the largest, hottest dish of curry ever cooked."

British authorities step in and condemn the brothers to fifteen years of imprisonment for having failed to contain the conflict. Epifania erects a wall of spice bags to separate the factions physically and takes legal steps to divide the corporate assets as well. Belle, at age twenty-one, emerges as a shrewd businesswoman, redeeming her fifty percent and eventually buying the remainder. As she hones her professional skills, she takes on less attractive traits: smoking, drinking, and philandering. She is largely an absentee mother, as we see from scenes of Aurora taking her first steps into the world of art, a secret she carefully hides from her mother. Sister-in-law Carmen languishes, her only comfort in life being daily bouts of masturbation.

The da Gama brothers are paroled after nine years, but remain ineffectual. Carmen and Aires resume their sexual standoff, he being threatened into greater circumspection, while Belle and Camoens happily spend their remaining three years together. Belle dies of lung cancer at thirty-three.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter fleshes out the bizarre personalities in the increasingly divisive da Gama household. It deals with the political atmosphere in India during the 1920s. Camoens is

shown as a partisan of Leninism, which recently came to power in Russia. He takes upon himself to organizing the Cochin Branch of the Special Lenin Troupes, which the Bolsheviks dispatched around the world, so that the masses could experience, in their own languages, the forceful leader's revolutionary rhetoric. On the docks, the Russian impersonator turns violent toward the native mimics, whose physical resemblance to Vladimir Il'ich Lenin and acting abilities were both questionable. The scene provides the kind of humorous touches that fill the book.

Belle's brief deathbed scene subtly introduces themes that will recur throughout the novel. First given, Isabella, is the name of the famous Spanish queen, who, with husband Ferdinand, expelled the Moors from their lands and launched Columbus on his voyages of discovery. Her middle name, Ximena (meaning 'heroine' in Greek and 'he heard' in Hebrew), is the name of the lover of El Cid Campeador. The expulsion of the Moors will be the central theme in Aurora's forty year long painting career, and she will often portray herself as Ximena. In the French form, "Chimène," will be applied to Uma when Aurora portrayed her in her paintings, and to a tragic character at the novel's conclusion. Belle asks that, like the legendary Spanish knight who battled the Moors, her dead body be tied upright and sent back into battle, "but for godsake not [on] a bloody elephant." Elephants will recur throughout the novel in a variety of symbols for fanatical religion, imprisonment, and usurped filial rights. "The enemy is close and in this sad story Ximena is the Cid," are Belle's enigmatic final words. Her daughter, Aurora, will emerge as a warrior of epic dimensions in the chapters ahead.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

The narrator opens with a lamentation over the briefness of his life (thirty-six years and soon to end) and, because of a congenital difficulty breathing, philosophizes about the lungs and breathing: "In the beginning and unto the end was and is the lung: divine afflatus, baby's first yowl, shaped air of speech, staccato gusts of laughter, exalted airs of son, happy lover's groans, unhappy lover's lament, miser's whine, crone's croak, illness' stench, dying whisper, and beyond and beyond the airless, silent void. A sigh isn't just a sigh. We inhale the world and breathe out meaning. While we can. While we can" (pp. 53-54).

After again mentioning Vasco Miranda's fortress, the Moor enters into family tradition to meditate on Epifania's conspicuous life of prayer, which inspires thanksgiving in Moor that her offspring "by some great fluke" threw off religion. He relates how this was occasioned by his father Camoens' pilgrimage to Malgudi on the river Sarayu, to see the great Mahatma Gandhi; there he was struck by the crowd, but "with that God stuff I got scared," and turned to secularism, presciently knowing that any other path would lead to sectarian violence.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

Most chapters in the book open with a soliloquy introducing whatever action with which they will deal. Chapter 4 is nothing but soliloquy, a very brief interlude in the developing story of the da Gamas, devoted to life and, with the exception of Epifania, at odds with organized religion.

The reader still puzzles over why a thirty-six year old, even one suffering with asthma, should be so obsessed with his age and the nearness of death. We do not know whether the obviously dangerous Miranda is pursuing him.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter 5 treats the odd fate of Camoens da Gama following his wife, Belle's, death. Psychosomatic scratch marks appear on his body, the result of making love in his dreams with Belle, further convincing him (beyond Aurora's pranks) that her spirit haunts the house. Aires, angered by the disappearance of his beloved ivories and Ganesha statues, assembles the household staff to determine who the thief is. He engages his penchant for cruel name-calling and physical abuse until Aurora can no longer abide the injustice. She steps forward, not only to confess her sole guilt, but also to claim her late mother's preeminence in the household.

She is punished for her impudence by a week's detention in her room. She uses the time to paint a vast mural on every wall and the ceiling, unifying her family's history - past, present, and future - in the context of Mother India's teeming, diverse history and cultures. Strikingly absent is any element of religion. Instead, "at the point where all the horn-of-plenty lines converged, Mother India with Belle's face. Queen Isabella was the only mother-goddess here, and she was dead; at the heart of this first immense outpouring of Aurora's art was the simple tragedy of her loss, the un-assuaged pain of becoming a motherless child. The room was her act of mourning" (p. 61). When her punishment ends, she allows her father to enter her room and be the first person to view her painting. Together, father and daughter weep.

The scene shifts to Christmas Eve, 1938. The onset of Aurora's menstrual cycle takes her outdoors to meditate on the Milky Way, the divisions that exist between Christian sects in India, and the story of the Nativity, which had been so distorted by northern Europeans into a wintry celebration. The pious Epifania, however, is careful to concentrate the celebration on Christ. All gift giving is postponed until Twelfth Night. Aurora peeks into her great grandmother's chapel just in time to see her keel over in the midst of her rosary, the realization of her dream to kill the old woman surreptitiously. Aurora does nothing to help the stricken woman, but sits patiently to watch the end, hearing her grandmother's death gasp curse: "May your house be forever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard." Aurora silently goes to bed.

With Epifania's demise, the pall that hung over the da Gama house is lifted. Even nature is reinvigorated. Visitors began to drop in as they had during Francisco's lifetime, and music sounds. Aunt Carmen is most affected, breaking out of her depression to dance with the young people. During one of the gatherings, one of the revelers, dressed as Snow White and drunk, tries to flirt with a despondent Carmen, and reacts to his rejection by revealing that his late wife had betrayed him with nearly every man in town during his incarceration. In the morning, Camoens is found dead of drowning like his father before him. "Water claims us," the narrator observes.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter investigates the dawning of Aurora's artistic creativity, her coldhearted relationship with her grandmother, and, by contrast, the depth of her feelings for her mother, with whom she had never before been close. It explores the idea of a secular India and, other than Epifania, the da Gama family's alienation from religion of whatever stripe.

Camoens is no exception. The statues he collects of the Hindu elephant god are, for him, mere objets d'art, and are mentioned in this chapter only as a means of putting Aurora into isolation, where her artistic gift is shown first blossoming.

Ganesha, however, and elephant imagery in general, will be used throughout the book. Ganesha is the son of Shiva and Parvati, Lord of Success, and Destroyer of Evils and Obstacles. Devotees (the Ganapatyas) worship him as the god of education, knowledge, wisdom, and wealth. The celebration of the annual festival in his honor will, later in the novel, provide the backdrop for Aurora's tragic death at the estate she calls "Elephanta." Savage teams of thugs will terrorize Ganesha's opponents in his name. Moor's jailer will appear to him elephant-headed. A rival 'brother' will be mocked for having elephant ears, and Miranda will be mocked for trying to paint a portrait of an elephant from beneath. As revenge, he will elevate a hideous elephant statue in the square facing his fortress. Finally, Ganesha's attributes in Hindu mythology - success, evil, obstacles, education, knowledge, wisdom, and wealth - are all ongoing themes throughout Rushdie's novel.

The Snow White image will also recur throughout the novel, as will cartoon characters more broadly.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

Wide-ranging Chapter 6 opens in August, 1939, with shipping between Cochin and England on hold for fear priceless cargo will perish at sea. Aurora, as heiress to the Gama Trading Company's enterprises, storms to the docks to investigate the situation. There, in the spice-rich atmosphere of the warehouse, she meets and falls instantly in love with the duty manager, a handsome young Jew named Abraham Zogoiby.

Abraham goes to the synagogue to inform his mother Flory about his intentions. Mother and son lock horns over what she considers betrayal of his heritage. Between them, with fury and tears, fly the facts of the history of the local Jewish community, drawn in successive waves over millennia from Babylon, Palestine, and Spain.

The narrator next sketches the story of Flory Zogoiby, "Epifania da Gama's opposite number, her equal in years": her pugnacious childhood, marriage to the synagogue caretaker Solomon Castile, the birth of a beautiful son Abraham, Solomon's abandonment of the family, and her assuming his duties. The synagogue was renowned for the blue tiles that cover its floor, walls, and ceiling. They had been imported in the year 1100 C.E. from Canton, and it was said that no two were identical and that one could see, in them both, history and prophecy revealed. From infancy through adolescence, Abraham sees visions of his absent father's odyssey in them.

From the outset, skeptical about its veracity, Moor provides the family's authorized version of its myth about a chest that Abraham, as a boy, had discovered locked beneath the altar of the synagogue - a story, captured on canvas by his mother, only to be stolen by Vasco Miranda. Its title was *The Moor's Last Sigh.* In confronting his mother over his proposed marriage, Abraham wears the hidden treasures he had uncovered: a silver dagger and a green turban encrusted with emeralds, "the last crown to fall from the head of the last prince of al-Andalus; nothing less than the crown of Granada, as worn by Abu Abdallah, last of the Nasrids, known as 'Boabdil'" (p. 79). Over the years, young Abraham had coaxed from the village chandler the lore surrounding fifteenth-century Spain and the expulsion of both Jews and Muslims. When told of Boabdil's shameful defeat by the Catholic monarchs, Fernando and Isabella, and his confrontation by his terrifying, dowager mother, Ayxa the Virtuous, Abraham feels his chest tighten with asthma, and, in that physical pain, identifies with his ancestor's plight. He distances himself from the Jewish community. As the conflict between mother and son heightens, Flory also sees a vision in the tiles and as a result, the zealot loses her faith in God.

Having recounted his family's founding legend, the narrator proceeds to debunk it, offering something more likely: his grandmother had been a fence for jewel thieves; his father had found, not a four hundred year old crown, but her ill-gotten spoils.

Nevertheless, drawn between logic and legend, Moor continues to follow his heart and embrace his legacy.

Chapter 6 concludes with Abraham and Aurora standing before Vasco da Gama's tomb in the Church of St. Francis, he tearfully wrenches away from his mother's legacy.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 introduces new characters and conflicts to replace those upon which were the focus of previous chapters. It reveals why the narrator calls himself Moor and provides rich, historical detail about the history of the Jews in India. It introduces the theme that will dominate Aurora's artistic career, which will revolve around the family history. It promises that this work and the still-shadowy figure of Vasco Miranda will play a major role in the pages ahead. The final scene at the explorer's tomb typifies the flavor of this pivotal chapter: much is suggested; nothing is resolved.

Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter 7 opens with a page-long soliloquy on the authentic diversity of India before turning to a varied exploration of sex. We experience a son's bashfulness at breaking the taboo of discussing his parents' sex life, clashing with a need to tell his story fully and candidly. Eventually the story of Aurora and Abraham's first fling in the warehouse loft vividly emerges, followed by details of their first night in the bedroom together. With this is intertwined a painful depiction of the struggles of the Reverend Oliver D'Aeth, rector of the church that we saw the couple enter at the end of Part 1.He is wracked by lust for young Aurora (who exudes a scent of spice-and-sex), frightened and allured by death, and ravaged by the South Indian climate. As the narrator overcomes his shyness, Aurora is depicted as dominating and abusing her devoted bridegroom and her growth into an artist of international renown is shown. D'Aeth succeeds in rousing the rabble of Cochin against the unorthodox couple and blocks a formal ceremony but is defeated in preventing their union. Aires and Carmen emerge as heroic figures, standing up for their ward and her chosen. The chapter ends with the narrator reveling in his parents' unwedded defiance and pride for their bastard son.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

Sex, a theme, which Rushdie had not previously dealt with in depth in any of his novels, stands at the heart of this chapter, and he explores the taboos skillfully and engagingly, never bordering on the pornographic, but not shying from graphic language. He captures the tension and emotion of passion here, and will return to it several times later in the novel.

Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

The final chapter in "A House Divided" chronicles the wartime separation of Aurora and Abraham. The narrator reveals, for the first time, the circumstances of their rift, based on information he learned only shortly before his father's death. Abie took over control of the company, resumed spice shipments to England, and despite three successful interceptions by Nazi U-boats, eventually prevailed. To do so, he was forced to borrow the emeralds from his mother that she had hidden in the synagogue. She agrees, subject to a written covenant to deliver his first-born son to her to be raised in his stead as an observant Jew. Inexplicably, the shipping lanes are cleared, cargos get through, and the company profits soar. Abie does not reveal his secret to Aurora, but a crazed Flory confronts her daughter-in-law ("my Abie's Roman whore") with written proof. Aurora bathes herself to remove the spice of love, locks Abie out of her bedroom to forestall delivery, and, when he persists piteously in seeking re-admittance, she assaults him with flowers, water, and a stone vase. As he limps along (figuratively and physically), adeptly adding to their fortune, she removes herself to Bombay, achieving fame for her artwork and her political activities, becoming the beautiful face of the liberation movement from Great Britain and a political martyr for the cause, spending three years in prison.

Back in Cochin, Aires da Gama and his long-time gay lover, "Prince Henry the Navigator," both fall victim to a particularly pernicious strain of syphilis, and Carmen nurses them both back to health, welcoming the paramour into the house, affecting a "three-cornered peace."

Peace also comes to Aurora and Abie when Flory loses her remaining faculties and is, ironically, committed to a church in Travancore, where the mentally challenged are reputed to receive "magic" cures. When a madman immolates himself in the courtyard, Flory's robes catch fire and she too perishes. Son and daughter-in-law abandon the troubled house in Cochin and move to Bombay where they resume their interrupted married life.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 brings Aurora to adulthood and fame. It establishes her adult personality. She trusts her lowborn husband to take over the business, but rejects his passionate love in order not to turn over a not-yet-conceived son. She no more gives in to her mother-in-law than she gave into her grandmother or mother. With no evident emotional conflict, she walks away from Abie, whose sorrow at the break-up is pathetic. There is no indication that she will relent - other than the fact that the narrator will eventually be born.

In an aside, after describing the confrontation between Flory and Aurora, the narrator indulges in formal literary criticism, commenting on the racial and religious tensions among Portia, Bassiano, and Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice.* A second, less elevated, allusion returns to the Snow White myth, depicting Flory as the wicked witch, set on persecuting Snow White because of her beauty. Finally, we see clearly the biblical image of Abraham sacrificing his only son, Isaac.

Part 2, Chapter 9

Part 2, Chapter 9 Summary

Part 2 bears the title "Malabar Masala." This chapter jumps forward to 1987 to recount the circumstances of Aurora's demise. As she had for forty-one years, she danced on the wall of her mansion, high above Chowpatty Beach as the masses celebrated the feast of the elephant-headed deity, Ganesha. On this occasion, she slipped and plunged to her death.

Stepping back decades, we are introduced to peg-legged Lambajan Chandiwala, the doorkeeper of Elephanta, Aurora's estate. We learn how he entered Aurora's employ, a victim of her careless driver, and gain a more detailed picture of Aurora's artistic and political careers during the years leading up to Indian independence.

We are also introduced to her four children. Three sisters were born in quick succession: Christina, Inamorata, and Philomena - swiftly transformed at home into Ina, Minnie, and Mynah, and at school into the first three elements of the children's counting game. The fourth - Moor - came eight years later, the fateful granting of Aurora's wish for a child who would outgrow childhood more swiftly than the girls had. We see him conceived during a family vacation and born, full-sized, only four and a half months later.

Part 2, Chapter 9 Analysis

'Masala' derives from Urdu (and, ultimately, Arabic), meaning ingredients or materials. In Indian cuisine, it refers to a mixture of spices ground into paste or powder. It is used figuratively to designate gossip or casual, informal conversation, for which common topics are cuisine and the cinema, especially the 'Bolywood' epics. The action does, indeed, turn increasingly into a masala, but the action moves from Malabar (Kerala State) northward to the teeming metropolis of Bombay (officially renamed Mumbai in 1995), capital of the state of Maharashtra.

Chapter 9 clarifies for us that Aurora is dead. She suffered a fittingly dramatic end. Knowing the end (or believing we do), we can enter more easily into the narrator's continuing stories about his mother and about his own life, with and apart from her. The chapter includes an aside on her destructive influence on everyone who encountered her, developing an earlier exploration of the theme of 'motherness' in Indian culture and cinema.

Part 2, Chapter 10

Part 2, Chapter 10 Summary

The narrator continues contemplating the meaning of his "two-timing evolution," providing detail about the circumstances of his birth and the reaction of his parents to his deformed right hand, a condition that does nothing to prevent him from becoming his mother's favorite.

We also, finally, meet a character face-to-face who is alluded to many times since page one: Vasco Miranda of Loutulium in Goa. The penniless artist is taken in by Aurora as her "pet," commissioned to paint murals of cartoon characters on the nursery walls in order to create a secular paradise for the children. Miranda befriends the narrator, helping him cope with his deformity and double-time pace of his physical development, anchoring him in accepting what is, as what must be.

