

Song of Kali Study Guide

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Song of Kali Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	9
Chapter 5.....	10
Chapter 6.....	12
Chapter 7.....	14
Chapter 8.....	16
Chapter 9.....	18
Chapter 10.....	22
Chapter 11.....	24
Chapter 12.....	27
Chapter 13.....	30
Chapter 14.....	33
Chapter 15.....	35
Chapter 16.....	36
Chapter 17.....	38
Chapter 18.....	39
Characters.....	41
Objects/Places.....	49
Themes.....	54
Style.....	57



Quotes..... 61
Topics for Discussion..... 63



Plot Summary

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons is a horror novel about an American poet, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, his Indian-born wife Amrita, and their baby, Victoria, who become caught up in the violent cult of the goddess Kali in Calcutta, India. It vividly depicts the horrors of a city that Bobby wishes could be obliterated from the earth and the family's personal tragedy when Victoria is kidnapped and killed.

Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, an obscure but promising American poet, is hired in June of 1977, by prestigious Harper's magazine to fly to Calcutta, India, collect a newly-found manuscript by the famed Bengali poet M. Das and if possible, interview him. Against his better judgment, Bobby takes along his Indian-born wife Amrita and their baby, Victoria. Das supposedly has been dead for years. Calcutta is a misadventure from the start. The Bengali Writers' Union stonewalls Bobby's attempts to meet Das, but a menacing-looking stranger, M. T. Krishna, befriends him, introduces him to a friend, Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji, and translates his life's story, including his initiation into the cult of the goddess Kali. Initiates must offer a corpse to Kali as a sacrifice and Muktanandaji claims that his is Das' and that it is resurrected by the goddess. When Bobby eventually meets Das, face-to-face, the poet, shockingly deformed by leprosy, confirms the story.

Bobby is too shocked by the violent and sexual nature of Das' manuscript to publish it, but promises to in order to get away. Concluding that Das wants to be released from his misery, Bobby smuggles to him in a hollow book with a loaded .45 pistol, which Das apparently during uses on Bobby in a coerced follow-up visit. Briefly imprisoned and drugged, Bobby barely escapes with his life, thanks to Krishna. In his absence, Victoria is kidnapped. Following a massive police search, Victoria is found, already dead. Fighting red tape, the grieving parents fly her home. Amrita throws herself into her career, while Bobby does nothing. They become estranged. Learning that Das is still alive, Bobby against his principles buys a Lugar, books a secret flight to Calcutta, and intends to kill everyone involved in Victoria's death, until he realizes that this would make him part of the Kali's darkness. He returns to Amrita, reconciles, and they move to Colorado to start a new life. He takes over as publisher of *Other Voices* and makes a go of it. Amrita gets pregnant again.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Abe Bronstein tries to talk Robert C. (Bobby) Luczak out of flying to Calcutta, India, but everything is arranged for a trip paid for by Harper's. Accompanied by his Indian-born wife Amrita and baby daughter Victoria, Bobby is to pick up new-found materials by the supposedly-dead poet M. Das and to try to interview him. Having served in Calcutta in 1947, Abe describes it as scary. He has witness a human sacrifice. Although he is spooked, Bobby is too stubborn not to take the trip.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 is set in the New York office of magazine publisher Abe Bronstein, as he tries to talk Robert C. ("Bobby") Luczak out of flying with his wife and baby to Calcutta, India, to pick up newly-surfaced materials by a supposedly-dead poet M. Das and to try to interview him. Bobby is something of an expert on Bengali poetry (without being able to read any language of the Indian subcontinent except English). Harper's magazine is funding the expedition. Without mentioning the cult of Kali, Bobby and Abe see that the newly-discovered Das fragments are violent and sexual, sharply contrasting with Das' usual lyrical, optimistic style.

Abe, who as a reporter on Mohandas Gandhi's 1947 fasting, aimed at ending fanatical religious warfare between Hindus and Muslims, describes Calcutta it as a scary place, a miasma. He tells of seeing a child sacrificed in conjunction with the dedication of a new bridge, and cites Rudyard Kipling's "The Bridge Builders." Bobby dislikes Kipling's fiction, argues that the trip is all arranged, and jokes that he will avoid new bridges. This sets up the pivotal role of the Howrah bridge halfway through the novel. This discussion points out that politics and religion are always intricately conjoined in India.

Note also how Bobby pressures his Indian-born wife Amrita to accompany him as translator. Although she speaks several of the languages of the Indian subcontinent, she does not speak Bengali, which is primary in Calcutta. Bobby regularly pressures Amrita into accepting his views, with tragic results. It and impatience, his less-endearing traits, are displayed in the novel.

Naming Harper's temporary editor in 1977 Chet Morrow and suggesting that less-than-stellar writers are contributing is perhaps too subtle a reference to the forced resignation of editor Willie Morris over an expose on the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. A number of famous names leave in protest. The M. Das story may be Harper's attempt to regain lost ground.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

On the eve of their flight, Bobby and Amrita talk on their porch while Victoria nurses. Amrita does not mind going. Bobby muses about how truly fascinating and different from other babies Victoria is. After tucking her into bed, while making love with Amrita, Bobby wonders about what questions Amrita is concealing.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 provides background information on Bobby and Amrita's marriage, particularly details on her memories of New Delhi and Bombay before moving to London, England, at age seven. Amrita takes the initiative in buying the home that they enjoy near Exeter, NH. This portends her decisiveness in Calcutta, when Victoria is kidnapped and Bobby is incapacitated by grief and fear. Much of the chapter is devoted to Bobby's remembering every detail of their daughter's early development, long before it is revealed that they lose her. He had been intolerant (another negative personality trait) of new parents' dotting on their children. Rather than changing his mind, he insists that Victoria is different from other babies and worthy of extolling. Descriptions of baby behaviors, here and throughout the novel, are accurate and charming, providing welcome relief from other matters being covered in the novel. Note the cloud crossing the moon that brings total and sudden darkness to Bobby as he makes love with Amrita. He will several times be plunged into darkness in Calcutta and describe it in gut-wrenching terms.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The Luczaks arrive at midnight, are jostled in the noisy, filthy terminal, and are picked up not by M. L. Chatterjee of the Bengali Writers' Union, but by M. T. Krishna, who claims to have been sent by Abe's old friend. As they careen by bus through the clogged, flooded streets to the hotel, Bobby grows irate, but Amrita restrains him. He ignores Krishna's requests to talk about Das. Their room is relatively clean and they are asleep within minutes.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 describes the Luczaks' arrival in Calcutta and first impressions. Bobby is struck by the lights everywhere and imagines that bomber crews during World War II would have perceived London or Berlin in much the same way. This heightens the ominous feeling the Calcutta has already gotten. He notes a "fungal phosphorescence" (pg. 21) oozing from countless sources that he will later also see at ground level. Bobby describes at some length the noise and filth in the airport terminal. During another visit near the end of the novel, he will find it even more pressing. At this point, he is numb and anxious about finding their promised ride. It has been arranged for M. L. Chatterjee of the Bengali Writers' Union to pick them up but there is no sign of the gentleman. Bobby writes it off to the long delay in Bombay. Chatterjee will be introduced later in the novel as a snobbish nationalist, hardly one to provide chauffeur service.

Instead, the Luczaks are taken in hand by one M. T. Krishna, who claims to be sent by Abe's old friend. His bus bears the logo of the official-sounding U.S. Education Foundation in India (USEFI). Krishna is an excitable, ominous looking young man. He reprimands Bobby for over-tipping the porters and nearly starts a riot among them. The police step in, brandishing much feared lathi sticks. This establishes an image of oppression that persists throughout the novel, even as the police become the Luczaks' allies and do their best to find the kidnapped Victoria. As the bus careens through the clogged, flooded streets of Calcutta, people and places are described in great detail, all of which point to the city's ruinous nature. Such scenarios are often repeated, driving home the hopelessness of life in Calcutta.

Bobby grows irate as they drive with the inside lights burning and the headlights off, even when Krishna explains that the switch is broken. Amrita restrains him. Bobby wants not to be seen by the impoverished masses through whom they are passing in relative luxury, but the degree of his anger is excessive. It again underlines his temper. Bobby ignores Krishna's repeated requests to talk about Das. In earlier conversations, Krishna has made clear that he considers himself an intellectual superior to his conservative American professors. He treats the American visitors with hurried contempt. It is clear that as he heads into the darkness, Krishna will be a significant



character. It is not until the end of the novel that the mix-up at the airport is explained. Ominous events are transpiring, which Bobby does not suspect. He and Amrita fall quickly asleep.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Bobby meets the executive committee of the writer's union. The drive gives him his first daylight view of Calcutta, intimidating but not fear- and anger-provoking as in the dark. Director Gupta emphasizes the privilege of receiving Das' manuscript, but refuses to let Bobby interview Das. Chatterjee reads aloud Das' explanation of why he disappears in 1969 and is now anxious to expedite publication of his new manuscript. The committee agrees to give Harper's the rights and will turn the manuscript over next day.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 formally introduces Chatterjee and other members of the Bengali Writers' Union. According to stereotype, Bobby cannot cope with long Indian names and has difficulty with the singsong accent. He wishes Amrita were along to translate. Chatterjee appears to be an urbane fellow, but the Director, Mr. Gupta, is all business. Another stereotype is invoked when, as the meeting begins, the power fails. It is taken as an everyday occurrence and candles are fetched. Chatterjee reads aloud a letter that he confirms from the signature is from Das. It explains in detail the circumstances of Das' disappearance and the reason for his wanting to get published the manuscript on which he has been working in the interim.

In the letter, Das repudiates his artistic life before his disappearance as insignificant and self-centered and suggests that he has now devoted himself to understanding and portraying the essence of Calcutta. Recall the radical change in style mentioned in Chapter 1. In Bobby's absence the committee votes to give Harper's English-language publication rights. Das cares nothing about credits, copyrights, and other legal matters, but committee members do. A Bobby sits alone during the voting, an enormous rat watches him closely, bringing him close to a violent reaction. This is a second time that he has flared since coming to Calcutta. Recall that Bobby is by disposition non-violent, like Gandhi.

The drive from the hotel to the union headquarters gives Bobby his first daylight view of Calcutta. He describes the city as a tidal flow of traffic, garbage, animals, and humans amidst decaying buildings. The heat and a wall of noise noise are distracting. The smell of incense and sewage fill the car. It is still intimidating, but not fear- and anger-provoking as in the dark. At the beginning of the chapter, over breakfast, Bobby is shocked to see a close-up photograph of a corpse in the newspaper, along with a police request for help identifying the deceased. He will remember this late in the novel when Victoria has been kidnapped and it will help police find her. Amrita, by comparison, at breakfast finds things looking up.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

This seems too easy to Bobby and leaves him with little material for his article, but Krishna is waiting in the lobby and presses him to meet a friend who will explain the truth about Das. Bobby agrees to go with him to a coffee shop at 9:30 PM. In the room, a beautiful, young stranger, Kamakhya Bharati, holds Victoria while Amrita is in the bathroom. Hearing that colleagues have communicated with her long-missing uncle, Das, Kamakhya has come to ask if Bobby has seen him. She arranges to go sari shopping next day with Amrita.