Commissioned next, by Abraham, to paint a portrait of Aurora and newborn daughter Ina, Miranda produces a canvas that offends his patron. He is rebuked, disappears from the estate, and returns, having obliterated the image with a second-rate, self portrait in the guise of a weeping Arab on horseback. *The Artist as Boabdil, the Unlucky (el-Zogoyby), Last Sultan of Granada, Seen Departing from the Alhambra.* Miranda shortens this to *The Moor's Last Sigh.* The original composition, Aurora, one breast exposed holding a non-existent child and sitting cross-legged atop a lizard, becomes an invariable element in all of Miranda's subsequent paintings, which come to fill all of India.

Having introduced Miranda, the narrator returns to his own fear-filled childhood, which sped by too rapidly, out of sync with his mental and emotional development. He skirts all the medical interventions to which Aurora subjected him, but dwells on being dragged to a metaphysical encounter with Lord Khusro Khusrovani Bhagwan and his charlatan mother-manager.

In the end, Moor embraces the inescapable and sheds his fear. He feels obliged to clarify a few points about Miranda: the dark and frightening side of his personality - aggressive fury, alcohol and drug abuse, bisexual orgies. "There was a Hell in Vasco, born of whatever devil-deal he had done to shed his past and be born again through us, and at times he seemed capable of bursting into flames" (pg. 165). The chapter ends with Miranda's drunken confrontation with Abraham during the celebration of India's independence in 1974.

Part 2, Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter finally clarifies what drives the narrator's fear of aging and death. It is clearly justified, given his rare condition. It introduces a pivotal character, Miranda, but gives little hint why the narrator would so fear him. The advent of the canvas, around

which the final part of the novel will revolve, is described. A crude rendering of the Moor theme covers a beautiful rendering of Aurora. Throughout her career, she will treat this theme in a variety of manners and styles. Her last, unfinished canvas will bear the same title as Miranda's over painting: *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

Popular western culture is shown as a formative part of the narrator's life. Characters from the Disney studios and the Looney Tunes cartoons are painted on his nursery walls by Miranda, who was, in childhood, Moraes' closest friend. The super heroes of comic books and western serials from boyhood fill his mind, and he philosophizes about the qualities that make them great. Fictional characters will pop up, from time to time, throughout the novel, helping to put in context the events that are taking place. Finally, Miranda helps Moor accept his fate by sharing with him the well-known Hans Christian Andersen story of young Kay in whom the Snow Queen left a splinter of ice to torment him for the rest of his life. Miranda claims to have such a needle trapped within his body. Young Moor marvels at Miranda's calm acceptance of the fact that the needle will one day break loose and kill him. This sets up for the novel's dramatic conclusion.

Part 2, Chapter 11

Part 2, Chapter 11 Summary

In Chapter 11, the narrator examines his life-long, love-hate relationship with his parents, whose marital relations ceased upon his conception.

Abraham deals with in terms of *Blade Runner* and *Star Wars,* taking him from the outwardly weak, submissive, work-obsessed fop in his sixties, during Moor's childhood, to the unrepentant, nonagenarian he last viewed, divulging the shady deals that had underpinned his monumental economic success. Along the way, Abraham had kept his promise of protecting Aurora, seeking to steer her towards realism in her art.

Aurora is pictured in her least productive period, torn between the imaginative artistry urged upon her by Miranda and the socially responsible realism advocated by her husband. He retells an incident that led to her brief ostracism by India's artistic elite: the snubbing in 1957 of Prime Minister Nehru at the presentation ceremony of the Esteemed Lotus Award for Excellence in the Arts. Moor notes that this incident, occurring nine months to the day before his birth, might provide an alternate explanation for his existence - then quickly retracts any implication of illegitimate patrimony by so great a figure. The press was filled with tales of the Gama-Zogoiby family scandals, and Aurora retreated within Elephanta, curtailing the drunken debaucheries she had previously sponsored for the cream of society, and drawing closer to her son as he became the focus of 'the Moor Paintings.'

Part 2, Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter deepens our understanding of family dynamics, revealing telling details about Aurora and Abraham, who, after conceiving four children, amiably go their separate ways while remaining under one roof. Aurora excels at art. Abraham earns the bread. Servants do the chores - and relate stories that help him understand the world. Finally, Chapter 11 explores the artistic and economic dynamics of mid-twentieth century India through a skilful blending of fiction with fact.

Part 2, Chapter 12

Part 2, Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 opens with the narrator describing the difficulties of the disparity between his physical and inner development. Too mature looking to be admitted to kindergarten and too immature intellectually to succeed in advanced classes, he had to be home schooled. After going through a quick succession of male tutors, he met Dilly Hormuz, a twenty-five year old woman who succumbed to his manly exterior while feeding his still-forming mind. He describes their affair circumspectly and reports, in the interests of full disclosure, rumors that his mother and sisters had abused him as a baby, providing a proclivity for such activities.

The source of these rumors was his nanny, Jaya Hé. The narrator describes his relations with this moralistic, judgmental old woman, who frequently took him on outings around Bombay; and her husband, Lambajan, a former bare-knuckle boxer, who taught him the sport - his deformed right hand proved a lethal weapon - and managed him in bouts on the street. Relations with them ended abruptly when Moor could no longer hide Jaya's thievery of household objects for pawn.

Great-uncle Aires da Gama appears at Elephanta, almost unrecognizably old, widowed and bereft of Prince Henry the Navigator. Only the presence of the bulldog Jawaharlal (even longer dead, but stuffed and mounted on wheels) tipped them to his identity. Aires filled them in on life in Cochin following their move to Bombay. He had taken to reading English literature. Carmen and Prince Henry had become the best of friends and poker buddies. Henry, a communist, became a successful legislator when the party took power in Kerala, but lost a last grand stakes hand to Carmen, who, over four years of play, had mastered the underhanded draw. In 1974, Henry disappeared in the Spice Mountains, and Carmen died quietly in her chair, having told Aires of the Navigator's appearance to her in a dream.

Wondering about Aires' reaction to the odd inhabitants of Elephanta leads the narrator to describe the development of each of his sisters. Ina, Christina at birth, always disdained and belittled by her mother, used her great beauty to inflame her. She began by posing nude for Aurora's protégé, and then went on to achieve national fame as a risqué fashion model. She took care to leave evidence of every instance of licentiousness for Aurora to find, including an affair with Vasco Miranda. This brought a mother-daughter clash that sent Ina into the arms of one of her father's business opponents, whom she married and with whom she fled to sing in Nashville, Tennessee. Both career and marriage collapsed in a year and Ina returned to Elephanta.

Minnie, Inamorata at birth, left nursing school to enter the Sisterhood of Maria Gratiaplena, to her mother's utter horror. Her monastic name was Sister Florea.

Mynah, Philomena at birth, became a radical feminist, and an antitrust lawyer, crusading to convict her father's dirtiest cronies.

Mother and siblings united to execute the now-corpulent Ina's plan to win back her estranged husband. Jimmy (Jamishah Cashondeliveri) was sent a radiogram informing him that his wife had been stricken with cancer and begged to see him again. Minnie talked her fellow nuns into giving her a bed in their convalescence hospital. Mynah agreed to pick him up at the airport. Aurora and Moor were ready. Each played an unwitting part in the swift unraveling of the plan, and a crushed Ina lost her mind, spending the rest of her days in her old nursery. She swiftly died of cancer, which only Minnie was brave enough to point out had been brought on by her prank.

The chapter ends with Moor's loss of Dilly, whom the spiteful ayah framed for pilfering three of Aurora's sketches of her son.

Part 2, Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter deepens our understanding of the narrator's life experiences on the streets of Bombay, his first romantic crush and introduction to sexuality, and his satisfaction at finding a purpose for his deformed arm, and hints that it will play a major role later in his life.

It brings to life the Indian art scene in the mid-1970s, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi rejected the high court's decision that she had used illegal practices during the last election campaign and unseated her; she responded by declaring an 'Emergency,' which allowed her to use force to clear the slums, enforce family planning, and silence all opposition. This climate, in conjunction with their mother's iconoclastic and pluralistic example, seems to allow for very divergent development of the Moor's sisters - yet they come together to pursue Ina's plot.

Part 2, Chapter 13

Part 2, Chapter 13 Summary

In Chapter 13, the narrator begins treating Aurora's so-called "Moor paintings," for which he served as model, concentrating on the 'early' period, between his birth in 1957 and the year of Ina's death in 1977. (The 'great' or 'high' paintings, her most profound and lasting body of work, would be executed between 1977 and 1981; and the 'dark Moors' only after the narrator's departure from Elephanta, culminating in her unfinished, unsigned masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh.*

Modeling for his mother afforded Moor an opportunity to observe her closely: her absorption in her work and oblivion to her surroundings. He muses about why she showed him greater affection than she did her daughters, and expresses true appreciation for her attempts at helping him accept the unique conditions of his life. Aurora talked while she painted, so Moor learned about his father's many infidelities, causing him to wonder at why as controlling a person as his mother would silently accept such behavior. He muses about their relationship and the effects on it his condition had.

The narrator pauses to ponder one of Aurora's most controversial paintings, inspired by a news report of a how a female fan's light cheek kiss threw a famous cricket player off his game. Aurora heightened this into the kind of passionate clinch that was banned in India. The work was reproduced in the press and became the focus of debate over public obscenity and youthful rebellion, and, at the hands of a ruthless political cartoonist, began fanning Hindu-Muslim hostilities. Aurora withdrew it from public display for fifteen years. She allowed it back into Kekoo Mody's showroom when she felt time had rendered it harmless, but the ex-cartoonist, Raman "Mainduck" Fielding, now a fanatical, racist politician, pounced again. The crisis passed only when Aurora bought him off - the first time she acted directly rather, than through Abraham's mediation - but left her smarting from having her creativity taken prisoner to others' agendas. Fearing that she could fall victim to the government during the 'Emergency,' she fortified her home's defenses and provided for her son's escape to Spain, just in case.

These steps proved unnecessary. Ina died then, however, and Aurora's style shifted to raw emotion in the first painting of her new phase, *Moor and Ina's Ghost Look into the Abyss.* Everything had changed and would continue to change far more; the last words of the chapter inform us of the arrival of the person whom Moor has repeatedly hinted would drive a wedge between him and Aurora - Uma Sarasvati.

Part 2, Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 uses Moor's twenty years of modeling for his mother as a means of revealing details about her troubled marriage with Abie, of presenting her in a more

positive light than previously. It also affords an opportunity for dealing with the role of art in politics. Much of the chapter deals with Aurora's paintings: the changing styles and symbols, taking Boabdil out of the Spanish historical context and blending him into her Bombay surroundings to create a hybrid: "call it Mooristan." Vivid, energetic compositions result, themes intertwined, historical and contemporary characters morphed, a golden age of non-sectarian brotherhood was advocated in paint.

Part 2, Chapter 14

Part 2, Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter 14 introduces Uma Sarasvati, "the woman who transformed, exalted and ruined my life." Forty-one days after Ina's death, the Zogoiby family dress up for the Mahalaxmi Weekend Constitutional, an annual opportunity for Bombay's cultural elite to gather at the racecourse to see and to be seen. Aurora and Abie walk arm-in-arm; Sister Floreas, specially dispensed for the occasion, walking beside her brother, announces she has seen Ina in a vision and reassures them that all is well with her. Aurora uncharacteristically suppresses her rage. We learn that Minnie has become so zealous in her new calling that she has had to be admonished about the vanity of excess piety; she obeys and begins seeing visions.

The narrator feels out of place among these thoroughbreds, self-conscious of his shameful deformity. He broods that his education at Dilly's delightful hands will not qualify him for college, and is resigned to accepting an entry-level job from his father, who has been berating him about wasting his life.

Ina's grieving ex-husband, Jimmy, joins the family circle on the track, invited by Aurora. Next, Mynah arrives, accompanied by her friend Uma. Uma instantly takes Jimmy's breath away.

Uma is a twenty-year old art student at M.S. University, a rising star. She recently met Mynah at a women's rights meeting. During the course of the morning, Uma manages to spend a few private minutes with each member of the family, and their reactions to her differ radically. Sister Florea finds her deeply spiritual. Mynah sees her hard-as-nails and a dedicated, Marxist, feminist activist. Abraham perceives a first-rate, financial mind. Jimmy sees a reincarnation of beautiful Ina - but a better singer. Aurora dismisses him from the family forever, and remains stubbornly resistant to her fellow artist's attractions. The narrator was swept away, instantly in love.

Uma convinces him that it would be unseemly for him to pose nude for his mother, as she had suggested, for a new painting, and his refusal to pose ends his career as a model; Aurora creates the work without him, and has a new reason to resent Uma. Moor begins work in his father's office.

Moor is troubled by the extended periods that Uma is away at the university and by learning that she visits Bombay without calling him. He hears from his sisters that she has contacted them. While making love, Uma complains that his mother dislikes her. Moor, at first, denies it, and then makes his choice between the two women: Uma.

Eventually Aurora accepts Uma into her home, and the talented young artist is contrasted with the aging, fattening, declining Vasco Miranda. At a party, Vasco and Aurora fight, she accuses him of being a commercial hack; he points to the vast riches

he has amassed through worldwide sales. Her fame has been restricted to India. Vasco is on the verge of leaving for his nearly completed mansion in Spain.

The chapter ends with Uma's revelation of family secrets that Moor had not known. Myrna is most probably a lesbian. Aurora has three paramours to make up for Abie, whose sexual needs are met by the prostitutes he imports to the city. The revelation of his mother's lovers - Keeko Mody, Vasco Miranda, and Raman Fielding - clarify for Moor why a great many, heretofore inexplicable, situations came about.

Part 2, Chapter 14 Analysis

Our major characters continue fleshing out and the introduction of a love interest adds a new perspective. The author deals with his sexual being, again hesitantly, but with lyrical power. Uma remains a mystery. Which version is true? Why does she do and say the things she does? These questions are painfully left unanswered here, to be answered in Part 3.

Part 2, Chapter 15

Part 2, Chapter 15 Summary

Chapter 15 opens with a critique of Aurora's new painting style: moving toward black and white abstraction. At age fifty-five, she allows her manager, Kekoo Mody, to mount a retrospective exhibition of her works at the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay's elite turn out for the occasion, and she is bathed in flattery. Come the morning papers, however, she is blasted as an artistic has-been, while Uma Sarasvati's sculpture, exhibited across town, is hailed as the future of Indian art. Uma, who had never shown any particular interest in religion, reveals herself as a devotee of Lord Ram. Moor confronts her secrecy. Aurora, brooding in Elephanta, says Uma is ambitious and conniving, and discloses that she has hired a once-renowned private investigator, Dom Minto, to obtain proof of her claim. Mother and son clash, but Minto's findings sting: Uma is a married woman and intimately involved with both Jimmy Cash and Abraham Zogoiby, at the same time as with Moor.

An angry Uma tells her story: she was orphaned early in life and abused by a teaching colleague of her father's. Aurora counters with Minto's radically different version: she had grown up in comfortable circumstances. Her prodigious artistic talent, early recognized, was counterbalanced by mental disorders for which she refused medical treatment. She grew adept at taking on whatever personae would most profit her in any given situation. She is a superb liar and heartless destroyer of marriages. For this, her parents cast her out of their home, and she turned to a wealthy widower, Suresh Sarasvati, for protection. The retired police commissioner, an acquaintance of her father's, was quickly seduced into marriage. When he was reduced to a vegetative existence by a stroke, she abandoned him and took his wealth to Bombay, where she attached herself to Moor.

Moor agonizes over the choice he must make: accept his mother's carefully-documented truth or remain with the only woman with whom he can imagine a life of love for the few remaining years he foresees for himself. Had Uma lied to him about his family's perversions or her own history? The next morning at Elephanta, an uncharacteristically calm mother and lawyer sister continue laying out the undeniable proof.

Uma defends her version as a necessary metaphor, but Moor avoids her for four months, concentrating on his work and advancing to the position of marketing manager. Aurora's cold-hearted expelling of Vasco Miranda and firing of Kekoo change the tone of life at Elephanta, and Moor finds comfort in food, apprenticing to Ezekiel, their ageless household cook.

Moor learns that a car crash has killed Jamshed Cashondelivery; Jimmy's companion, the newspapers report, was his fiancé, Uma Sarasvati. Suppressed feelings revive, and Moor rushes to her apartment, where he finds her unscathed. She had never loved the

hapless, dead man, she claims, not anyone but Moor. The happiest fifteen months of the narrator's life begin, and Dom Minto is no longer on the job to interfere.

Mynah dies next, in an industrial accident investigating the maltreatment of the female workforce in a factory. The explosion, it turns out, was no accident, but a deliberate plot to curtail the search for truth. It is tied to associates of Abraham Zogoiby.

Uma seeks to comfort the grieving brother by confronting his parents with the reality of their love. She returns from the meeting, ecstatic over its success. Moor is overwhelmed by the prospect of an authentic, happy life. They make passionate love. In the morning, he goes to Elephanta and is met by Abraham and Aurora, standing shoulder-to-shoulder and grim. He is given one day to collect his belongings and leave the house, never to return. Suitcase in hand, he arrives at Uma's apartment. He begs her to try no more to convince his parents; such efforts would be madness. This strikes a sensitive nerve. After declaring her love, she turns to fervent prayer, which ends with a revelation of what they must do: together, commit suicide. She produces cyanide tablets. Horrified, Moor wrestles with her to dispose of them, but she prevails. She swallows hers and slips into death. There is a pounding on the door. Moor answers to face the police. He is arrested for narcotics dealing through his father's company, and is led away. The police inspector spies the body he leaves behind.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Analysis

An unusually, rapidly paced chapter concludes Part 2 of the novel. Two equally-plausible versions of Uma's life history are debated back-and-forth, and the long-hinted estrangement of mother and son comes to pass. Moor's too-rapid life is elevated and then destroyed. The reader is left thirsting to learn how he will make his way from incarceration to the desolate Spanish garden where we know the tale will end. This does not look like a predicament he can escape.