After dinner, Amrita tells Bobby about how everything in India seems simultaneously alien and familiar, frightening and seductive. She tells of seeing a ghost - of herself - on her last night before emigrating. At 9:30 Bobby goes to the lobby, where he meets Krishna, distraught over the death of writer Vladimir Nabokov. As they ride by rickshaw through the hot night, Krishna tells about the city's origins and the bloody goddess Kali. In the coffee shop, a university warehouse, waits nervous, young Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji whose story Krishna translates from Bengali on the fly.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 introduces details about the fearsome Hindu goddess Kali and her bloody cult and promises more details as it introduces a nervous, young student, Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji, whose story Krishna proposes to translate for Bobby from Bengali. Again Bobby curses his own lack of linguistic skills and wishes that Amrita were along to help. Before heading out to the meeting, Bobby again apologizes to Amrita for dragging her and Victoria to Calcutta. Amrita describes India as simultaneously alien and familiar, frightening and seductive. Bobby is surprised by the use of this last adjective, for Amrita is normally very precise about her language. She also tells about seeing a ghost - of herself - on her last night before emigrating. This is uncharacteristic of a most rational person. These factors add to the heavy mood of the story, as Bobby again rides into the fear-inspiring darkness.

A final morbid item is that the great Russian-American author Vladimir Nabokov, has just died. Krishna finds it amazing that Bobby is unaware of the death and of Nabokov's preeminence as an English-language writer. He is even more astounded that Bobby does not know how Calcutta gets its name, the place of Kali, or about the goddess herself. Although a student of Tagore, Bobby has not recently read any Vedic literature. Krishna describes how Kali is most often depicted, in her jagrata ("very awake": pg. 57) aspect: naked except for a necklace and belt of skulls, tall, gaunt, fanged mouth open, tongue protruding, holding in her four hands a sword, a noose, a severed head, and a staff. Her beautiful feet stand on a corpse. This idol reappears several times in the novel, first in Muktananandaji's narration and then to Bobby, when he is taken prisoner.



Another new character is introduced, Kamakhya Bharati, and she is first seen holding Victoria while Amrita is in the bathroom. Bobby is shocked, first to see her holding the baby, and then by her beauty. Both before and after this scene, Bobby contemplates Amrita's beauty, but it seems faded in comparison with young Kamakhya's. She claims to be Das' niece and former assistant. Going forward, Bobby obsesses about seeing Kamakhya and Amrita is amused to see him so smitten. The two women arrange to go sari shopping next day. This becomes a turning point in the novel, and Kamakhya holding Victoria is a precursor of the tragedy that is to hit the Luczak family.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Muktananandaji relates being brought up in village poverty and being sent off to school and university to lessen the strain on his family. In Calcutta he soon finds himself desperate but is befriended by a brilliant student, Sanjay, a political radical and part-time goon. Muktananandaji is soon indebted to Sanjay and learns how to survive cheaply in the city. He is surprised when Sanjay invites him to his introduction to the Kapalika Society. Knowing the Kapalikas' reputation for terror in the name of the Kali, Muktananandaji is surprised at how dignified the members are and how moving the somewhat familiar rituals. The pair are asked to return the next week, when they participate in a formal initiation ceremony in a warehouse-like temple.

The idol of Kali, small but fearsome, stands on an actual, reeking corpse, and the hand that is supposed to hold a severed head is empty. Some 50 Kapalikas enter and fill the back of the temple. Six trembling initiates form a semi-circle before the idol. Muktananandaji thinks that he recognizes the chief priest, who intones that many are called but few chosen. They will remain initiates for three years unless they leave immediately and will have to do many things to prove their worth to Kali. All stay. The first duty is to draw straws, one of which is stained with the priest's blood. They are put in dark, individual rooms afterwards and return to see the one who draws the bloody straw, virtually a child, slain at Kali's feet, his head dangling from her hand. The second duty is announced: bring a human corpse to the temple by the next midnight.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Lengthy, detailed Chapter 6 begins Muktananandaji's story, which continues through Chapter 8. It deals primarily with the nature of religion in India (no sacred/profane dichotomy as in the West) but opens by depicting the impoverished life of the village. Land is divided up equally among a man's sons. Known as gavelkind, this system is particularly ruinous in a land with as high a birth rate as India. Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji's brothers rejoice when the eldest of their number is killed in war and others leave agriculture. Young Jayaprakesh is sent off to become a doctor or a rich merchant. He is not prepared for the all-English curriculum or for the costs of university, both official for tuition, room, and board, and for the baksheesh (bribes) that are required at every turn. This is another stereotype of non-Western life that is pointed out.

Muktananandaji's salvation is a complex character, Sanjay, who is both a Marxist (joining two warring factions) and a part-time goon for one of the gangs that de facto rules Calcutta. Their machinations are sketched with vivid illustrations of kidnappings and rapes and it is claimed that the police avoid certain neighborhoods unless protected by the army. This should be borne in mind as Victoria's kidnapping enters the story. Muktananandaji senses the danger of becoming indebted to Sanjay, who occasionally

flashes a fierce temper, but he has no alternatives. He is surprised when Sanjay invites him to his initiation to the Kapalika Society.

Muktananandaji recalls being brought up as a pious devotee of the maternal goddess Durga and being warned as a youth against dangers of tantric nonsense ("alcohol, meat, fish, hand gestures, and coitus" - pg. 70), and knows a sanitized version of Kali's cult only from village practice. He hears that a virgin is sacrificed before every meeting and Sanjay half-jokingly suggests that Muktananandaji might be a candidate. Muktananandaji is surprised at how dignified the members and the moving ritual are during this first exposure. When they return for the full initiation, things change radically.

Kali's idol, already described by Krishna in academic terms is now told in minute, fearsome detail. The corpse at her feet is replaced by a decaying cadaver and the hand that is supposed to hold a severed head is empty. The temple reeks of carrion and incense. Six males are being initiated, each trying to maintain composure as they stand in a semi-circle before the idol. The chief priest intones that many are called but few chosen, a deliberate parody of the Christian missionaries who work the city. The chief priest stains one blade of grass with his own blood and then conceals it in a sheaf of others, one per initiate. They do not know whether it designates some special status or denotes which will be sacrificed.

The darkness motif begun at the Writers' Union hall is reprised: each initiate is isolate in a narrow, pitch-black cell. Darkness will several more times descend at particularly crucial moments in the story. When the initiates emerge, the candidate who draws the straw lies dead at Kali's feet and his head dangles from her hand. Muktananandaji all along has wondered why this mere youth had not instantly fled, but recalls the mortal threat if anyone tries once initiated. The survivors are dismissed, being told to wait for Kali's next call.

Home in their flat, Sanjay, who obviously knows more than he is telling about this society, explains to Muktananandaji that each must by the next midnight bring a corpse to the temple as an offering to Kali. Recall that is is too late to back out. Defectors will be hunted down and killed. Since Muktananandaji has survived to tell his story, he must have complied, but the reader's imagination is allowed to run wild until the next chapter at how this mission can be carried out.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Krishna pauses his translation when the proprietor demands that they leave. It is past closing time and he is paying for electricity. Rather than postpone the rest of the story, Bobby gives the man a 20-rupee note (U.S. \$3) and the narration resumes: Sanjay feels it is an easy task in Calcutta. They learn how animal and human remains are handled and head to the Sassoon Morgue. Claiming to be from Varanasi, Sanjay and Muktanandaji seek the bodies of two imaginary cousins, Samar and Kamila, who are said to have died recently in the city. Their stories do not match and the attendant suspects that they might be medical students. Sanjay identifies a body, but is informed of all the red tape and fees (almost 2,000 rupees) required before they can remove it. They leave. A driver informs them that most unclaimed bodies go to the Naidu Infectious Diseases Hospital on Upper Chitpur Rd. for disposal.

There at the hospital, posing as reporters, they learn about 37 fresh corpses being transported to the Ashutosh Crematorium Grounds and dumped for the night. Borrowing a van, the pair heads there at 10 PM, climbs the wall, and rummages through decomposing remains. Time is short. Sanjay finds a body and begins hauling it to the fence, while Muktanandaji in a panic struggles to free himself from a chord that he believes to be a living hand. Carrion birds frighten him. Loading the bodies into the van, they race to the temple, miles away, through heavy traffic. A Sikh policeman stops them, but lets them go when Sanjay claims that they are transporting lepers, whom the officer will have to help offload. They reach the temple at 11:50. Sanjay pulls a pistol to force tearful Muktanandaji to take hold of his body and drag it inside. It is grotesquely swollen because it is a drowning victim. They make it inside just in time.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 continues the three-chapter long telling of Muktanandaji's chilling tale. The transition reinforces the prevalence of baksheesh in Indian life, and establishes the rate of exchange. This allows the reader to calculate other values later in the story, such as the total fees required legally to process a body for cremation (2000 rupees or U.S. \$300). The red tape at the Sassoon Morgue is repeated at the tragic end of the novel, where there is little emotional room for such detail. Better to know that this is the Indian way early on. The red tape ensures that the morgue will collect at least a week's rent on space, because various agencies are only open on certain days and times. One imagines that there are also hidden fees.

Sanjay's intuition that in Calcutta it should be easy to procure a corpse is wrong. The pair visits three institutions before they are successful, and then it is almost accidental that they find two bodies. In the end, it is Calcutta's terrible traffic that provides what they need: One gets a good education in how Calcutta disposes of animal and human



remains and the enormity of the chore. Twice Sanjay shows an ability to think on his feet. At the Sassoon Morgue he convinces the attendant that they are picking up out-of-town relatives to taken them home for proper cremation. Only the red tape and cost prevent this. The passages are played for humor, as Sanjay and Muktanandaji fail to coordinate their stories before going in and the attendant suspects foul play. Medical students apparently also harvest bodies illegally. They turn next to the Naidu Infectious Diseases Hospital and pose as reporters covering the story of corpses being lost in traffic for hours. They visit a field behind the hospital where bodies are bulldozed into the earth because cremation takes so long. Dogs hunt for tidbits and are driven off by a guard with an ancient bolt-action rifle and rocks. Body parts protrude out of the earth. The effect is ghoulish and surreal.

Finally, they arrive at the Ashutosh Crematorium Grounds where 37 bodies await cremation in the morning. It is the festival of Kali Puja, so the idol's covered "godcart" is present. Pious Muktanandaji is horrified when a carrion bird ducks inside. He pictures Kali coming to life and dealing with the invader. Muktanandaji's imagination is fired up, for he believes that a dead hand captures his leg. It is a rope binding a wrapped body. In his panic it takes a long time to free himself, but dealing with a wrapped body is less disgusting than the more numerous naked ones. Recall the many passages that emphasize how hot Calcutta is, around the clock. dumped.