Chapter 15 leaves much hanging in the air. Was Uma truly insane? The slightest suggestion she might have mental problems raised her ire. How had her mission of reconciliation so badly backfired? The answer will be revealed when the truth comes out how she had lost the walkman that she took to the meeting. At this point, we accept, at face value, that she threw it away because it ate up tapes. It seems a minor detail. Soon we will see that it is pivotal to the plot.

Part 3, Chapter 16

Part 3, Chapter 16 Summary

Part 3, entitled, "Bombay Central," opens in the city prison. The narrator tells of his spirit-shattering descent into a life of cockroaches, rats, adjacent bowls of gruel and excrement, verbal abuse, and resignation. He meditates about abandonment by mother and lover, about his tragic family history, about the canvas of life. Not knowing whether it is reality or a dream, he sees a one-legged man appear with a parrot on his shoulder.

Lambajan Chandiwala does, indeed, spirit him out of jail, and as they drive away, Moor mulls over the details of his arrest: the police had strip searched him and found the second suicide pill. He is forced to swallow half of it, and discovers it holds not cyanide but a hallucinogen. What had Uma's intention been: which of them had she intended to die, before the scuffle? She had taken that mystery to her grave. Head still swirling, Moor takes a while to realize that they are driving northward, rather than toward his shore side home. He is amazed to find himself introduced to Raman Fielding. Lambajan, it turns out, has always been on the payroll of Mumbai's Axis (MA), tasked with protecting the Zogoiby mansion, a covert member of the Hindu militia, and has now delivered to his master the potent weapon he had trained: Moor becomes Mainduck's enthusiastic "Hammer."

Hammer's probationary period passes in the MA kitchen, where the lessons learned from Ezekiel pleased the master's decidedly un-Hindu palate, and earning respect in impromptu boxing matches. He is assigned to the most elite goon squad. For the first time in his life, he gains a sense of belonging and pride, wielding his vicious, deformed fist in campaigns to intimidate trade unions, feminists, and any other opponents to the master's ideology.

An aside on Aurora's "Moor in Exile" sequence intervenes, describing dark diptychs, increasingly dominated by collage, where cast off items of everyday life come to comprise the substance of her subject, now motherless and immoral.. In these new works, the narrator says, she has lost her radical social consciousness, even as her former model-son has grown into what he was destined to be, in dreadful company, doing dreadful things.

The narrator describes the beatings he delivered as part of Hazaré'sXI, the MA's elite terrorist cell, a flying wing of masked avengers of all wrongs against the interests of the Hindu majority in India. He muses about society's taste for violence on screen, on its need to be purged of elements contrary to its progress, and on how victims react to various kinds of beatings. He provides a few examples of his efforts, but as with sex, he demurs, in order to spare the readers' weak stomachs. The results of six years' of hard work, however, were concrete: Fielding is elected mayor of Bombay, loyally backed by his victims.

Moor/Hammer's dreams, he confesses, are occasionally haunted by guilt, but most frequently his nightmares are about Uma: He reveals that feelings in this period of being pursued (shared, he did not know at the time, by Aurora) were justified; Dom Minto, now on Abraham's payroll, has been tailing them both.

Fielding throws women at Hammer, like crumbs from his table, and sometimes dispatches him to service rich, bored matrons' needs. He impassively accepts both. Only one stood out: Nadia Wadia, a beauty queen of international standing, whom Fielding wants to possess, more to advance his political ambitions than to satisfy his lust. To win the masses to his cause, he sponsors the most lavish celebration of the Gampati festival ever held - the one at which Aurora dances upon the wall and plunges to her death.

Although he was at the festival, guarding Fielding, the narrator learns of his mother's passing on the news. He is rueful that the press repents of the unfair coverage it had given her in recent years, driving her into grim retreat, too late to do her any good. He comments on the unfinished painting he hears was found on her easel, a realistic rendering of her son to whom a frightened mother reaches out her hand: *The Moor's Last Sigh.*

Part 3, Chapter 16 Analysis

Chapter 16 gradually, painfully, develops the narrator's new situation - grim imprisonment - in detail, suggesting that this will be his fate for a very long time. It transitions into his career as a paramilitary thug through the mists of hallucinations hanging over him from the night of his lover's suicide. He blossoms as a confident anti-hero, wielding his deformed right hand to crush opponents into supporting Fielding's cause, which is the despicable antithesis of his mother's politics. At chapter's end, we wonder what will come next, knowing only that it will be radically different from the outcome we expected at the outset, and will feature a primary character much advanced over how we have come to view him.

Part 3, Chapter 17

Part 3, Chapter 17 Summary

Chapter 17 begins with a soliloquy on aged Abraham Zogoiby's victorious struggle to remain ageless, his plunge into business to overcome sincere sorrow at his wife's premature passing, and the loss of all of his children (two to death, one to Jesus, and one to the power of Evil). Family and money become his exclusive focus.

Father is determined to reconcile with his son. He passes messages to Hammer, inviting him to meet at the racetrack. Initially rebellious, the narrator does as he is commanded. In the crowd, a fleeting figure hands him Uma's walkman set, which she supposedly had thrown away on the night she went to make peace with his parents. On it, he hears edited recordings of his own voice, ranting against Aurora, uttered while he and Uma made love. She had turned these over to his parents, turning them irrevocably against him, occasioning his expulsion from their home. He sees Uma clearly for what she had been: the deceiver, whom his mother had never misjudged, a dealer in mayhem. She had deprived him of his mother at a time when, with his advanced aging, he should have been a contemporary and friend.

Abraham Zogoiby is relentless and gets his wish. Father and son meet in his penthouse high atop Cashondeliveri Towers and share the deepest mysteries of each other's lives. For a while, the narrator remains a double agent in Fielding's house. He learns that his mother had often wanted to be reconciled, but could not overcome the painful, recorded words. He and his father determine to retrieve Vasco Miranda's *The Moor's Last Sigh,* in order to restore the original content of the canvas: a young Aurora; this will reconnect them with better times in their family's lives and help lessen their mourning.

Miranda's eccentric life in Spain is recounted. Benengeli, the late Francisco Franco's favorite southern village, has been desecrated by a modernist sculpture of a dancing elephant, Miranda's monument to his widely publicized, public spectacle of painting a portrait of a female pacaderm from beneath. Public outcry is massive, and he retreats within his fortress walls, as much a recluse as Zogoiby.

Zogoiby's lavish arboretum, gracing the stuffed remains of Jawaharlal, is haunted by Aurora's ghost. Abraham determines that the only way to let her spirit rest in peace is to preserve her artistic legacy, and establishes the Zogoiby Bequest to house and display her works. National and local governments fail to fully cooperate, so he taps his own resources to bring about the dream. A brilliant young art theorist, Zeenat Vakil, is hired as curator. At the same time, Abraham grows convinced that Aurora's death was not an accident, and sets the wheelchair and dialysis bound detective, Dom Minto, on the trail of evidence, linking it to Raman Fielding.

The narrator unveils the dark secrets of his father's business dealings, which the old man had begun confiding to him. Abraham had risen to the power of de facto *capo di*

tutti capi in the Muslim mafia that was confronting Fielding's Hindu thugs. His narcotics smuggling operation had shifted to a dangerous, more costly mode. Siodicorp, including the Khazana Bank International had become a front for weapons trafficking. Worst of all, they were working to provide nuclear weapons technology to fanatics in the Muslim world. Here, the narrator's conscience is pricked, and he stands up against his father's immorality, identifying with the Jewish heritage that Abraham had rejected, knowing that the bombs will be targeted on Israel.

Fielding had, by this time, retired the narrator, realizing that he could glean no more useful information about his father's machinations, and fearing that he might be disclosing secrets of his own to his arch rival. Fielding allies with like-minded, religious, nationalist organizations (the 'alphabet soup'), to broaden his base. The narrator, spending time wandering among his mother's canvases with Zeenat Vakil, comes to share the latter's post-Marxist view that the MA is perverting Hinduism, focusing exclusively on one deity, one sacred book, one tradition of worship. Fielding is, however, succeeding in rallying together Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in opposition to Planned Parenthood; all communities fear that they, alone, will be threatened by unilateral birth control. Sister Floreas is a vocal opponent of contraception, apocalyptically foreseeing the end of the world through violence and plague.

The narrator turns to contemplating his thirty-fifth birthday, which, at double-time aging, means he has passed the biblical lifespan of seventy. He has undergone surgeries which details of he delicately declines to relate, other than to say that they have left him impotent. Abraham is dismayed and, still smarting from his son's identification with Judaism and refusal to work on the Islamic bomb, moves to bring in fresh blood. Adam Braganza is introduced as an eighteen-year-old entrepreneur who sells the family business to Zogoiby and is invited to become vice president of Siodicorp, in charge of technology. His aptitude for coining slogans transforms the company and its president, and Adam's ascendance plunges the narrator into glum. To compensate, Abraham offers his son the hand of Nadia Wadia in marriage.

Nadia's fortunes plummeted once her year's reign as Miss World ended. Fielding had continued pursuing her, but she consistently dismissed him as a toad. This infuriated Bombay's would-be dictator, and he orders his minions to destroy the stubborn beauty queen. The also-enamored Sammy Hazaré refuses. Fielding's troubles strike a chord with Abraham, and he hires Nadia as his company's spokeswoman. He sets her and her mother, Fadia Wadia, up in a comfortable apartment, and hangs in it the one painting that the gallery still cannot display, *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig*. The narrator cannot refuse his father's new wish - for the Wadias would surely be cast out should he try - so he agrees to a formal, extended engagement, during which time he assures mother and daughter he is certain to die of old age.

The chapter ends in the Taj hotel, where thousands of guests toast the narrator's engagement. Abraham surprises him by expressing hope that this will bring new members to their depleted family (knowing the narrator is now sterile), then stuns all by theatrically revealing that he has adopted Adam Braganza, henceforth his "beloved son."

Part 3, Chapter 17 Analysis

We come to fear Abraham Zogoiby, but take a measure of comfort in the reconciliation with his son. A head-to-head confrontation with the thoroughly loathsome Mainduck appears inevitable. The Wadias offer a whimsical diversion from the horrors we feel during Indira Gandhi's Emergency administration and the rising sectarian pressures that are developing. How close the caricature of Bal Thackeray comes to the truth would be shown by the novel's initial banning in Bombay and across India.

Part 3, Chapter 18

Part 3, Chapter 18 Summary

The final chapter in "Bombay Central" begins with a soliloquy on the great city itself, nexus of Indian culture, its face to the west, a metropolis usually immune to the level of religious turmoil that regularly rocked the subcontinent. A threat to this peace exists, however, rooted in the two power centers that loomed around Aurora Zogoiby and appear to the narrator to have been loosed upon her death. They are about to be unleashed in an obscene burlesque.

The first act is a luncheon with Moor and his new fop of a 'brother,' Adam; their first and only. Moor perceives that Adam is a male version of Uma, calculating and conniving (but not nearly as clever) and now has the maturity to be on guard. Adam is offended but clear about looking out after his own interests.

Sammy Hazaré's new situation is told. His broken down bungalow in a marginal part of town is a shrine to Nadia Wadia, for whom he continues to pine. She, however, has become engaged to his former comrade-in-arms, Hammer, and Roman Fielding has dismissed him from service. Hazaré lies at home, depressed, ignoring his roommate, a dwarf named Dhirendra, who hits upon a way of snapping him out his funk: they will prepare explosives to wreak revenge on their enemies.

Adam proves to be the cause of the fall of the great house of Zogoiby, an event long hinted at but now come to fruition. When one of Abraham's business confederates is indicted for bribing government officials, Adam is exposed as the bag man. An uncharacteristically thorough investigation ties him to drug and arm-smuggling operations, and Siodicorp stocks plummet, bankrupting Indians worldwide. The ninety year old patriarch is forced into open court to deny any wrong-doing in his life.

When Raman Fielding weighs in on the scandal on television, Abraham snaps, speaking by phone with Scar, the elusive gangland thug, Dom Minto, his private sleuth, and his biological son. The narrator hurries to Cashondeliveri Towers, where his father confides Minto's latest revelations: Chhaghgan Five-in-a-Bite had murdered Aurora by shooting her with a hypodermic dart as she danced on the wall. Fielding was behind it. Minto claimed to have documentation, which he promised to deliver next day, but it had vanished when his dead body was discovered in the morning. Moor/Hammer is filled with anger and pledges vengeance to rest his mother's soul.

Moor/Hammer's thirst for vengeance is couched in well-publicized historical events during 1992, when over a million Hinduvata activists were brought into Ayodya to raze a historic 16th-century a mosque, the Babri Masjid. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had for two years been campaigning replace it with a temple to Ram on his supposed birthplace. A city where Hindus and Muslims had coexisted in harmony was torn apart, and riots killed more than 2,000 people nationwide. Lurid stories monopolized the press

for weeks. During this time, thieves stole four of Aurora's paintings from the Zogoiby Bequest, one representative of each of her three Moor cycles, plus her final, unfinished masterpiece. The only coverage this story received was a comment by Fielding, terming the loss of such "alien artifacts" a cause for celebration, not mourning.

Also, before acting, the narrator pauses to contemplate the nature of evil. He acknowledges that there is much in his family past to suggest a predisposition to violence but refuses to use this as an excuse for what he has done - and is about to do - any more than it excuses the religious butchery taking place across India.

He enters Fielding's property, and the ferocious guard dogs lick his familiar left hand. Two inept guards at the door prove malleable, and the Captain agrees to see him. With little fanfare, Hammer bludgeons his former boss to death using the frivolous Frog phone he kept on his desk, and then makes his way back to his car. As he drives, an explosion rocks the car, and he sees flames shoot up from the house he just left. He remembers a guard remarking that Sammy had visited earlier, and realizes that both had gotten even with Fielding that night.

Abraham advises his son to flee India, immediately, and go to Vasco Miranda in Spain. Moor has kept his passport and airline ticket up-to-date, as his mother had recommended decades earlier. As a gesture of affection, Abraham gives him Jawaharlal, the stuffed dog, to accompany him on his travels.

Bombay is blown apart by a series of explosions, unprecedented in its history. Public buildings and private residences are attacked. Many of Abraham's allies are hit, and so is he. Elephanta is blown to bits, killing the servants whom we have known. Flames consume the Zogoiby Bequest gallery, killing the curator, and destroying Aurora's legacy, with the exception of the stolen paintings and a few items on loan to other institutions. Sammy Hazaré and Dhirenda assault Nadia Wadia, leaving her beautiful face ruined. The pair also leaves Chhaggan dead in a ditch. Explosives destroy the skyscraper where Adam Zogoiby grew up. Sister Floreas perishes when a bomb leveled the Gratiaplena nursing home. The finale brings Hazaré and Dhirenda to Cashondeliveri Towers with explosives attached to their bodies. They ride the elevator to the penthouse, where a security guard hears Abraham's last words by phone, "Evacuate the building." Explosions rend the upper stories of the building, raining the fauna and flora that Abraham had collected on his rooftop all over Bombay, as well as the spices he always kept near him to remind him of the happy, early days of his marriage.

The narrator watches the flames rise while his plane banks westward towards a new life, Jawaharlal mute on his lap. A few days later, the fiancée he left behind, Nadia Wadia, her face mutilated, faces the television cameras, declaring that neither she nor the great city of Bombay is finished.

Part 3, Chapter 18 Analysis

"Bombay Central" ends in a dramatic cataclysm, built solidly on historic data. Characters we have learned to love and hate are torn away. Seeing the tower crumble, post 9/11, adds immediacy that the author could not have anticipated. Even without that, this is a wrenchingly powerful depiction of the power of evil.

Reflecting on Fielding's murder, he quotes the *Ramayana* and Homer's *Iliad,* noting that he neither honored, nor desecrated his victim's body, unlike Lord Ram and Achilles in those literary classics.

Part 4, Chapter 19

Part 4, Chapter 19 Summary

Part 4 bears the title of the novel as a whole. The narrator flies to Benengeli to reclaim his mother's stolen paintings and to heal something broken within him. He describes his first experience flying, the disconnection from reality it brings. He falls asleep and awakens to talk with a friendly flight attendant, Eduvigis Refugio. She leads him to the restroom for a quick romp, and then they part. Later he wants to talk with her, but a different stewardess answers his summons; there is no one of that name on board, she assures him, and a pilot authoritatively backs her claim. Cowed, Moor contemplates what lies ahead in a land of foreign language, people, and customs. He is alone in his quest.

The airliner lands in Madrid and Moor takes a smaller plane south to Andalusia. He is feeling dizzy, deaf, and old. A uniformed man inquires what he is doing there; their conversation is disjointed. Ignorance of Spanish prevents him from hailing two cabs; a third driver, Vivar, fortunately speaks "the broken argot of dreadful American films." They set out for Benengeli.