Another wild ride through Calcutta traffic ensues, inevitably involving the police stopping them. That most municipal policemen are Sikhs is established, preparing the way for a Sikh detective to lead the search for Victoria. The emotional load at that point in the story needs no cultural asides. More detail is given in Chapter 9. At this point, Muktanandaji focuses on lathi sticks that they brandish like billy clubs - and make swift and effective use of when opposed. Sanjay again talks them out of a perilous situation, claiming that they are transporting lepers. Leprosy (properly: Hansen's Disease) plays a major role later in the novel. Note the exaggerated reaction of the patrolman. Note also that the borrowed van has a distinctive paint job and a large dent in the door. This will suggest who is kidnapping Bobby when he is later grabbed off the street.

They reach the temple at with only ten minutes to spare. Sanjay pulls a hidden pistol to force tearful Muktanandaji to take hold of body that he has claimed and drag it inside in time. Unwrapped, it is grotesquely swollen and rubbery. Sanjay explains, knowingly, that it is a drowning victim. This soon links the corpse to the poet, M. Das. At this point, however, the focus is on Muktanandaji's disgust and terror and fear of Sanjay ending his life within seconds. Recall his savage temper, several times already exhibited.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Kneeling before the idol and the decorated corpses that they have brought in, the seven initiates, their foreheads marked, sing the sacred Sataphatha Brahmana, specifying the order of sacrifice: man, horse, bull, ram, and goat. Their eighth colleague's head hangs from Kali's hand, but his body is removed. Muktanandaji feels almost nothing as he wonders what Sanjay had meant: he should have used him. He knows that he will never see Anguda again. Nothing surprises him. Priests simultaneously flash daggers that slice a sliver from each initiate's palm. These are put in their corpses' mouths. Muktanandaji has never seen this done during a village Kali Puja. Blood drips until the mantra is sung and the hands are bandaged. Muktanandaji begs Kali to end the ordeal soon, but she does not.

The Brahman inspects the corpses slowly and selects Muktanandaji's to be placed at Kali's feet. It is purified with water and painted, where its eyes should be. Muktanandaji suppresses giggles. As they continue chanting mantras, a cold wind blows through, extinguishing most of the candles. When they are re-lit, the white corpse begins to change, looking more human. Eyes appear. It begins to breathe, sits up, kisses Kali's foot, turns, stands, and looms over Muktanandaji, and touches his forehead before moving on to touch each of the others, except a fat, screaming initiate, who has vanished. The Brahman becomes relaxed and tells them that they are now Kapalika and must await Kali's next summons. They are led out to put on street clothing and leave, happy as school children. Muktanandaji and Sanjay separate, never to meet again. Muktanandaji wanders Calcutta, worried that Kali will call him. Eventually he returns to the university. People sense that he has changed and give him space. He never returns to the Kalighat. He cannot afford to go home. Krishna is his only friend.

It is 2:20 AM and Bobby aches. Muktanandaji is exhausted. Bobby demands to know what this story has to do with Das. Krishna tells him that Das is the bloated corpse that Muktanandaji brings in as his sacrifice.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 continues the narration, with no extraneous material. It describes a rite in which the initiates kneel before the bodies that they have brought in as sacrifices, chant about how sacrifice pleases Kali, offer a slice of their own flesh to her through the mouths of the corpses, and sing mantras that rise to a crescendo. A Brahman - member of the highest Indian caste, responsible for teaching and leading rituals - selects Muktanandaji's offering and a series of rituals serve to re-animate it. It blesses six of the initiates, beginning with Muktanandaji. One of their colleagues, who had shown signs of cowardice during the rituals, has disappeared. The survivors are told that they are Kapalika and are dismissed to await Kali's next assignment. They leave relieved.



For Muktanandaji time compresses during the ritual. He has no feelings other than to lament that his old life is forever gone. When Bobby is later kidnapped by Kapalika, he reports similar sensations. The resurrection is accomplished in near darkness, when winds suddenly blow out most of the candles. This reinforces the darkness motif. It is a mystical force, commonly found in religious texts, rather than the inefficiency of the Indian electrical grid that is responsible. Muktanandaji has seen rituals of the Kali Puja festival, but they are nothing like these.

Perhaps because of the Muktanandaji's state during the ritual, his re-telling moves relentlessly forward with a flat emotional quality. Muktanandaji begs Kali to bring the ordeal to an end, but she declines. The morbid details are heaped on and the text of Hindu hymns are given in full. There is a sense of awe. Particularly dramatic (not melodramatic) is the slow process of the corpse returning to a semblance of life. It is still ghastly as it begins to move. There is a sharp break as the corpse walks out of the scene. The Brahman visibly changes, relaxing, and telling them that they are full-fledged Kapalika who must await Kali's next summons, whatever that might be. Recall that they remain initiates for three years. Recall also that Muktanandaji had characterized the Brahman and priests as ordinary-looking citizens, perhaps bankers who are accustomed to smiling at customers.

Muktanandaji and Sanjay never meet again and Muktanandaji slowly returns to university life, but sense that he is somehow now untouchable. He and Krishna seem somehow surprised that Bobby fails to realize that the bloated corpse is Das. It is an unexpected and shocking revelation, crowning a draining three-hour recitation.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Bobby dreams about corridors and caverns and of Amrita and Victoria being locked in a wholesale furniture warehouse in which he had worked during college. When the phone rings at 8:05 AM, Amrita answers it. She says there is a one-day delay in picking up the manuscript and they are invited to tea at Chatterjee's. He next awakes at 10:28, as room service breakfast is delivered. Amrita feigns treating him like a sahib. She and Kamakhya have already gone shopping and much material will be delivered later.