Passing through three villages along the way, the narrator learns of the enmity that split the region during the years of revolution and Franco's rule. He learns that Andalusia is filled with starving dogs, abandoned by their itinerant owners, he witnesses philosophy students debating in Erasmo, and he sees the golf school where one of the game's great masters languished and died. He muses on his heritage as Jew and Moor and cannot identify with the great figures of either tradition in this region. He realizes that he is simply a nobody, from nowhere, utterly out of place, not at home.

He spies the fairytale tower of Vasco Miranda's Little Alhambra rising ostentatiously and incongruently above the squat, whitewashed native buildings. Vivar gets lost trying to find the estate and is dismissed. On foot, Moor asks directions in a pub, and sets out, lugging suitcase and dragging Jawaharlal into a most un-Spanish section of town. A tall, elegantly dressed stranger introduces himself as Gottfried Helsing, and offers to help him get oriented. This, Helsing explains, the locals refer to as the "Street of Parasites," the habitation of foreign expatriates like him. He ignores Moor's straightforward request for directions to Miranda's fortress and offers vignettes of local history: the former mayor who hid out for thirty years from the Falangists; his own argosy in South America, avoiding the Nazi scourge only to be labeled here "the Nazi." The locals, he fulminates, are middle-ranking evildoers, their children, idle trash. All are living dead. Benengeli is hell. An exasperated Moor interrupts to renew his request for directions. The dreadful Miranda sees no one, Helsing assures him; rumor has it that the tower is knee-deep in dust. Moor's quest is truly quixotic. Just recently, a pretty, young woman failed to gain admission. Miranda even cut the telephone lines, years ago.

Two Spanish women appear at Moor's elbow, apologizing that they could not help but they had overheard the conversation. They contradict everything Helsing said. Felicitas Larios and Renegada, her half sister, claim to be Miranda's housekeepers, and are willing to fill him in with details about their boss. Moor leaves with them, Helsing fulminating behind them.

Moor rents a room in their two-story cottage from which he can see Miranda's hideous elephant statue. His tiny room is entirely covered in blue tiles, no two identical, salvaged from the ruins of the local synagogue after the expulsion of the Jews. As an exhausted Moor falls asleep, he sees his mother's face in one of the tiles. It has vanished when he awakens forty-eight hours later. As they contradicted Helsing, the half-sisters constantly contradict each other when they bicker. Moor grows impatient. He formally introduces himself, and is taken aback when they gasp at hearing his last name: "Zogoiby" is a hated, hated word in these parts. He coaxes from them an explanation.

Vasco Miranda hired Felicitas (half Arab) and Renegada (half Jewish) as housekeepers as soon as he arrived in Spain. He promised he would restore, in his Little Alhambra, the multi-ethnic culture of ancient Andalus. This never materialized, as the world-famous painter steadily descended into madness. He had become a recluse five years ago, after being offended by Salvador Medina, the local constable. Even the half sisters were forbidden to enter his apartment. They had seen evidence of his recent work, a blasphemous series of "Judas Christ" paintings and were perplexed by the recording machines and x-ray equipment he had been installing. On moonlit nights, he was sometimes seen walking the high battlements in a cloak. Moor returns to the question of the hated name Zogoiby. "There was a woman □ his lover." Moor tells them his tale.

Moor remains with them for a month, awaiting the arrival of his mother's paintings, which he is certain are en route. He becomes fond of Renegada, but they are never left alone long enough for anything to come of it. He determines that the women have no family and neither has ever wished to marry.

For five weeks, he wanders the streets aimlessly, but on Wednesday of the fifth week he encounters a one-legged woman passing out flyers opposing contraception; he is snapped back to reality by memories of his late sister, Lambajan, and his bird Totah. Waking to pain and emotions long anesthetized, he hurries to tell his landladies about this event, but is interrupted by news that the stolen paintings have arrived.

Very early the next morning, Moor is disguised as a woman and smuggled by Renegada into Miranda's house. He experiences powerful déjà vu, for the interior is modeled after his mother's Moor paintings. He initially feels that he has found her "Mooristan," but as he wanders the empty rooms, he realizes that Miranda's relationship to Aurora was always parasitic, and decides that, for all its flamboyance, this is a counterfeit, ugly and pretentious.

Reaching the locked door to the tower, Moor changes clothes. Hearing the horrible din of 'avant-garde music' that the sisters said emanated time-to-time from the tower, he returns to find a bloated, aged Miranda dressed in fancy, Moorish costume, being tickled

by his housekeeper. After pointed banter, Moor inquires about the paintings upstairs. They ascend slowly, accommodating the fat man. Miranda reveals that Renegada and Felicitas are not related; they are lesbian lovers - and his lovers as well. He had ordered them to detain Moor until the stolen canvases arrived, so he could destroy them all at once. Vasco is armed with a gun.

Finding himself, an East Indian surrounded in hostile territory, the narrator muses about the relationship between the Lone Ranger and Tonto in the vintage American films.

Alone with Miranda in the tower, he finally views his mother's last painting. Miranda has x-rayed it; the glaring white of the display panels blinds Moor. The robber claims that fourteen years earlier, fearing that she would be murdered, Aurora had written him a letter. She had lain in a full-length portrait of her assailant beneath *The Moor's Last Sigh.* In the event she does suffer a sudden death, she ordered, get your hands on the painting and x-ray it to see the proof. Moor is shocked to see on the film, not Raman Fielding, whom he had executed but, his father, Abraham Zogoiby. Facing the muzzle of a gun, sitting on a too-cold stone floor, the narrator reaches the finale of his tale.

Part 4, Chapter 19 Analysis

All the pieces appear to have come together. The narrator's naive eyes are opened to who has been pulling all the strings throughout the calamity that befell his family and Bombay. Abraham had assassinated his too famous and unfaithful wife, a too thorough investigative daughter, a too-pious daughter, a crippled ex-cop, and finally, his archrival - using the deformed hand of his only biological son. Abraham had engineered it all, had perhaps even engineered all the unusual events that accompanied his son to Spain and Miranda's lair.

Part 4, Chapter 20

Part 4, Chapter 20 Summary

Moor is forced, at gunpoint, upstairs to the top floor of the tower, where he meets an imprisoned woman, Aoi Ué. She labors, removing Miranda's pedestrian over painting of *The Moor's Last Sigh* from the original portrait of a bare-breasted young Aurora Zogoiby. Of necessity, it is slow, meticulous work, but she is also drawing it out, in order to allow time for her abduction to be discovered and her rescue effected. Miranda orders the narrator to record his life story in all its detail, promising that, like Scheherazade, he will be allowed to live so long as his tales amused his new master. He learns, in brief, Aoi's history and draws from her the discipline necessary to survive. They cling to each other in their imprisonment, reminiscent of conditions in Bombay Central, until the Moor's tales, which she reads daily before he surrenders them to their jailor, turn her to dread the presence of this last remnant of a truly evil dynasty. Her direct honesty helps clarify truths for him about his life as he is lays it down on paper. All the Gama-Zogoibys have been simply terrible. Why? Because they could not calm down.

Clarity achieved, the narrator flips back and forth between wishing to die and hoping to escape. Aoi, whom Miranda nicknamed Chimène, the ill-fated lover in Boabdil's legend, will grant him neither absolution nor hope. The drug-crazed Miranda will surely make good on his threat. Indeed, the fat man, whom Moor had truly loved in his youth, enters the room in Moorish attire, brandishing a pistol. He takes aim at Aoi, who pleads with Hammer to save her life. He does nothing, and as she dives for cover behind the canvas, a single bullet pierces Aurora's chest before entering hers. Aoi's blood spurts through the painting as they both crash lifelessly to the floor. Miranda turns the weapon on Moor, but collapses before he can fire, blood pouring from every orifice, as though the legendary ice needle had finally reached and exploded his heart.

The narrator frees himself and flees, carrying all the sheets he has written and a handful of nails with which to post them across the countryside, to make sure his history survives. He stops in a cemetery within view of ancient Alhambra, and lies down beside a crumbling tombstone, hoping that his rest will find peace.

Part 4, Chapter 20 Analysis

Taut drama is sustained until Moor flees the prison. Aoi helps him reach full clarity. Even Miranda's curious tale of an ice needle that a fairy tale princess had injected in his system is shown to have been prophetic. We understand Moraes, whom we first met in the cemetery, and could only wonder about his first mysterious uttering.

In an interview given while promoting this novel, Salman Rushdie stated that he knew precisely how the book would begin and end, which gave him the freedom to wander

blissfully in between. Rereading Chapter 1, we appreciate how wonderfully he achieved his goal.

Characters

Moraes Zogoiby (1957-)

Moraes Zogoiby, the novel's narrator, known as the "Moor," is the scion of the de Gama-Zogoiby dynasty of spice merchants in Cochin, India. He introduces himself as a "determinedly ungodly Indian Christian," who finds himself, as the novel begins in Spain, just thirty-six years of age but worn out from a life lived too fast. What this enigmatic introduction means will be gradually be spelled out. He is the only son of a scheming tycoon, Abraham Zogoiby, and his eminent artistic wife, Aurora, both deceased. He is a skeptical, bashful, and self-loathing personality, hampered by asthma, which runs in the family, and a malformed right hand of which he is ashamed much of his life. More important than either malady is another birth defect: a rare condition that causes him, from the moment of conception, to age physically at twice the rate of his chronological age. He lives with the awareness that he will wear out in half the normal time.

More beautiful than his three older sisters, he is favored by his mother, but still victimized by the cruelty that runs in her veins, the legacy of her own parentage. His physical condition requires that he be home schooled. Various servants influence his development. His mother's protégé, Vasco Miranda, decorates his nursery walls with cartoon characters and fills his mind with stories. The family's gatekeeper teaches him to turn his crippled right hand into a lethal weapon as a street boxer. His mother shares her family stories with him while he models for painting after painting devoted to the family's Moorish ancestor, the last sultan of Alhambra. His father forces him to enter the family business and elevates him to a position of management in its talcum powder exporting branch.

When it is discovered by authorities that this is a front for drug trafficking, Moor is arrested - and, unfortunately, seized just after the suicide of his lover, Uma, so a count of murder is added to his charge - but he is rescued from the horrors of Bombay Central lock-up by his parents' most avid foe, Raman Fielding, ruthless head of an ultra-fundamentalist Hindu political party. Moor is recruited into Fielding's elite hit teams, where, as "The Hammer," he delivers savage beatings to anyone who opposes his captain's plans. He had, at the time, nowhere else to turn. His parents had disowned him over Uma.

After his mother's tragic death, deemed purely accidental, he is contacted by his father and re-enters his service. Abraham discloses more details of the family's shady past. At age thirty-five, feeling like a decrepit seventy, Moor finds he is unable to bear an heir and is usurped by an adopted 'brother,' Adam. He is given a beauty queen as fiancé by his father. Father and son, however, fall out again, when Moor learns that the family business is involved in underground deals to deliver a nuclear device to Muslim fundamentalists in the Middle East; he cannot sink that low. He is not, this time, cast out completely, but finds himself homeless when an orgy of violence descends upon

Bombay. He plays a part in the first act, murdering his former employer to avenge his mother, when Abraham reveals that Fielding had engineered the "accident" that killed her. The homes he had known in childhood and as an adult, his father's towering office building, the convent where one sister lived, and countless other structures were immolated in senseless, wanton murder.

He heeds his father's last command and flees to Spain, where he hopes to understand his Moorish legacy. There, he hunts down his mother's exiled protégé, Miranda, and finds himself imprisoned by the drug-crazed, vengeful psychopath, forced to tell his tale in order, Scheherazade-like, to prolong his life. When Miranda quite literally explodes while training a pistol on him, Moor is able to escape, and makes his way across the countryside, nailing the pages of his lurid tale to trees and fences, determined that they will survive his own demise. Exhausted, he lies down to rest in the cemetery where we first met him, hoping that his tormented spirit will find peace.

Aurora da Gama Zogoiby (1924-1987)

Aurora is the narrator's mother, a great beauty and talented artist whose downfall is the sharp tongue and sharp wit she is powerless not to exercise. Raised in a household divided emotionally and physically between warring extended family factions and neglected by her businesswoman mother, Belle da Gama, Aurora matured early and discovered a talent for drawing and coloring. She hid her craft from her mother and revealed its glory to her father as an act of mourning, only after Belle's death. Fifteen-year-old Aurora haughtily claims Belle's legacy of strength.

The heiress to the successful Gama Trading Company, she marries an unlikely man, Abraham Zogoiby, twenty-one years her elder, a Jew, and a fairly junior employee. Passionate physical love and the shared bearing of scandal could not prevent Aurora from asserting her social superiority, and the timid Abie fell victim to the haughtiness, domination, and derision with which she treated all around her. On her wedding night, she reveals to Abie the curse which her dying grandmother had whispered in her ear: "May your house be forever partitioned, may its foundations turn to dust, may your children rise up against you, and may your fall be hard."

Aurora has turned over all business concerns to Abie and blossomed to become the preeminent female painter in India and a giant public figure in Bombay. She spent the war years there, estranged from her husband after learning of his deal to turn over his first-born son to his mother to be raised as a Jew. She defiantly locked him from her bedroom door before embarking north, following her largely autobiographical art. She also immersed herself in nationalist politics and was rumored to be the mistress of Jawaharlal Nehru. She became a national hero when she was jailed for two years in the Dehra Dun District Jail, proclaimed a new Chand Bibi. Released at age twenty, her hair turned prematurely white. She returned, briefly, to Cochin, but attained adulthood in Bombay, just before the end of the war, feted by the city's artistic and political luminaries.

When her mother-in-law died, she reconciled with Abie, and the couple abandoned Cochin for a sprawling bungalow on Malabar Hill, Bombay, named Elephanta. There she bore three daughters in rapid succession, then, eight years later, she gave birth to the son she coveted, to whom she gave the nickname "Moor," and whom she coddled, because of his defective right hand and twice-normal physical development. She portrayed him repeatedly in three series of paintings dealing with the last sultan of Alhambra. Her career flourished in India, but never abroad. For the first twenty years of Moor's existence, her style was realistic, but after her eldest daughter's death, it turned symbolic, fanciful, and visually striking. After Moor's love affair with Uma moved her to expel him from her home, her work turned highly abstract and she withdrew from the world.

Near the end of her life, a major retrospective of her work was mounted but was savagely panned by critics as socially irrelevant and passé. She was crushed and withdrew further. She left a final, realistic canvas on her easel, an incomplete and unsigned masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh.* Post mortem, her reputation was rehabilitated in the press.

Aurora died at age sixty-three, while dancing "higher than the gods" on the wall of Elephanta, as she had forty-one times before, mocking the devotes of the god Ganesha, celebrating on the beach below. Losing her footing, she plunged to the rocks below, shouting the family's favorite phrase of cursing. She was granted a state funeral, attended by her widowed husband and sole-surviving, now monastic, daughter; the beloved but exiled son remains absent.

Her spirit, however, could not rest. It haunted Abraham, who reconciled with Moor and sought to give her peace. When it was revealed, inaccurately, that one of her secret lovers, Fielding, had arranged the accident, Moor enacted vengeance on his former employer, the first act in an orgy of violence that rocked Bombay, and resulted in the destruction of all of her paintings, save a few mysteriously stolen just before, including *The Moor's Last Sigh.* Moor travels to Spain to find these, convinced that another spurned lover and exiled protégé lay behind the theft.

Uma Sarasvati

Uma Sarasvati is the love of the narrator's life and the cause of his painful estrangement from his mother. We meet her only in the second half of the novel, but she is felt throughout the narrative, before telling about their meeting. Everyone who met her could agree that she was India's most promising, young sculptor. On no other particular front was there unanimity, however. She claims to be an orphan, sexually abused by a family friend. A detective, whom suspicious Aurora hired when Uma and Moor get too involved with one another, discovers proof that her parents are alive, and that they had expelled her from their home because of her promiscuous behavior. Moreover, she is married to a wealthy family friend, currently paralyzed and heartlessly abandoned by her. There are indications that she is involved with Abraham Zogoiby, certainly lusted after by him,

and by the widower of Moor's eldest sister. Confusion over who she truly is leads Moor to separate from her for a time, but they reunite and conflict flares again.

When Uma seemingly tries to reconcile with Aurora but fails, resulting in Moor's expulsion, she revealed herself as a devoted Hindu, she divines that she and her lover are destined to die together. She produces two pills to execute her plan, and after a comic scuffle, swallows one and dies in Moor's arms. He is arrested and charged with her murder; the remaining pill, he finds out, after being forced by police to swallow it, is a hallucinogen; what Uma's plan had been - which would die - she took to her grave. Her duplicity haunts Moor for the rest of his life, but opens his eyes to the solemn truth that reality can easily be masked.

Epifania da Gama (1877-1938)

The narrator's late, great grandmother, and the domineering matriarch of the family, she was born to the reduced trader family of Menzes of Mangalore, married Francicso da Gama, became mistress of his declining, but still grand, mansion, and bore him two sons. She and her husband took opposite positions on politics - she was pro-British, he was radically nationalist - and one son allied with each parent. Dismissing her sons as hopeless businessmen following Francisco's suicide, Epifania rallied her daughters-in-law to usurp the enterprise, a move which brought the household into conflict and resulted in the jailing of her sons for allowing the situation to decline into murder and arson. Epifania died on Christmas Eve, felled while praying with the rosary in her candle-lit chapel, staring into the eyes of her callous granddaughter, Aurora, who did nothing to save her life. Following her death, the household - and nature itself - revived to the glory of the days when Francisco ruled the roost, but the dying curse she whispered in Aurora's ear guaranteed its ultimate downfall.