Bobby shares with Amrita the gist of his meeting with the Mysterious Stranger and all of his revelations, omitting certain parts. Amrita seems somehow distracted and disturbed. Bobby claims not to have been frightened, spending the night in Calcutta. They both wish that she had been there to translate, at least the cultural elements. Despite the fantastic elements, Bobby feels that Muktanandaji believes that he is telling the truth - although the whole thing could be a scam by Krishna. Bobby admits to giving Muktanandaji a blank \$20 traveler's check on which to escape to South America or do whatever he wants.

Bobby has gotten little that he can use in the Harper's article. Muktanandaji's story is too trite. Bobby wants Amrita and Victoria to fly that night to London. Once he picks up the manuscript, he will rendezvous with them in New York City. Bobby shoots down all of Amrita's objections, but with both BOAC and Pan Am having canceled their night flights out of Calcutta, they are stuck. At any rate, Amrita does not want to fly without Bobby. He wants to put his family on a 6:30 AM flight.

The Luczaks sightsee, after a fashion and despite the oppressive heat, enjoying the India Museum, whose Kali figurine seems not very frightening; the ten-armed Durga looks much worse. They enjoy idols of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of prosperity. It is too late to show the baby the Victoria Memorial Hall for which she is named. When they return to the hotel, Chatterjee's car is waiting. During the one-hour crawl through traffic, they see sprawling chawls, the terrible slums that are grown up outside grim factories. It is a "panorama of human hopelessness" (pg. 125). Everything changes when they cross into the old British neighborhoods, which suffer only controlled decay.

Chatterjee avoids the topic of Das, but talks authoritatively about Indira Gandhi's political fall and tries hard to draw Bobby into offering a non-diplomatic, non-euphemistic view of Calcutta. Over fine Scotch, the men exchange metaphors and debate the reality of specific national psyches. Chatterjee holds that Calcutta is no worse than London at the dawn of Britain's Industrial Revolution. When Bobby talks about the seething violence that he perceives in Calcutta, Chatterjee tells of witnessing as a child during the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1947 a brutal act of butchery outside their very gate. Ordinary people - neighbors - carry it out and go back to being ordinary. It is similar to the looting that breaks out in New York City during the 1965 blackout. Newspaper pundits debate



what such uprisings mean, but to Chatterjee they suggest that urban poverty begets barbarism everywhere. When Amrita objects, saying that cultures obey set theory, and offering two personal anecdotes to point objectively to India's backwardness and perverted values, Mr. and Mrs. Chatterjee are offended that a woman would dare express opinions.

During the ride home, Bobby chides Amrita for her lack of diplomacy and she expounds on her views. Little girls in India have no childhood and it is not a case of how cultural sets overlap or not - although she believes that the Indian cultural set is an utter failure and that East and West are incompatible. Since she is a product of such a cultural blending, this is distressing. The problem is bigger, resulting from differing geometries (e.g., Euclidean and non-Euclidean). Different theories and axioms result in different realities.

Waiting for Bobby at the hotel is Inspector Singh of the Calcutta Metropolitan Police. Singh asks if Bobby knows Das' whereabouts and seeks permission discretely to follow him to the rendezvous to pick up the manuscript. Bobby tells all that he knows, other than Muktanandaji's fantastic tale. He wants his family out of India and does not care if Chatterjee, Gupta, and the other writers are implicated in anything.

That evening is stormy, Victoria is cranky, and Bobby's dinner is bad. At 9 PM a boy delivers sari material, which Amrita discovers is Kamakhya's by mistake. They turn in early so as to make the early flight, but the hotel is noisy all night. At 11:30 Bobby begins reading, first his *Winter Spirits*, which does not fit Calcutta's heat, and then Das' humorous poem, "Family Picnic," and the compassionate "Song of Mother Teresa." The cover photograph of Das looks like liquid-eyed, patrician Jawaharlal Nehru. Bobby can see where Kamakhya gets her beauty.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 is primarily devoted to a debate about East-West cultural differences, but it also introduces a new character, Inspector Singh, who proves crucial at the novel's climax. The Bengali Writers' Union again delay hand-over of the manuscript, which necessitates another day for the Luzhaks in Calcutta. Neither is pleased, but Amrita prefers not to fly out ahead with the baby. Airline problems make it a moot point. Eventually they will see the movement of fate. Amrita and Kamakhya's sari material get mixed up in delivery.

When Singh is introduced, the second half of an excursus on their place in Indian history and culture is given. The Sikh faith originates in the Punjab region but Sikhs come to inhabit much of India, taking advantage of the technological revolution. Many are policemen and cab drivers. They wear distinctive red turbans, large mustaches, and a conceal small symbolic swords to remind them of their faith. A heavy steel bracelet is a stronger reminder. Bobby muses about these not even being challenged when going through metal detectors to board aircraft. Singh has kept Das' case open for eight years and now, hearing rumors of new developments, wants closure for relatives and friends.



Bobby happily shares what little he knows, omitting Muktanandaji's crazy tale. He does not say what he excludes when he boils three hours down to a ten-minute account for Amrita with whom, presumably, he can speak candidly.