Dr. Francisco da Gama (1876-1922)

The narrator's late, great grandfather, a failed business magnate, was intellectual, artistic, avant guard, eccentric, impractical, and idealistic. Avid devotion to ideologies led to his ruin; nationalist politics brought him imprisonment by the British, while spiritualism led him to publish tracts that brought him only public derision. Both caused rifts with his strident wife, Epifania. Frustration led him to suicide in the sea, unlamented by his widow.

Aires da Gama (1902-1977)

The narrator's great uncle, a ludicrous, pompous figure, collector of ivories and elephant statues, with a penchant for assigning mocking nicknames to everyone around him. Despite his addiction to heroin and cocaine, and promiscuous, philandering homosexuality, he was Epifania's favorite son. Jailed with his brother for responsibility in the internecine warfare that resulted in destruction of the Spice Mountains, he emerged an outspoken proponent of Liberalism and the preservation of British administration in

India. He and his male lover, nicknamed Henry the Navigator, both contracted syphilis and were nursed back to health by Carmen, the wife he always ignored. Aires survived them both, but perished during a visit to the Zogoibys in Bombay. His body was frozen and returned to Cochin for burial. The quirky man's pet bull terrier, Jawaharlal, whom he stuffed to keep him company after its death, passed to the narrator's father, and finally to the narrator, and became Moor's traveling companion when he abandoned India.

Camoens da Gama (1903-1939)

The narrator's maternal grandfather, Aurora's beloved, timid, soft-spoken, and eccentric father, he is a "goateed stick of a man," recently widowed from Belle when the story opens, a woman whom Epifania barely tolerated in the household. She, alone in the family, refused to be cowed by the great lady, and pointed with pride to the fact that she had, in Aurora, produced the only heir to the da Gama fortune. Camoens shared his father's nationalist, political bent but shunned his activism after being humiliated in public at a dockside promotion of Leninism. Camoens was a study in contradictions, dismissed by his cruel mother as a fool, but admired by the Moor as a gentle and humane man. Jailed along with his brother following the burning of the Spice Mountains, he served six years of a fifteen year jail term and returned home to live, briefly, in harmony with Belle. Her death depressed him, and he grew jealous of his daughter Aurora, who embodied Belle's domineering spirit. After a drunken girl revealed to him that Belle had seduced most of the men in the village during his incarceration, Camoens ended his life in the ocean, following the example of his father.

Isabella Ximena Souza da Gama (1904-1937)

The narrator's blunt-speaking grandmother, Belle, alone appreciated her father-in-law Francisco's genius and sought vainly to save her husband from her mother-in-law's life-draining control. Her nickname, Queen Isabella of Cochin, was earned by her skillful administration of half the Gama Trading Company' assets following Camoens' imprisonment and the estate's division. "Tall, beautiful, brilliant, brave, hard-working, powerful, victorious," she also "smoked like a volcano, grew increasingly foul-mouthed," drank herself frequently into unconsciousness, intimidated business associates, and shamelessly prowled for men at the Malabar Club, leaving her daughter, Aurora, in the care of servants. She ceased her dissolute ways when Camoens was released from prison, and the two lived happily for three years, while, what was diagnosed as tuberculosis, steadily ate away at her lungs. She died at age thirty-three from what turned out to be instead lung cancer.

Carmen Lobo da Gama (1904-1974)

The narrator's great aunt and daughter-in-law of Epifania, and her appointed chief lieutenant in the battle to seize control of the family business away from her hapless sons. Husband Aires' homosexuality made Epifania's order to bear a male heir

impossible, and earned Carmen, from sister-in-law Belle, the cruel nickname 'Sahara.' When Belle seized control of the family business and Aires languished in prison, Carmen grew morose, finding solace only in daily bouts of masturbation. After Aires' release from prison, she threatened to kill him if he did not curtail his philandering, but she made no effort to gain his intimacy. Only in the renaissance of the da Gama fortunes that followed her mother in law's death, did Carmen rediscover life through dance. She and Aires remained in the house after the Zogoibys moved to Bombay, and Carmen nursed her husband and his lover back to health after they contracted syphilis. She invited Henry the Navigator to remain in the house and they became best of friends. She died peacefully on the terrace, drinking tea with her husband, telling him of a dream about their lost friend.

Flory Zogoiby (1877-1945)

She is the narrator's paternal grandmother. As a child, she earned a reputation as a pugnacious battler ("Flory-the-Roary"). At twenty-four she married Solomon Castile, the synagogue caretaker, twenty years her senior. By coincidence, they wed the same day as Francisco and Epifania, and produced, to the community's amazement, "the most handsome young man of his dwindling generation" (p. 75). Solomon Castile abandoned his family to sail the seas and an embittered Flory took over his duties, caring for the synagogue and its treasures. Flory lost her beautiful son to Aurora in a fiery confrontation, and she lost her faith in the God of Judaism. Bitterly, she sat outside the synagogue for over a year before he returned, seeking loan of her secret emeralds in order to recover from business losses. Cagey Flory demands a written promise to deliver his first-born son into her hands, to raise him as a Jew in place of her own lost son. Her plot fails when she reveals it to Aurora, who bans Abie from her bedroom for the duration of his mother's life. That life ends in a churchyard, which serves as an interreligious sanctuary for the insane, an institution to which she was consigned after the blue synagogue tiles revealed to her a final prophecy: the bombing of Hiroshima. She perished when the flames of a crazed self-immolator caught her robe. She was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery in Cochin.

Abraham Zogoiby (1903-1993)

The narrator's father, a lowly dock manager employed by the Gama Trading Company, with whom Aurora da Gama falls instantly and madly in love (or lust) during an inspection of the warehouses. Son of the synagogue's fiery caretaker, Flory Zogoiby, he stands up to her wrath and marries outside the Jewish faith. Together, he and Aurora weather the scandal, but she rapidly tires of him, asserts her social superiority, and makes him the constant butt of derision. Nevertheless, he continues to love and provide for her.

Abie proves himself an effective executive, which allows the hapless Uncle Aires to retire from the business. The torpedoing of three spice ships bound for England forces him to broker a loan from his mother, which, while it turns the tide of the company's

fortune and is quickly repaid in full, commits him to turn over to his mother his first-born son. This results for him in decades of banishment from Aurora's bed. Long-faced he attends doggedly to business while she pursues art and politics in Bombay. Only after Flory's death are they reunited. Abraham fathers three daughters and one son before they, once again, revert to separate bedrooms, and he turns ever more resolutely to providing for their economic welfare. However, he keeps the underworld activities, by which he truly elevates the spice export enterprise into a diversified empire at the pinnacle of the Indian economy, a strict secret from everyone. He meekly consents to Aurora's banishment of Moor from their household.

Suspicion that Aurora's death might not have been accidental moves him to reconcile with the boy, despite Moor's criminal association with long-time, bitter rival, Raman Fielding. Abraham uses their time together to confess the dark secrets of his success, culminating in plans to provide nuclear technology to Arab terrorists. These revelations lead Moor to murder Fielding and launch a bloodbath across Bombay that consume Abraham and everything he worked a lifetime to build. Father sends son on a final mission to Spain to reclaim Aurora's stolen legacy.

Vasco Miranda

A hack commercial artist from Loutulium in Goa, he arrives penniless at the gates of Elephanta, grandly asking to meet the only artist whose greatness approaches his own. Turned away by the diligent doorkeeper, he pens a clever letter to Aurora and is admitted, hired to paint murals on the children's bedroom walls, and comes to reside forty years at the Zogoiby estate before being expelled. He becomes the narrator's first hero, helping him cope with his disabilities through stories, pictures, and recipes. A troubled individual, close-guarded about his past, ambitious, shallow, marginally talented, explosive, alcohol and drug addicted, hedonistic, bisexual, he is the center around which the story evolves. An affair with Ina Zogoiby causes an explosion between mother and daughter, leading her to flee to America. Continuing to work in Aurora's house, he produces an enormous body of large-scale-commercial works sought around the world. These bring him fame outside of India and a vast fortune. An increasingly bloated debaucher, he is expelled from the household, and he moves to Spain, where he uses his fortune to construct a massive, garrulous fortress in Andalusia, where he becomes a recluse, consumed by drugs and the pain of having been rejected by his long-time lover. He orders four of her paintings stolen and spirited to his home, including her unfinished masterpiece, *The Moor's Last Sigh,* and his original rendering of this theme, which covers a portrait of young Aurora, bare-breasted, holding nothing. Atop his tower, he imprisons an art restorer to reveal the original image and the Moor to write Moor's entire saga. After murdering Aoi Ué, Miranda's body explodes from within, sparing the Moor to have to complete his tale.

Raman Fielding

A vicious, ambitious political cartoonist whose trademark was a small frog, which earned him a nickname Mainduck that he despised and that could safely be uttered only behind his back, Fielding led the attack on Aurora's *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig* in 1960, and drew the artist back into controversy in the mid-1970s, by having seized undisputed control of the radical Hindu nationalist party Mumbai's Axis (MA). Late in the story, it is revealed that this repugnant character is one of Aurora's three simultaneous lovers and undisputed leader of a terrorist paramilitary force battling secularism, communism, unionism, feminism, and anything else he deems detrimental to the interests of the Hindu majority, despite the fact that he is not personally observant of the dietary strictures of the faith. He rescues Moor from prison and assigns him to his premier cadre of thugs, rechristening him "The Hammer." His victims rally behind his political ambitions, electing him mayor of Bombay, a limited post of which he quickly tires and turns his eye to provincial office. Spurned by Nadia Wadia, Miss World, he vows vengeance on her fiancé, Moor and Moor's father Abraham whose power rivals his own. Abraham convinces Moor that Fielding is implicated in Aurora's murder (which had been dismissed as an accident), and Moor pledges to avenge his estranged mother. He brutally murders Fielding at his desk, wielding a ridiculous green novelty telephone, shaped like a frog, as the murder weapon. An explosive charge, planted by another disgruntled employee, Sammy ("Tin Man") Hazaré, conceals the crime, which marks the beginning of an orgy of violence that consumes much of Bombay. Later Moor discovers that Fielding was not to blame in his mother's death; he killed an innocent man.

Jawaharlal

Aires da Gama's toothless bulldog, a constant companion, was given the name of the leader of India's independence movement in order to irritate brother Camoens, and nicknamed "Jaw-Jaw" by Aurora in order to anger its owner. After its death, the dog is stuffed and mounted on wheels to remain forever at its owner's side, then Abraham's, and finally Moor's on his final trip to Spain. He ends up in a closet, one of Andalusia's abandoned canines.

The Nehrus

Real-life figures in India's political life during the time span of this novel. Independence leader, Jawaharlal is the only one depicted favorably. Called 'Pandit' (teacher), he served as Prime Minister (1947-64) and is repeatedly depicted as a patron of Aurora Zogoiby's art. He is rumored to have been her lover. His heirs are depicted as a grasping, self-serving, political dynasty, and the passing of each coincides with a major development in the story's plot. Indira, Prime Minister (1966-77 and 1980-84) is Aurora's sworn enemy. Aurora's art flourishes during the years of her draconian reign. Sanjay, the assassinated politician's second son, used nepotism to treat India as a personal fiefdom, earning the fierce hatred of his many victims; his death in a plane crash in 1980 - flippantly related by Moor — coincides with the deaths of Jimmy Cash, Mynah, and

soon afterwards, Uma. Rajiv, Indira's eldest, duller son and successor as Prime Minister (1984 to 1989) is blown to bits by an assassin in 1991, an event which coincides with Abraham's revelation to his son that he is involved in a project to obtain an H-bomb for Islamic fundamentalists, a revelation that drives a wedge between them again.

Lambajan Chandiwala

The indispensable doorkeeper of the Zogoiby estate is a former sailor named Borkar. Loss of a leg, as a result of Aurora's driving, leads to his hiring as restitution, and to his nickname, an inter-lingual play on words rendering Long John Silver after the pirate in Robert Lewis Stevenson's *Treasure Island.* She bought Lamba a green parrot, Totah, to complete the image and did her best to teach it obscenities to squawk. A former bare-knuckle boxer, he becomes Moor's coach and manager for a time. His wife, Jaya Hé, is the family ayah and housekeeper. Late in the story, it turns out that Elephanta was a covert assignment by Raman Fielding; Lambajan is, in reality, a warrior in the Hindu guerrilla army, and is assigned to rescue the homeless, imprison Moor, and enlist him in the struggle against pluralism. Lambajan perishes with the rest of the staff in the bombing of Elephanta at the cataclysmic conclusion of the story.

Christina Zogoiby Cashondeliveri (1947-1977)

The eldest of the narrator's three sisters, her name was cut in half by her mother to Ina. Disdained and belittled by her mother, Ina used her great beauty to inflame her, posing nude for Aurora's protégé, Vasco Miranda, and then going on to achieve national fame as a risqué fashion model. She took care to leave evidence of every instance of licentiousness for Aurora to find, including an affair with Vasco Miranda. This occasioned a mother-daughter clash that sent Ina into the arms of one of her father's business rivals, whom she married and with whom she fled to sing in Nashville, Tennessee. Both career and marriage collapsed in a year and Ina returned to Elephanta, overweight and despondent. She enlisted her family to win Jimmy back, but the plot failed and she died of cancer - the ruse she had used to get him to see her.

Inamorata Zogoiby (1948-1993)

The second Zogoiby daughter, name shortened by Aurora to Minnie, left nursing school to follow a religious calling in the Sisterhood of Maria Gratiaplena, much to her mother's horror. As Sister Florea she was over-zealous, in asceticism and in social protest against contraception. She saw visions of her late sister Ina and of catastrophic plagues that would end the world. She is the last of the narrator's siblings to die, perishing when her convent is firebombed in the violence that consumes Bombay at the novel's end.

Philomena Zogoiby (1949-1981)

The third Zogoiby daughter, name shortened to Mynah, becomes a radical feminist and antitrust lawyer, crusading to convict the dirtiest of her father's cronies. She introduces Uma to the family, and later aids Aurora in trying to break up Uma and Moor. She is wrongly accused by Uma of being a lesbian. She is the second Zogoiby child to die in an industrial accident that she is investigating. Charges are brought against the saboteurs behind what is determined to be an assassination. Only at the end does it become apparent that her father was behind the murder.

Jamished Cashondeliveri

Also known by his anglicized name, Jimmy Cash, he and his brother mark the pitiful end products of a remarkable commercial family. Recognizing an offer that cannot be refused, they sell their birthright to Abraham Zogoiby and disappear from sight. Jimmy returns, on daughter Ina's arm, her refuge from Aurora when mother and daughter finally clash over Ina's promiscuity. The two run off to Nashville to pursue a career in Country and Western music. Jimmy abandons his career and wife to study law in California, but is lured back to Bombay and his ex-wife by stories that she is dying of cancer. When the ruse is unmasked he leaves, but returns briefly to the narrative, depressed when Ina actually does die, summoned by Aurora to attend a family outing to a racetrack. When he makes a senseless pass at Uma Sarasvati, however, the same Aurora summarily dismisses him from the family. It turns out that rumors of an affair between them were true, when he perishes in an automobile accident in 1980 (although the never truthful Uma denies any love for the no-talent singer).

Keeko Mody

Aurora's agent, dealer, and, it is late in the story revealed, one of her three simultaneous lovers, and intermediary in her efforts to learn the truth about Uma Sarasvati.

Dom Minto

A legendary Bombay police inspector, whose life was made into movies, but who retired when he wrongly convicted a man. He is brought out of retirement late in life to snoop out the truth about Uma Sarasvati. He obtains documentary and photographic evidence of a life completely at odds with Uma's version, giving Aurora ammunition to affect a breakup with her son. He continues to draw assignments from Abraham, trailing Aurora and Moor. His last assignment, when he is over one hundred years old, confined to a wheelchair and on dialysis, proves that Raman Fielding was behind Aurora's death. He dies at night before the evidence can be produced, but Moor acts on the telephone report and kills an innocent man.

Chhaggan Five-in-a-Bite

Raman Fielding's snaggle-toothed cook was the premier wrestling member of the MA's most elite band of thugs. He earned his nickname by having bitten off an opponent's five toes in a single bite. The opponent was his own brother. He is found dead, likely at the hand of a former colleague, Sammy Hazaré, during the bloodbath at the novel's conclusion.

Sammy Hazaré

A non-Hindu (Christian Maharashtrian) thug in Raman Fielding's employ, he is nicknamed 'Tin-Man' because accidents handling explosives had required his arm, as well as large portions of his head and body, to be replaced or armored. Nevertheless, explosives remained his passion. Assigned bodyguard to Nadia Wadia, he pines for her and his home becomes a shrine to the Miss World beauty queen. Dismissed by Fielding, he harbors a grudge against him and Moor (Nadia's fiancé), shared with his dwarf roommate Dhirendra. Together they obtain fiery revenge, blowing up Field's estate and the Zogoibys' Cashondeliveri Towers.

Nadia Wadia

A free-spirited Parsi beauty queen, Miss Bombay, Miss India, and ultimately Miss World, each time a long-odds surprise, she is Raman Fielding's most desired conquest. On camera at the Miss World finals in Granada, Spain, she calls him a toad. Winning the title, she is immortalized in a pop song heard everywhere in India. When her reign ends, she finds she has no future. She continues to spurn Fielding's advances, and is hired by Abraham Zogoiby to put a pretty face on his company. She and mother Fadia Wadia are given a comfortable apartment by Abraham, and Nadia's hand is given to Moor. Her beautiful face is slashed by Sammy Hazaré, but she survives and makes a valiant appearance on television, vowing that life will go on for her and for stricken Bombay.

Dr. Zeenat Vakil

A brilliant, sardonic, young art theorist, hired by Abraham Zogoiby as curator of his late wife's collected artwork. She is author of *Imperso-Nation and Dis/Semi/Nation: Dialogics of Eclecticism and Interrogations of Authenticity in A,Z.,* whose examination of the Moor sequence of paintings restored Aurora to the rank of art's immortals. She perishes along with beloved paintings in the Bombay bombings.

Scar

Bombay's elusive Muslim drug king.

The Reverend Oliver D'Aeth

An awkward, pasty-faced, Anglican missionary for whom the tropical climate brings pure torture, he is no less tortured by the visits paid to the empty tomb of Vasco da Gama within the confines of his St. Francis Church of a beautiful, scornful fifteen-year-old, Aurora Zogoiby. She inspires both lust and loathing in the hapless cleric, whom she derides as "Allover Death," and comes to haunt his recurrent nightmares about shameful beatings and a mixture of fearing and yet longing for death.

Emily Elphinstone

A young widow with whom the Reverend Oliver D'Aeth is secretly enamored. She brings him to realize his shameful lust for Aurora and forbids him to visit her any more.

Adam Braganza Zogoiby

An elephant-eared, eighteen year old entrepreneur who sells the family business to Abraham Zogoiby and so impresses the tycoon with crisp slogans and mastery of the business' best practices and technology, that he is invited to become vice president of technology. Abraham goes one step further and adopts him as his beloved son. Adam, however, is discovered to have been the bag man in Siodicorp's vast underworld activities and is imprisoned, awaiting trial, when all the other major characters are killed in the Bombay violence.

Felicitas and Renegada Larios

Supposedly half sisters, daughters of a sailor, Juan Larios, Felicitas, half Arab, and Renegada, half Jewish, introduce themselves in Benengeli as hired by Vasco Miranda as housekeepers and offer Moor lodging while he awaits arrival of his mother's stolen paintings. It turns out that they are not related, but are lesbian lovers, and Miranda's lovers, and willing confederates, as well.

Aoi Ué

Japanese restorer of fine art, abducted by Vasco Miranda and imprisoned in this tower, forced to remove *The Moor's Last Sigh* and reveal the canvas' original content: the portrait of a bare-breasted Aurora holding nothing. Thrown together with the narrator after his capture, she imparts to him strength and discipline, which enable him to survive the ordeal. As she reads his story, however, she grows disgusted, and recoils from a man whose family embodies evil. When she has removed the last flakes of overlying paint, Miranda makes good on his threat and kills her while Moor ignores her pleadings to save her. Miranda nicknamed her Chimène, after the love interest in the legendary El Cid.

Objects/Places

The Moor's Last Sigh

The title of the novel and of its fourth division, it refers to the place in Spain where the Moors lost their last stand. The defeated sultan's nickname gave the Zogoiby's their family name, and the events were embraced as their family heritage. Vasco Miranda first painted the theme to cover up a shocking portrait of Aurora. She returned to the theme throughout her career, and left an unfinished masterpiece on her easel bearing this title.

Benengeli

Vasco Miranda's fortress in the Andalusian mountains of Spain, site of the final events of the book, where Moor puts down on paper the full story of his family's notoriety, and escapes Miranda's vengeance.

Elephanta

This is the Zogoiby's estate atop the cliffs of Malabar Hill, Bombay. Wryly named for the feast of Ganesha celebrated annually on the beach below, its walls house where the children grow, Aurora as she reaches fame, and the place from which she plunges to her death. It is destroyed by fire when Bombay erupts in violence.

Cochin

This location is a vibrant, historic, harbor town on the west coast of India, today called Kochi, is the setting of the first half of the novel. Its synagogue, renowned for its blue tiles and church of St. Francis, which houses the vacant tomb of Vasco da Gama, and pretentiously British fortress all exist. The fictional home and warehouses of the wealthy da Gama family blend seamlessly with reality. Aurora and Abraham abandon the ancestral home for Bombay, leaving the remnants of their extended family behind. It is closed after the last one passes, and later becomes a government-run tourist attraction before it eventually crumbles.

The Gama Trading Company

This is a multi-million dollar enterprise, exporting pepper and other spices grown on Spice Mountain. It is brought back from the brink of ruin by Abraham Zogoiby and is transformed into C-50 - the Camoens Fifty Per Cent Corp. (Private). The real source of its income, a narcotics-smuggling operation, is concealed under the guise of the Baby Soft Talcum Powder Private Limited, of which the narrator rises to be the unwitting

manager. After absorbing the Cashondeliveri banking operation, it is referred to as Ciodicorp. Its lavish headquarters, Cashondeliveri Towers, is destroyed in the violence that befalls Bombay at the end of the book.

The Synagogue

Famed for the blue tiles that cover its ceiling, walls, and floors, imported from China in 1100 C.E., this is the site of Abraham Zogoiby's fiery confrontation with his mother, where the family name and mythical origins are revealed.

St. Francis Church

Center of Cochin's Christian community, founded as Roman Catholic, but ministered to by an Anglican, this church contains the long-empty tomb of Vasco da Gama, to which Aurora regularly makes pilgrimage, confessing her sins and confiding her secrets. There, she unites with Abraham without benefit of clergy.

Bombay Central

This is the inhumanly horrible prison to which the narrator finds himself consigned as the third part of the novel begins. He is amazed that he was unaware it existed, despite his frequent wanderings around the city. His tormenting jailor informs him that Bombay hides many secrets.

Mumbai's Axis (MA)

Raman Fielding's radical Hindu nationalist party. The book accurately depicts the leader of Shiv Sena, a fundamentalist Hindu political party headed by Bal Thackeray, who is infamous for the use of violence against opponents.

Hazaré's XI

The MA's elite cadre of brutal enforcers, to which the narrator is assigned under the code name 'The Hammer.'

Mahalaxmi Racecourse

This is a horseracing track in Bombay, where the city's social elite congregate. It is the backdrop for Uma Sarasvati's introduction to the Zogoiby clan and the site of the narrator's reconciliation with his father.

Social Sensitivity

The proclamation of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, urging all "zealous muslitns" to execute Rushdie, indelibly inscribed on public consciousness an image of Rushdie as a writer inextricably involved with the political issues his work addressed. While The Satanic Verses (1988) was the proximate cause for the fatwa, all of Rushdie's novels have contained material that some people found offensive, and as he himself has often reiterated, he is a "fairly political animal" who has observed about Midnight's Children (1981) and Shame (1983) "that everything in both books has had to do with politics and with the relationship of the individuals and history." This continuing concern was concentrated for Rushdie by the necessity of concealment caused by the fatwa, and when he resumed writing in 1990, he reaffirmed his political position, saying, "If I can't write, then, in a way, the attack has been successful."

The Moor's Last Sigh, which Rushdie spent five years writing, follows the life of Moraes ("Moor") Zogoiby from his birth in 1957 to the "present" in the mid-1990s, preceded by what J. W. Coetzee calls "a dynastic prelude" reaching back to the birth of Moraes's great-grandfather, Francisco da Gama (1876), who began the spice trade in the province of Cochin that led to the family's rise to moderate affluence. Da Gama is a social progressive and Indian nationalist whose differences with his wife Epifania Menezes—a traditionalist described as believing in "England, God, philistinism, the old ways"—sets the terms of a schism that eventually splits the family and which parallels the divisions in the country at large.

Their son Camoens has a vision of an independent India which he hopes will be "above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened." Rushdie's knowledge of history and his personal experiences as an inhabitant of India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom prevent him from sharing this idealistic conception, but Rushdie's social vision includes, as Moraes puts it in describing some of the paintings of his mother Aurora Da Gama, "a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation."

The story that Moraes tells of his family's origins and circumstances before his birth, and then of his own upbringing and eventual estrangement from the family, is designed to parallel and comment on the course of the history of the Indian subcontinent and to illustrate how difficult it has been to actualize this romantic myth. Living as a Muslim and Jew (from his father Abraham Zogoiby) in a country with a Hindu majority, and as an Indian citizen in a land recently part of the British Empire, Moraes has the historical perspective of a marginalized semi-outcast who feels he must challenge and subvert the official voice of authority and counteract the official version of the historical record with his own narrative. Rushdie's treatment of religion, language, and the indigenous culture of the subcontinent in The Moor's Last Sigh stems from his contention that there were "three pillars of independent India" which he lists as "democracy,.. . a protectionist economy,. .. [and] a secularism" which he defines as no single religion having a constitutional advantage. The concern which he expresses and examines in The Moor's Last Sigh is that his generation "grew up buying that India and liking it and feeling its air

free to breathe," and that in the fifty years since the founding of the state in 1947, all of these "pillars [are] tottering." His intent through the course of Moraes's narrative is to locate and castigate the people and philosophies responsible for this reversal, and to set against the forces of totalitarian repression a liberating vision of artistic creativity.

Specifically, he finds religious tolerance under attack from what he calls "Hindufundamentalist triumphalism." This is part of a larger organized ecclesiastical tyranny that he attacked in The Satanic Verses. He finds the values of a democratic state endangered by politicians like Raman Fielding, a figure based on Bal Thackeray, the Bombay leader of the Shiv Sena Party which Rushdie describes as being in collaboration with the Bombay criminal underworld "against unions ... against working women, in favor of sati, against poverty and in favor of wealth." This organization has similarities to the military mob that was responsible for the shameless behavior of the government of Pakistan in Shame. Rushdie does not underestimate the power of these people, but his depiction of "India" in The Moor's Last Sigh is informed by an exhilarating portrayal of a place that can be psychologically energizing and spiritually sustaining. The ethos of the land—the homeland that he has carried and cultivated in his imagination while in exile—enables him to regard India with a degree of hope for an enlightened future. As he expressed his intention: The character in The Moor's Last Sigh who says motherness is our biggest idea certainly speaks what I consider to be the truth. But I wanted a different sort of Mother India ... I wanted my own sort of Mother India. This Mother India is metropolitan, sophisticated, noisy, angry and different.

This conception is developed through the character and paintings of Moraes's mother Aurora, a heroic exemplar of resistance to oppression, the "outlaw bandit queen" of Bombay. And it is Bombay itself, the city of Rushdie's youth, that provides the "metropolitan" component—an endlessly fascinating, diverse fusion of disparate elements that he knows as "Bombay of my joys and sorrows," and recalls in rapture: Bombay was central, had been so from the moment of its creation. The bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities. In Bombay, all India met and merged. In Bombay, all-India met what-was-not-India ... Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea. It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, and everybody talked at once.

Techniques

"When I was growing up," Rushdie told an interviewer who asked about his facility with words, "everyone around me was fond of fooling around with words. It was certainly common in my family, but I think it is typical of Bombay, maybe India, that there is a sense of play in the way people use language." This language play is one of the most compelling parts of Rushdie's writing, so much so that he tends to follow a kind of linguistic logic beyond the requirements of either plot or character, but these verbal digressions or extensions often have their own appeal. In The Moor's Last Sigh, since the narrative is a continuing expression of the protagonist's thoughts and emotional responses, nothing is ultimately irrelevant to an understanding of Moraes. In addition, one of the peculiarities of Moraes's character is the interesting conceit that he is living at a sort of double time. That is, he is aging twice as fast as his chronological growth, so that he is already relatively mature at the age of seven (which is effectively fourteen physically). Rushdie says that this is a result of his consciousness of mortality, as well as his own peril, during the fatwa, when "quite a few of the people I care about died during this period." He felt that he should convey a sense of urgency in the novel since "we may not have as much time as we think." The rush of images and ideas in Moraes's mind reflects his hyper-awareness, as well as Rushdie's sense of a general "acceleration of things" toward the end of the twentieth century.

Due to the location of the narrative, Rushdie uses extended descriptive passages reflecting Moraes's responses to various stimuli written in long breath-lines akin to some poems of Alan Ginsberg, skillfully employing vivid images—especially sensual ones—to (as Ginsberg had it) "put iron poetry back into the line." Cochin harbor comes to life as a collage of imagery: the horns of freighters and tugboat chugs, the fishermen's dirty jokes and the throb of their jellyfish stings, the sunlight sharp as a knife, the heat that could choke you like a damp cloth pulled tightly around your head, the calls of floating hawkers, the wafting sadness of the unmarried Jews across the water in Mattancherri, the menace of emerald smugglers, the machinations of business rivals, the growing nervousness of the British colony in Fort Cochin, the cash demands of the staff and of the plantation workers in the Spice Mountains, the tales of Communist troublemaking and Congresswallah politics, the names Ghandi and Nehru, the rumors of famine in the east and hunger strikes in the north, the songs and drumbeats of the oral storytellers, and the heavy rolling sound (as they broke against Cabral Island's rickety jetty) of the incoming tides of history.

Beginning with sensory detail (sound, sight, touch), then proceeding toward psychological mood, then providing political perspective, and then moving back toward auditory impulse before concluding with a metaphysical statement, this passage is one among many similarly dazzling presentations, a product of Rushdie's desire to make The Moor's Last Sigh "linguistically very bright."

Confident that his descriptions provide a sound foundation for other types of writing, Rushdie moves beyond the traditional to indulge his proclivity for punning to show the associative links among words, occasionally indulges in postmodern asides and quips

to the reader, yokes items from popular (especially American) culture with moderately esoteric accounts of incidents in subcontinental history, exhibits his scholarly erudition with the entire panoply of literature in English, and summarizes motifs with aphorisms that are designed, as much to provoke as enlighten ("Vasco had said it years ago: corruption was the only force we had that could defeat fanaticism").

Rushdie also writes graphically clear scenes of violent action that may owe something to his evident interest in films and uses the same visual skills to make Aurora's paint ings visible. "I came around to Aurora after becoming friendly with a whole bunch of contemporary Indian painters. In them, I found affinities to my own ideas and work."

Aurora's paintings are a continuing commentary on Indian politics and are a way of placing her family into history. By concentrating on shape and color, as well as content, Rushdie gradually makes his descriptions of the paintings another form of reality, an equal element in what Robert Morace has called the "narrative extravaganza" of "hyperkinetic fiction."

Themes

Mother India

Throughout the novel, Rushdie explores the uncertainty, deception, and illusion that indwells this teeming nation: the intermingling and conflicting of many cultures, languages, and religions - although he consistently downplays the latter's significance and positive impact. Historical events intertwine with fiction, offering opportunities for reflection. Both classical myth and modern pop culture offer insights into a mysterious region.

Spice

Spice is the foundation of Gama-Zogoiby wealth. Clouds of burning spices signal warfare between Menezes and Lobo factions. Pungent sacks are stacked to form a physical barrier between the warring clans, and a rooftop love nest for Aurora and Abraham's first encounter. The aroma of spice emanating from Aurora's body drives the Rev. D'Aeth to distraction, and its washing away signifies Aurora's decision to cut her husband off from her bed. Spice rains down on Bombay as the tower of wealth explodes; normally unsentimental, Abraham had kept sacks of it close-by until the end of his life.

Sex

As we have seen above, sex and spice are intimately related. Rushdie had never dealt, in depth, with the taboo subject before this novel, and he uses the naïve, young narrator, torn between bashfulness over discussing intimacy and an inner drive to tell all, as a useful tool. Moor's parents' lust-flamed meeting and closely guarded, but abundant, sometimes surprising infidelities, his own introduction at too early an emotional age (possibly including pedophilia), prostitution, homosexuality, venereal diseases, mandatory contraception, and voluntary celibacy all find a place in the novel.

Breath

Breathing problems are the bane of the da Gama family. Lung cancer, brought on by years of smoking, claims Belle and frightens Mynah, who dies of asphyxiation, victim of a terrorist explosion. Asthma weakens Moraes and, in Chapter 4, inspires a soliloquy on the meaning of life contained in breath.

Death

Death haunts Moraes throughout the novel. Death by all of the natural elements — by water (suicides by drowning), by air (inability to breathe), by fire storms, and by earth (Aurora's plung.) Death twice removes characters from the household who were corrupting life within. Death liberates Aurora to develop her artistic gift and later to begin a family. Death claims a sister who mocks its power, and preoccupies another entranced by mysticism. Death - or perhaps murder most foul - cuts short a promising artistic career. Death claims the love of his life in a calculated gamble over who will get the lethal pill and who will stay behind to watch the drama. D'Aeth is the name of a clergyman who fears and welcomes its approach. Death is dealt as a political weapon, in the name of religion. Causing death brings Moraes satisfaction at having avenged his mother's murder; discovering he had killed an innocent man shatters that calm. Death claims one artist who restored the long-hidden image of his mother and another, who points a gun at him. Peace, when he finally rests, is his final hope.

Art

Art permeates the novel. Aurora's evolving styles and themes, society's finicky reactions to it and emotional ups and downs these inspire in her. Aurora, witness to social consciousness. Miranda, a decorator of a children's nursery; Miranda, a fabulously-successful commercial hack. Fielding, a cynical cartoonist; Fielding, a defender of society against offending rubbish. Art collected; art stolen; art consumed by fire; art used to reveal terrible secrets; art allows a son to reconnect with his lost mother; classical art; modern sculpture; whimsical cartoon character art; Bolywood, cinematic art. Art permeates and enriches this novel.