M. L. Chatterjee is further developed as a character, as the Luczaks visit him and his wife for high tea. The visit allows them to contrast the sheer misery of the common people's life in the vast chawls or slums. The particularities of the Indian version are described in detail in preparation for the debates ahead. As they cross the river into the old British neighborhoods, everything changes. Bobby describes the lifestyle, noting the combination of Eastern and Western cultures in the furnishings themselves and the gradual decay that the climate causes. It is a minor thing, compared to what the rest of the city suffers. Early chit-chat discusses the Emergency, just ended, which Indira Gandhi had used to solidify dictatorial power. Chatterjee is adamant about her political career being over and the debate takes place in the summer of 1977, long before her 1980 comeback. Writing this memoir after 1983, Bobby is obviously aware of the comeback and makes Chatterjee look pompous without correcting him in afterthought. It is subtle and effective.

Chatterjee wants to talk about how India, and particularly Calcutta are stereotyped and judged by Westerners. Bobby is not easily drawn into the debate over whether places have specific psyches, viz., American vs. Indian. Chatterjee holds that India is no worse than London at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution and tries to trick Bobby by reading an excerpt from an 1850 English book. He offers a recollection of a neighboring Muslim family in 1947 being torn to pieces (including their horse) by erstwhile Hindu neighbors when they decide to move to Pakistan. He emphasizes that the attackers are ordinary people before and after the event. The tragedies of 1947 have several times been mentioned in the novel. This is the most graphic. Chatterjee contends that this is analogous to the spontaneous looting that begins in New York City in 1965 the instant that electricity fails. Recall that this is a regular occurrence in Calcutta. Chatterjee has photocopies of editorial comments across the ideological spectrum debating what it says about civil rights, the war on poverty, individual morality, etc. He concludes that urban poverty begets barbarism everywhere.

When Amrita objects, saying that cultures obey set theory, and offering two personal anecdotes to point objectively to India's backwardness and perverted values, both Mr. and Mrs. Chatterjees are offended that a woman would dare express opinions. Amrita that morning in the hotel patio watches as a woman in the untouchable caste hits a downed power line while hand-clipping the lawn. When no one moves to help her, Amrita uses a wooden handle to break the contact. The woman survives and goes back to work. Chatterjee objects to Amrita's use of the pejorative term "untouchable" rather than addressing the question of why no one cares enough to help. This bottommost caste is now euphemistically dubbed the "Scheduled Class" or, using Gandhi's term: Harijan, "Beloved of God" (pg. 136). Earlier use of Scheduled Class in the novel made little sense to anyone not familiar with Indian culture, proving the power of euphemism.

Amrita's second example involves a teenage girl collecting urine from a cow on the street outside the shop where Amrita and Kamakhya buy their sari material. Chatterjee



jumps in, complaining that Amrita by reason of her birth ought to be attuned to the sacred value at play here. He adds that Prime Minister Moraji Desai drinks several ounces of his own urine daily. Shuddering, Amrita says that this is simply unhygienic and typical of the kinds of things that must change. She is not able to elucidate her theory of how cultural sets overlap or fail to, but enlightens Bobby during the ride home. She declares the Indian cultural set a failed experiment, which no one would repeat. East and West incompatibility is more akin to differing geometries than to misaligned sets. Different theories and axioms produced radically different realities. The debate does nothing to advance the novel's plot but provides food for thought on many of the things that Bobby is laying before the reader.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

When Gupta tries unsuccessfully to keep Amrita Luczak from accompanying Bobby to the transfer of the manuscript, Bobby devilishly invites Krishna along to annoy Gupta and Chatterjee. On the drive to Tagore's house, which has become a museum, Krishna reminds them that they have rejected his application for membership in the Writers' Union. The 110°F heat makes the city - and Krishna - reek. Chatterjee points out the colorful Jain Temple and describes the sect's radical concern for the preservation of all life forms. Reaching Tagore's house in Chitpur, Bobby learns that the museum doubles as a temple. Krishna relates how Tagore dies in 1941, surrounded first by disciples and, when he lingers, by a crush of people who require entertainment. Tagore writes and dates a bitter poem about going in and out of coma as Laurel and Hardy movies and Mickey Mouse are projected on the wall. He sees life as an illusion meant to amuse the gods. As Chatterjee points out photographs of Tagore's famous friends, Krishna regales them with an anecdote about Tagore and W. B. Yeats. Chatterjee is visibly annoyed.

A small, tattered boy who speaks minimal English delivers a canvas bag to Bobby and says that he will lead him to Das. There is room in the rickshaw only for the Luczaks; the others must follow in cars. As they cross the Erector Set-like Howrah Bridge, Bobby snaps a photograph that the boy declares is illegal in India. At the Howrah Railroad Station the boy tells Amrita in Hindi that Bobby should give away the 50-60 Kennedy half-dollars to whomever. The station seems larger than any structure that Bobby has seen, including Chicago's Merchandise Mart and NASA's Vehicle Assembly Building. It is filled with thousands of jostling, sweating people, many of whom live there. The noise is deafening.