The emphasis placed on the political component of Rushdie's writing, due to the intense scrutiny of his controversial ideas resulting from the protests that culminated in the issuance of the fatwa, has tended to distract attention from other, equally important elements. As Rushdie himself observed, while he regarded Midnight's Children and Shame as "in some ways quite directly political," he thought The Satanic Verses "was the least political novel I had ever written." He explained that the "engine" of the novel was "not public affairs but other kinds of more personal and political affairs." Similarly, in discussing The Moor's Last Sigh, he responded to an interviewer's suggestion that the central theme of the novel is love by agreeing: "Yes, love.

The love of nation, love of parents, love of child, erotic love, romantic love."

This is something of an abstraction, but it is a revealing indication of how Rushdie approached the main themes of the book: The tangle of emotional responses to a country as a kind of home; the clash of positive and negative feelings engendered by a difficult relationship with a heterogeneous family, particularly the problems of dealing with a powerful, controlling father; the ways in which a creative imagination— here expressed through an exhibition of the myriad delights of language and the revelatory capacity of painting—can provide both insight and consolation as the loss of home

leads to perpetual migration; and as Rushdie's response to the interviewer indicates, the force of love in the course of human affairs, perhaps the most primal energy source in the cosmos as Rushdie sees it.

The Moor's Last Sigh is written in the tradition of the great nineteenth-century novels that combined the fate of a family with the flow of a nation's history. Rushdie makes this explicit by including a diagram of the Da Gama/Zogoiby Family Tree before the Contents page, and then, as Coetzee points out, beginning the novel with the "dynastic prelude" that establishes the character(s), direction(s), source of income and general attitude(s) of Moraes's forebears.

The plurality of this family history is crucial because there is a clash of ideas and positions from the start. The narrative begins in Cochin (now Kerala) as this is the place where the West (Europe) and the East (the Indian Subcontinent) first interacted, and it is the location of the spice trade which led to the relative affluence of the Da Gama line. Rushdie equates pepper with passion (especially in the rush of love the overcomes Abraham Zogoiby and Aurora Da Gama), and draws a distinction between the origins of both love and material success in the realm of a natural resource, and their corruption in the realms of commerce and politics, areas that are debased by their removal from the natural world. Moraes's family is torn by more than the gulf between an agricultural economy and the techno-financial manipulations of the modern world, however. Differences in temperament, demeanor, and desire stem from a more personal, internal matrix of motives that supersede the changes in the social milieu but remain linked to it. The understandable rivalry of separate families forced together by a marriage is compounded by the inner conflicts assailing the main characters.

Camoens Da Gama flirts with communism, supports Jawaharlal Nehru's program for an independent India, yet makes a journey to hear Ghandi speak, writing in his journal, "I had seen India's beauty in that crowd." Moraes also admires Nehru's critique of colonialism, but a comic motif that runs throughout the novel involves a pet dog named Jawaharlal. Indira Ghandi, who is rarely shown in any positive way (she sued Rushdie about her depiction in Midnight's Children), appears as the negative shadow of Aurora's affirmative light, but Moraes is still deeply shaken by her assassination. These contradictory impulses are an aspect of a doubling, or layering that Aurora explains by saying "worlds collide, flow in and out of one another." Coetzee feels that this is the key pattern of the book, a palimpsest which places an alternative truth like a texture over a specific image, so that Moraes sees himself "neither as Catholic nor as jew ... a jewholic-anonymous."

The historical universe of the novel is set in motion by the fall of Granada in 1492 which Rushdie views as "a rupture. One can see Moorish Spain as a fusion of cultures—Spanish, Moorish, Jewish.... In that fusion are ideas which have always appealed to me ... the complex, relativist, hybrid vision of things." Aurora's paintings, as Coetzee puts it, are an effort to overlay "tolerant Moorish Spain over India." Rushdie uses them to project her (and his own) "prophetic, even Cassandran fear for the nation," as his almost Utopian dream of the "plural, hybrid" independent India is distorted and repeatedly damaged by absolutist fanatics and zealots contending for power and

influence. The paintings embody some of the spiritual qualities ("a sense of community, a sense of hope and comfort, and even a kind of moral structure in people's lives") that Rushdie sees as the beneficial side of religion, and often express Aurora's love and concern for her son, while at the same time, in a version of the doubling motif, are also a method for her ("my nemesis, my foe beyond the grave") to continue to influence his life after her death.

The idea of a family—and a country— torn by conflicting desires and beliefs is felt most fervently in the story of Moraes and his father, Abraham Zogoiby. "The reality of a father is a weight few sons can bear," Moraes observes, and throughout the narrative, Moraes's struggles with his urge for filial approval and support and his growing conviction that he must remove himself from his father's reach in order to form his own identity. This thread echoes the England/India linkage, touching on tendencies of paternalism and rebellion as India responded to attitudes of imperialist derogation, while absorbing many facets of British social and cultural life. The authoritarian force Moraes faces is epitomized in his thoughts about a trashy film called Mr. India: There he sits, like a dragon in his cave, like a thousand-fingered puppet-master, like the heart of the heart of darkness; commander of uzied legions, fingertip-controller of pillars of diabolic fire, orchestrator of all the secret music of the under-spheres.

After this amalgam of images from traditional Indian folklore and modern adventure films, Moraes goes on to compare this infernal Father to some of the more dire villains of recent times, "Blofelder than Blofeld, not just Godfather but Gone-farthest, the dada of all dadaism;" and he pointedly recalls "Luke Skywalker in his ultimate duel with Darth Vader, as champions of the light and dark sides of the force." Characteristically, though, Moraes does not associate himself with Luke—instead, there is the continuing suggestion that both Zogoibys contain the entire force within their natures.

Rushdie traces the beginning of his conflict with his own father, Anis, to his first trip to England, accompanied by his father, when he was about to enter the prestigious Rugby public school. Instead of the charming storyteller he knew, Rushdie became aware of a man "drunkenly abusive," and in The Satanic Verses tells of a son in a similar situation whose rage "would boil away his childhood father-worship." Until just before his father's death in 1987, they remained estranged, and at the close of The Satanic Verses, there is a scene of reconciliation that Rushdie decided to include partially as "an act of respect." The duality of his feelings occurs again in The Moor's Last Sigh and culminates in the sense of loss that pervades the novel—loss, as John Banville summarizes, "of parents, country, self, things which to a greater or lesser degree Rushdie himself has lost." But as some kind of compensation for the loss, Moraes has gained some understanding of the things which he held dear. "How easy was my scorn for him, how long it took me to understand his pain," Moraes reflects, and even when he calls his father "the most evil man that ever lived," he is still able to note that "my own deeds had taken from me the right to be my father's judge."

Moraes is both the voice of "history" and the focal point of the narrative. His highly personalized story is ostensibly a search for the self, a search which reflects a resistance to the entropic forces of disintegration that threaten to destroy the hybrid

fusion Rushdie hopes for. The goal of Moraes's recounting (a meld of past/present/imaginative possibility) is to establish a kind of Truth which will resist tendencies toward fragmentation. The difficulty of the task is measured in Moraes's observation that "The truth is always exceptional, freakish, improbably, and almost never normative, almost never what cold calculation would suggest." When the task is successful, the central story of Aurora and Abraham (and of their son Moraes), "a story of what happens when love dies" (as Rushdie has described it), is also a story for people who desire to: cling to the image of love as the blending of spirits, as melange, as the triumph of the impure, mongrel, conjoining the best of us over what there is in us of the solitary, the isolated, the dogmatic, the pure; of love as democracy, as the victory of the no-man-is-an-island, two's company Many over the clean, mean, apartheiding Ones.

Style

Point of View

Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* is written in the first person, like an onion slowly peeled. Only at the end is it revealed that he has written down the lurid details during an imprisonment by a former family friend, and that, by doing so, he extended his life. Clearly, however, he also feels a profound need to confess the darkest secrets of his tormented family. It is a cautionary tale that the world at large needs to hear. The narrator, Moor, assures the reader that he works from memories shared by his mother as he posed for paintings and by his father, who wished to make a clean breast of his evil deeds before he died. He carefully lays out hypotheses and facts, and qualifies the telling each time new evidence comes to light.

The choppy way in which the plot advances is explained by the fact that it is a series of written, single pages. In the tradition of Scheherazade, he tantalizes with foretastes of elements he promises will be developed, circles back to elaborate on items only partially revealed, citing the uncovering of new sources of information along the way. The novel is a process of revelation by a narrator on two interwoven missions.

Setting

The Moor's Last Sigh both opens and closes in Benengeli, in a forsaken graveyard overlooking Alhambra, the site of the Moors' last stand against the advancing rulers of Catholic Spain. The bulk of the novel, however, is set on the west coast of India, on the island of Cochin, a remnant of Portuguese and British rule, and in Bombay, the great Cosmo polis, crossroads of the subcontinent, and its face to the West. The interiors of high-class buildings are most often portrayed: the Zogoiby mansions, the Cashondeliveri Towers, museums, and galleries. Wharves, nunneries, prisons, houses of worship, and the teeming streets, however, play a contrasting role.

More important than place, however, is the time in which the novel is set. Concrete historical events provide the pegs on which the narrative is woven. Reactions in India to World War I and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia are backdrops to stories about the grandparents' generation; the U-boat menace, as World War II began, provides his father an opportunity to flex his business prowess. The political turmoil of the war years and immediate aftermath allows Aurora to fill out as a character on the political arena. The Emergency Years in the mid-70s pit her against Indira Gandhi and her dynasty, and with the building communal tensions - and ultimate explosion - between majority Hindus and minority Muslims (and the even tinier, virtually inconspicuous Christians and Jews). A blend of fact and fiction provide a rich picture that one does not have to be a historian to understand and appreciate.

Language and Meaning

Rushdie is a master of words and verbal images. With equal facility he draws from history, world literature, classical art, and popular culture to weave his story. He often feigns bashfulness about subjects like sex, violence, or illness, but plunges ahead, ostensibly because they are stories the narrator must tell, and the reader senses that both the reluctance and the candidness are equally authentic. He curses, blasphemes, and shocks. He stops and starts tales, interrupting, sidetracking, returning; promising to develop later; filling in details to which he had not been privy previously.

His story line lures the reader ever forward, but the richness of his languages begs a slow down to allow closer attention and a savoring of its subtleties. His masterful plays on words in English delight. At times, he kindly explains select interlingual gems, leading one to suspect that he is also sprinkling the text with clever twists in Marathi and Arabic. He admitted to an interviewer that he delighted in spicing up the novel with these elements, and said that he can read American novels without catching all the subtleties of the New World idiom.

The variety of his characters helps to define them. Indians do not utter the standard dialect of London but the authentic variant that has evolved in their homeland. Rushdie does not look down on them in mimicry, but reflects a dialect he admires. The da Gamas share a playful manner passed down through generations. Puns, calques, odd combinations, plays on words, inserted and appended syllables all serve to set them apart. They do not "kill"; they "killofy." They also share a penchant for the wry nicknaming of everyone and everything around them. Miranda, as his only redeeming feature, expands the language to fill in missing pieces: "mistake" logically demands an antonym: he uses "hittake"; "this" and "these" require a convenient question-form; he supplies them: "whis" and "whease." Every page of the novel entertains and challenges the reader with the creativity of its language.

Structure

The Moor's Last Sigh consists of twenty chapters, divided into four sections. Fortunately, there is a genealogical chart at the beginning, to help keep track of the generations of Gama and Zogoiby relatives that populate the first half. In 120 pages of "A House Divided," we learn how Abraham and Aurora's ancestors struggled to create a successful business. We see strains of personality - positive and negative - pass down the generations. A multitude of divisions erupt and seem to be nearly overcome as the first part ends. Abraham and Aurora are together after a long estrangement and eager to begin bearing a new generation.

In Part 2, "Malabar Masala," the family's divisions fail to disappear; rather they deepen and grow permanent. The roughly 150 pages of this section cover the Zogoiby family's growing years and the flourishing of the parents' diverging careers. It ends abruptly with the enamored and exiled narrator's arrest for murder and narcotics trafficking.

Part 3, "Bombay Central," begins with the narrator cast into Bombay Central lock-up, a horrific prison, but for ninety odd pages, it treats the city as a whole: the growing communal tensions, the corrupt politics, the gangs, the black markets, the only slightly less corrupt white markets. It ends in an enormous, unprecedented cataclysm of violence that consumes the metropolis. The Zogoiby family and businesses smolder in ruins as the narrator, an active participant in the violence, flees to Spain.

Part 4, "The Moor's Last Sigh," is short and faced paced. The narrator finds himself abroad, determined to confront the man who stole his mother's artistic legacy. There, he is taken captive and forced to write his story. With him, we realize how dark his life has been, how much could have been different if anyone in his family had patience.

Quotes

"Later, on the jetty, Belle was equally blunt about her findings, complaining bitterly to Camoens that he had not stood up for her. 'Your family home is like a place lost in a fog,' she told her fiancé. 'Where is the air to breathe? Somebody there is casting a spell and sucking life out of you and your poor Dad. As for your brother, who cares, poor type is a hopeless case. Hate me don't hate me but it is plain as the colours on your by-the-way-excuse-me too-horrible bush-shirt that a bad thing is growing quickly here.'" Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 23.

"This, too, is part of my inheritance: the grave settles no quarrels." Part 1, Chapter 3, pg. 27.

"Aurora reached the top of the great staircase and saw that the chapel doors were open; the chapel itself was illuminated, and the light emanating from the doorway made a little golden sun in the stairwell dark. Aurora crept forward, peered in. A small figure, head covered by a black lace matilla, knelt at the altar. Aurora could hear the tiny click of Epifania's ruby rosary beads. The young girl, not wishing the matriarch to become aware of her presence, began to back out of the room. Just then, in complete silence, Epifania Menezes da Gama fell sideways and lay still.

'One day you will killofy my heart.'

'Patience is a virtue. I'll just bide-o my time.'

How did Aurora approach her fallen grandmother? Did she like a loving child, run forward, raising a stricken hand to her lips?

She approached slowly, circling along the walls of the chapel, moving in towards the immobile form in gradual, deliberate steps.

Did she cry out, beat a gong (there was a gong in the chapel) or in other ways do her level best to sound the alarm?

She did not" (Part 1, Chapter 5, pg. 63).

"The young heiress leaned closer towards him, grabbed his chin between her thumb and forefinger, transfixed him with her fiercest glare, and fell head over heels in love" (Part 1, Chapter 6, pg. 69).

"What was in the box? - Why, the only treasure of any value: viz., the past, and the future. Also, however, emeralds" (Part 1, Chapter 6, pg. 78).

"Suddenly, as the chandler spoke, Abraham curled upon a coil of rope felt all the mournful weight of Boabdil's coming-to-an-end, felt it as his own. Breath left his body with a whine, and the next breath was a gasp. The onset of asthma (more asthma! It's a wonder I can breathe at all!) was like an omen, a joining of lives across the centuries, or

so Abraham fancied as he grew into his manhood and the illness gained in strength. *These wheezing sighs not only mine, but his. These eyes hot with his ancient grief. Boabdil, I too am my mother's son"* (Part 1, Chapter 6, pg. 80).

"Christians, Portuguese, and Jews; Chinese tiles, promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns can this really be India?" (Part 1, Chapter 7, pg. 87).

"Aurora, with lace-covered head, and smelling strongly of sex and pepper, awaited her lover by Vasco's tomb; Oliver D'Aeth, bursting with lusts and resentments, skulked in the shadows" (Part 1, Chapter 7, pg. 96).

For several nights Abraham mewled piteously at her locked door, but was not admitted. At length, Cyrano-fashion, he hired a local accordionist and ballad-singer who serenaded her in the courtyard below her window, while he, Abraham, stood idiotically beside the music-man and mouthed the words of the old love-songs. Aurora opened her shutters, and threw flowers; then the water from the flower-vase; and finally the vase itself. All three scored direct hits. The vase, a heavy piece of stoneware, struck Abraham on his left ankle, breaking it" (Part 1, Chapter 8, pg. 115).

"As she braked, she felt a small bump.

Stories of Aurora Zogoiby being gripped by panic are rare, but this is one such tale: feeling the bump, my horrified mother, who had at once understood that someone had been staging a sit-down protest behind her car, column-shifted the Buick into first. The car leapt forward a few feet, thus passing bumpily over the stricken sailor's outstretched leg for a second time. At this moment several policemen, waiving sticks and blowing whistles, raced towards the Buick, and Aurora, acting now in a kind of dream, motivated by some disoriented notion of guilt and escape, jerked the car into reverse once more. There was a third bump, although this time it was less noticeable than on the previous occasions. Shouts of rage mounted behind her, and, completely unhinged by the situation, she lurched forward again in a wild response to the cries - barely feeling the fourth bump - and knocked at least one policeman flat on his back. At this point, mercifully, the Buick stalled" (Part 2, Chapter 9, pgs. 133-134).

"So, in writing this, I must peel off history, the prison of the past. It is time for a sort of ending, for the truth about myself to struggle out, at last, from under my parents' stifling power; from under my own black skin. These words are a dream come true. A painful dream, that I do not deny; for in the waking world a man's not as easy to flay as a banana, no matter how ripe he may be. And Aurora and Abraham will take some shaking off" (Part 2, Chapter 9, pgs. 136-137).

"My three sisters were born in quick succession, and Aurora carried and ejected each of them with such perfunctory attention to their presence that they knew, long before their births, that she would make few concessions to their post-partum needs" (Part 2, Chapter 9, pg. 139).

"Ina, Minnie, Mynah, and at last Moor. That's me: the end of the line. And something else. I'm something else as well: call it a wish come true. Call it a dead woman's curse. I am the child the lack of whom Aurora Zogoiby lamented on the steps to the Lonavla caves. This is my secret, and after all these years all I can do is say it, straight out, and to hell with how it sounds.

I am going through time faster than I should. Do you understand me? Somebody somewhere has been holding down the button marked 'FF,' or, to be more exact, 'x2'" (Part 2, Chapter 9, p. 143).

"Confident of her genius, armed with a tongue as merciless as her beauty and as violent as her work she excluded nobody from her coloratura damnations, from the hawk-swoops and rococo riffs and great set-piece ghazals of her cursing, all delivered with that cheery stone-hard smile that sought to anaesthetize her victims as she ripped out their innards" (Part 2, Chapter 11, pg. 171)

"The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantom wise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, how then could Abraham's career have been different?" (Part 2, Chapter 11, pg. 184).

"I was the only child she suckled at her breast. It made a difference: for although I received my share of the sharp end of her tongue, there was something in her attitude towards me that was less destructive than her treatment of my sisters. Perhaps it was my 'condition,' which she refused to permit anyone to call an illness" (Part 2, Chapter 13, pg. 219).

"First I worshipped my mother, then I hated her. Now, at the end of all our stories, I look back and can feel - at least in bursts - a measure of compassion. Which is a kind of healing, for her son as well as for her own, restless shade" (Part 2, Chapter 13, pg. 223).

"It is hard for me to speak of our lovemaking. Even now, and in spite of everything, the memory of it makes me shiver with yearning for what is lost. I remember its ease and tenderness, its quality of revelation; as if a door were opened in the flesh and through it poured an unsuspected fifth-dimension universe: its ringed planets and comets' tails. Its whirling galaxies. Its bursting suns. But beyond expression, beyond language was the plain *bodyness* of it, the movement of hands, the tensing of buttocks, the arching of backs, the rise and fall of it, the ting with no meaning but itself, that mean everything; that brief animal doing, for the sake of which anything - anything - might be done" (Part 2, Chapter 14, pg. 251).

"'She's married,' said Aurora, flatly. 'And currently fooling around with not one, not two, but three lovers. You want photos? Your poor sister Ina's stupid Jimmy Cash; your stupid father, and, my stupid peacock, you'" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 265).

"That night I sat alone in my room, unable to eat. It was plain that I had a choice to make. If I chose Uma, I would have to break away from my mother, probably for good. But if I accepted Aurora's evidence - and in the privacy of my own four walls I had to concede its overwhelming force - then I was condemning myself, in all probability, to a life without a partner. How much longer did I have? Ten years? Fifteen? Twenty? Could I face my strange, dark fate alone, without a lover by my side? What mattered more: love or truth?" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 267).

"'What's the big prob?' she shrugged, waving an ashy cigarette as she left. 'Giving up this stuff is harder. Trust me on this. Just cold-turkey the bitch and be thankful you don't also smoke'" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 269).

"'She was my obsession, you must have guessed that,' he said, caressing the exclamatory walls *(Pow! Zap! Splat!).* 'As she was and is and will be yours. Maybe one day you'll feel like facing up to that. Then come to me. Come before that needle hits my heart'" (Part 2, Chapter 15, p. 270).

"Only a few months previously Mynah had finally succeeded in sending Ké Ké Kolatkar to jail for his property swindles, but no real connecting the politico to the killing was ever established. And Abraham, as has been stated, got himself off with a fine listen, Mynah was his *daughter.* His *daughter.* Okay?" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 276).

"When I got home the next morning Abraham and Aurora were waiting for me in the garden, standing shoulder to shoulder, with darkness on their faces.

'What?' I asked.

'From this moment on,' said Aurora Zogoiby, 'you are no longer our son. All steps to disinherit you have been put in place. You have one day to collectofy your effects and get out. Your father and I never wish to see you again.'

'I support your mother fully,' said Abraham Zogoiby. 'You disgust us. Now get out of our sight.'

(There were further harsh words; louder, many of them mine. I will not set them down.)" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pgs. 277-278).

"She swallowed the pill.

There was a moment when an expression of immense and genuine surprise crossed her face, followed at once by resignation. Then she fell to the ground. I knelt beside her in terror and the bitter-almond smell filled my nostrils. Her face in death seemed to pass through a thousand changes, as if the pages of a book were turning, as if she were giving up, one by one, all her numberless selves. And then a blank page, and she was no longer anyone at all" (Part 2, Chapter 15, pg. 281).

"'A city does not show itself to every bastard, sister-fucker, mother-fucker,' the elephant man shouted before slamming the window shut. 'You are blind, but now wait and see'" (Part 3, Chapter 16, pg. 287).

"Listen: I do not deny that there was much about Mainduck that elicited in me profound reactions of nausea and disgust, but I schooled myself to overcome these. I had hitched my fortunes to his star. I had rejected the old, for it had rejected me, and there was no point bringing its attitudes into my new life" (Part 3, Chapter 16, pg. 300).

"That night, on the news, I heard that my mother had fallen to her death while dancing her annual dance against the gods. It was like a validation of Fielding's confidence; for her death made Abraham weaker, and Mainduck had grown strong. In the radio and TV reports I thought I could detect a rueful apologetic note, as though the reporters and obituarists and critics were conscious of how grievously that great, proud woman had been wronged - of their responsibility for the grim retreat of her last years" (Part 3, Chapter 16, pg. 315).

"And the painting they found on her easel was about me. In that last work, *The Moor's Last Sigh,* she gave the Moor back his humanity. This was no abstract harlequin, no junkyard collage. It was a portrait of her son, lost in limbo, like a wandering shade: a portrait of a soul in Hell. And behind him, his mother, no longer in a separate panel, but re-united with the tormented Sultan. Not berating him - *well may you weep like a woman* — but looking frightened and stretching out her hand. This too was an apology that came too late, an act of forgiveness from which I could no longer profit. I had lost her, and the picture only intensified the pain of the loss.

O mother, mother. I know why you banished me now. O my great dead mother, my duped progenitrix, my fool." (Part 3, Chapter 16, pgs. 315-316).

"Space-lizards, undead bloodsuckers and insane persons are excused from moral judgment, and Uma deserves to be judged. *Insaan,* a human being. I insist on Uma's insaanity" (Part 3, Chapter 17, pg. 322).

"Children make fictions of their fathers, re-inventing them according to their childish needs. The reality of a father is a weight few sons can bear" (Part 3, Chapter 17, pg. 331).

"Abraham became stone. He was ice, and flame. He was God in Paradise and I, his greatest creation, had just put on the forbidden fig-leaf of shame. 'I am a business person,' he said. 'What there is to do, I do.' *YHWH. I am that I am'"* (Part 3, Chapter 17, pg. 336).

"I turned seventy on New Year's Day 1992, at the age of thirty-five. Always an ominous landmark, the passing of the Biblical span, all the more so in a country where life-expectancy is markedly lower than the Old Testament allows; and in the case of yrs. truly, to whom six months consistently did a full year's damage, the moment had a special, extra piquancy" (Part 3, Chapter 17, pg. 339).

"Dimple! Simple! Pimple! So great to see you girls on speakers again. - Ah, bon-jaw, Kalidasa, my usual claret, silver-plate. - Now, then, Moor dear - it's OK-fine with you if I call you 'Moor'? OK-fine. *Lovely.* - Harish, howdy! Buying OTCEI, a little birdie told. Good move! Damn high equity paper, even if just now little-bit underdeveloped. - Moor, sorry, sorry. You have my absolute *undivided*, I swear□" (Part 3, Chapter 18, pg. 353).

"Ancient, irrefutable imperatives had claimed me. Against all expectation, my mother's perturbed shade was hovering at my shoulder, crying havoc. *Blood will have blood. Wash my body in my murderers' red foundaints and let me. R.I.P.*

Mother, I will." (Part 3, Chapter 18, pg. 362).

"'The message is from my mother,' I whispered, and smashed the green frog into his face. He made no sound. His fingers released my hair, but the frog-phone kept wanting to kiss him, so I kissed him with it, as hard as I could, then harder still, until the plastic splintered and the instrument began to come apart in my hand. 'Cheap fucking gimmick item,' I thought, and put it down" (Part 3, Chapter 18, pg. 367).

"As I reversed down the street I imagined I heard the barking of hungry dogs who had unexpectedly been thrown large chunks of meat, mostly still on the bone. That, and the flapping of vultures" (Part 3, Chapter 18, pg. 370).

"Peppercorns, whole cumin, cinnamon sticks, cardamoms mingled with the imported flora and birdlife, dancing rat-a-tat on the roads and sidewalks like perfumed hail. Abraham had always kept sacks of Cochin spices close at hand" (Part 3, Chapter 18, pg. 375).

"At once I had a powerful feeling of *déjà -vu,* and my head whirled. When I had recovered myself a little I marveled at the skill with which Vasco Miranda had modeled the interior of his folly upon Aurora Zogoiby's Moor paintings" (Part 4, Chapter 19, pg. 408).

"'Still, you did love her,' said Aoi. 'You were not playing a part,'
'Yes, but - '
'So, even then.' She said with finality. 'Even then, you see.'" (Part 4, Chapter 20, pg. 426).

"'A true Moor,' responded Vasco, 'would attack his lady's assailant, even if it meant his certain death.' He raised his gun.
'Please,' said Aoi, her back to the red stone wall. 'Moor, please.'
Once before, a woman had asked me to die for her, and I had chosen life. Now I was being asked again; by a better woman, whom I loved less. How we cling to life! If I flung myself at Vasco, it would prolong her life by no more than a moment; yet how precious that moment seemed, how infinite in duration, how she longed for it, and resented me for denying her that aeon!
'Moor, for God's sake, please.'
No, I thought. No, I won't.
'Too late,' said Vasco Miranda merrily. 'O false and cowardly Moor.'

Aoi screamed and ran uselessly across the room. There was a moment when her upper half was hidden by the painting. Vasco fired, once. A hole appeared in the canvas, over Aurora's heart; but it was Aoi Uë's breast that had been pierced. She fell heavily against the easel, clutching at it; and for an instant - picture this - her blood pumped through the wound in my mother's chest" (Part 4, Chapter 20, pg. 431).

Key Questions

From the moment that Salman Rushdie was forced into seclusion by the price placed on his life in 1989, it has been difficult to assess his work without considering all of its possible connections to his political predicament. Rushdie has commented that "The book is grounded in my experience of these past years," and it is not irrelevant to consider how Rushdie is using aspects of his own seclusion when he describes Moraes's incarceration in a Bombay prison and then in a lunatic's castle in The Moor's Last Sigh.

Of course, an author's entire experience can become a factor in his writing, and Rushdie has acknowledged that his books "have a spirit of connection with real life," as Ian Hamilton puts it in his very valuable biographical essay, "The First Life of Salman Rushdie" (The New Yorker, December 25, 1995 and January 1, 1996, pp. 89-113).

Rushdie's troubled relationship with his father, for instance, which seemed to reach a kind of settlement in the concluding passages of The Satanic Verses, where a son bids farewell to his dying father, apparently informs The Moor's Last Sigh in terms of the central issue of Moraes and his father, Abraham. Rushdie has rightly insisted that with regard to his work, he hopes people will "defend the text"—that is, focus debate on what the book actually says; and questions that cover Rushdie's politics should move from the ways in which The Moor's Last Sigh engages various controversial positions toward the main points of the novel itself.

1. How does Rushdie present fundamentalist philosophy in The Moor's Last Sigh?

Is it accurate to accuse him of antireligious bigotry? Are there positive elements of religious thinking or practice in the novel?

2. Since the character of Moraes Zogoiby is central to the narrative, how does Rushdie make him interesting, appealing, sympathetic, or compelling? Are the negative aspects of his character a detriment to a reader's involvement in the story?

3. The idea of family is one of the main motifs of the novel. What are some of the traits, habits, manners, and ways of being that define the Da Game/Zogoiby lines in The Moor's Last Sigh?

4. Rushdie has indicated in an interview with John Banville that "one the most important themes in the novel is loss: of parents, country, self, things which to a greater or lesser degree Rushdie himself has lost." What, specifically, are the things which are lost in The Moor's Last Sigh, and how do the characters cope with or compensate for such losses?

5. Among the different modes of knowing in The Moor's Last Sigh, the fantastic or visionary one is presented as equally important, if not equally provable, as the realistic. Consider how the supernatural or mystical operates, noting the illuminating power of

Aurora's painting, the tiles in the Cochin synagogue, and the manifestations of ghostly apparitions, among other examples.

6. One of the critical comments made about The Moor's Last Sigh is that some of the numerous characters lean toward stereotype or caricature. Apply this stricture to various characters, particularly Moraes's three sisters.

7. Indira Ghandi began a libel action directed at her "portrait" in Midnight's Children. Does Bal Thackeray, the Bom bay leader of the Shiv Sena Party, have grounds for a legal complaint in terms of Rushdie's depiction of Raman Fielding, the leader of a group based on what Rushdie has called "the most overly Hindu-fundamentalist grouping ever to achieve office anywhere in India"?

8. Rushdie's work has been enthusiastic about the establishment of the independent Indian nation after the colonial control of the British Raj. How does Rushdie present the place of the British in Indian culture? Are there any positive aspects of the colonial relationship, and how has India fared as a postcolonial country?

9. In his creation of"India" in The Moor's Last Sigh, there are an abundance of references and allusions that may not be familiar to many Anglo-American readers. Just how much of a problem is this? Does it detract from the novel?

Topics for Discussion

Discuss how Aurora's early family life shaped her as a mother. What kind of mother was she?

Only Epifania and Flory are shown as practicing religion? Discuss whether either was truly a believer, in terms of the way they treated their family.

Discuss the rocky road of Abraham and Aurora's marriage. How did they regard each other?

Discuss how the passage of time is treated in this novel.

Discuss how the blue tiles are treated. Remember to include the incident in Spain.

There is lots of American pop culture in this novel. Pick a favorite element and describe how it is used.

There are many allusions to world literature in the novel. Identify one and describe how the author uses it to develop or enrich a theme.

Vasco was a hack commercial painter but grew rich and famous around the world. Aurora was a true artist but was known only in India - and there her work was often harshly judged. Discuss the turbulent life of the artist.

We've examined how elephants are used as symbols throughout the book. Two other animals are also used symbolically: cockroaches and dogs. Pick one and discuss.

Discuss Vasco Miranda's ice needle.

Discuss the treatment of the story of Boabdil as history, myth, and subject of art. Does Raman Fielding remind you of any power brokers in our times? Name them and discuss similarities and differences.

What were Moor's feelings at the end about his mother and father?

Did being forced to write his story by Vasco Miranda help Moor in any way, other than keeping him alive while he was writing it?

The chronological table at the beginning of the book lists "'Moor (Moraes) Zogoiby, 1957- ," whereas it gives death dates for all the other characters. What do you think became of him after the novel?

Literary Precedents

Rushdie's work draws some of its greatest strength from his ability to join the structure and scope of the "classic" novels of the nineteenth century with attributes of the comic picaresques that preceded them and modernist experiments in narrative form stemming from the ground-breaking work of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In discussing his own influences, he has said that the three novels "lying behind Midnight's Children are Tristram Shandy, The Tin Drum and One Hundred Years of Solitude." These landmark fictions are also clearly predecessors for The Moor's Last Sigh in terms of Laurence Sterne's comic outlook, Gunter Grass's use of a narrative voice, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's employment of magical realism. Rushdie considers the eighteenth century a "great century" in literature, and mentions Henry Fielding's apparently rambling plot in Tom Jones as an example of a book (like The Moor's Last Sigh) in which everything is there for a purpose, where the patterns of organization are not like a straitjacket but permit a more subtle series of connective devices. Although he does not emphasize Charles Dickens, a fascination with family, the social milieu, and a larger historical context are crucial features of The Moor's Last Sigh, which are also very prevalent in Dickens's works, and the way in which a family saga parallels and informs a nation's destiny has some significant affinities with the way Tolstoy worked in War and Peace. And in concert with his admiration for Joyce's ability to "do anything," Rushdie's construction of an elaborate narrative ranging from the past to the present to the imaginary—primarily in his protagonist's differing moods and voices—reaches back to the mind of Leopold Bloom in Ulysses.

Related Titles

With the publication of Midnight's Children, Rushdie opened a new page in the annals of Indian English writing—indeed, in the entire field of English language literature. That book, according to many critics, effected a change in the "English" novel comparable to the revolution of the word unleashed by Joyce's Ulysses, opening the field so that it was "less insular and more international," as Morace states, and encouraging other writers from the former British Empire to "write back with a vengeance." Midnight's Children introduced what appears to be the central concern of Rushdie's writing life—the mapping of what he calls "an ancient civilization but it's also a new country." He is referring to the entire Indian Subcontinent, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, and his expressed intention is to provide readers with "imaginative maps" to act as guides to an emerging nation. As the scholar and poet Rukmini Bhaya Nair speculates, The Moor's Last Sigh is "the fourth (and last?) of Rushdie's subcontinental tetralogy," including Midnight's Children, Shame, and The Satanic Verses, but which also ought to include his short story "The Prophet's Hair" and his novella in the form of a fable for children, Haroun and the Sea of Stories, since they also are set in the same region. And in discussing the themes of the novel, Rushdie has observed, "The story is a metaphor for the conflict between the one and the many, between the pure and the impure, the sacred and the profane, and as such is a continuation by other means of the concerns of my previous books."

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