Bobby gives his first coin to a needy-looking woman who carries her shrunken husband on her back. and Soon he is swarmed by hundreds of people demanding "Baba!" Bobby panics as he is pushed to the edge of the platform. Throwing the bag into the middle of the mob and being trampled, Bobby briefly passes out. He comes to in Amrita's arms. The tidal wave of humanity is spent. At Bobby's feet appears a briefcase, which he finds contains Das' manuscript. Chatterjee and Gupta drive up in a taxi.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Brief Chapter 10 describes the transfer of Das' manuscripts to Bobby. This is accomplished between two iconic locales, Rabindranath Tagore's home and the massive Howrah Railroad Station. Krishna reveals a great deal of arcane knowledge about Tagore and tells amusing anecdotes. Bobby begins to appreciate him, not in the least because Krishna bothers stiff Chatterjee and Gupta. As Chatterjee talks piously about Tagore's home being revered as a temple, Krishna recalls that in Varanasi ignorant peasants create a temple for a relief map of India, made by the government to



help teach geography. The map has its own feast day. When Krishna mentions to Bobby that Muktanandaji has gone home, Bobby jokes that Thomas Wolfe must have been wrong, alluding to Wolfe's novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

Varanasi, mentioned earlier when Sanjay and Muktanandaji are trying to obtain cadavers for their initiation, is a major center for Hindu pilgrimage. Tagore's house in Chitpur is near those earlier misadventures. As they wait for Das' representatives to arrive, the company wanders through the museum, commenting on artifacts, and hearing recordings of Tagore's musical compositions and his own readings of select poems. One's appreciation of this great man of art is greatly expanded.

The actual transfer takes place in the railroad station under mysterious circumstances. A small, tattered Hindu boy takes the Luczaks there by rickshaw and leaves after handing Bobby a sack full of U.S. coins. Told to give them away, he innocently begins selecting a particularly needy-looking woman. Pandemonium breaks out as beggars converge on him, knocking him down, clawing him, and causing him briefly to faint. Begging hereafter becomes a frequent motif in the novel. Description of the swarming induces claustrophobia in the reader, despite the immensity of the station. During the brief *mêlée* someone unseen plants a briefcase at Bobby's feet. It contains the manuscript.

Having described in brief terms the place of Sikhs in Indian life, Bobby deals with the less prevalent Jains, whose brightly-painting temple they see on the ride to Tagore's house. Chatterjee scoffs at the fanatical lengths to which Jains go to preserve life in all of its forms: wearing masks to avoid breathing in and killing insects, avoiding bathing to spare microbes, and, of course, eating nothing that has ever lived. No one can answer what they might themselves subsist on. It is an interesting aside, allowing Simmons to broaden his portrait of diverse India.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Bobby is dismayed by his reflection in the mirror and unconcerned that Chatterjee and Gupta are upset at not getting to study the manuscripts before he claims it. Normally impatient, Bobby plans not to read it until they are on the plane home. He is anxious to leave India behind. After a brief visit to the zoo in Maidan Park, the Luczaks find Krishna waiting at the hotel, anxious to know if Bobby has reviewed the manuscript. He slips Bobby a sack before leaving, explaining that it is in anticipation of a meeting with Das. Bobby is not certain that there will be a meeting. Finding inside the bag a tiny Guiseppe .25-caliber automatic pistol, Bobby hides it from Amrita.

After arranging a 4:45 AM taxi to the airport, Bobby and Amrita go to bed, but he cannot sleep. He wades into the 500 pages of Das' materials. The opening rough verse begins with Mahishasura, a powerful, malevolent demon, which turns into a turgid new translation of the Kālidāsa: Kumarāmbhava 400 A.D., which sounds like "vintage Homer via Rod McKuen" (pg. 174). The battle rages for boring millennia until the gods reach a group decision and Kali is born from Durga's forehead. She is powerful, violent, unfettered, wrapped in darkness, and feared by both gods and mortals. Before taking on Mahishasura, Kali demands human sacrifice from every village and town on earth. In a marginal note written in his own hand, Das hails the coming of the Age of Kali. He then switches to the style of fifth-century sambhava, using countless stories, tales, and anecdotes to show how the Song of Kali can be heard. Kali alone has the black power that the gods have always wanted. There follow

Bobby stops reading at 3:45 AM, leaving 100 pages unfinished and, exhausted, dreams about coming face-to-face with Kali as a beautiful, sensuous, perfumed being who arouses his passion even before she touches him. She does a graceful four-armed dance that ends by drawing him close and caressing his penis. As he pulls her close and enters her, a chorus sings hymns to Kali. Bobby awakens at 10:48 AM, angry at himself over this wet dream - and at missing Amrita's morning plane. When he lashes out at her, Amrita informs him about trying to rouse him at 4 AM but being told that he wants to remain another day. Letting him sleep, Amrita has worked on getting Kamakhya's address to exchange the sari material. Bobby insists that Amrita and Victoria fly out on the next available plane. She is already packed and offers no serious objection.

Before heading to the airport, Bobby phones Gupta to demand an interview with Das. Otherwise he will tell Harper's readers about opposition from the Writers' Union, declare the Das' manuscripts the biggest hoax since Clifford Irving, and suggest that the pornographic nature of the manuscripts suggests links with the outlawed Kapalikas. Gupta weakly threatens a libel suit before offering to try to arrange something. Bobby warns that he has already mailed a copy of his article to his New York editor with instructions to publish it, should anything befall him. The airport is less chaotic than



when they arrive. Bobby bubbles about contingencies for the flight to London and, when she still wants not to leave, observes that her bags already aboard a Pan Am flight and he has a little follow-up work to gather enough for an article. When he promises, insincerely, to exchange the sari material, Amrita jots the shop's address on a matchbook. Uncharacteristically, Bobby does not wait for the plane to take off, but races to phone Gupta, jots down another address on the matchbook, and promises to come alone.

Where in the old section of Calcutta the taxi drops him, Bobby cannot tell. He recognizes no landmarks. The streets are crowded after a fierce rainstorm. He notices that residents throw refuse out windows into narrow gaps between buildings. He is startled when two men approach from behind, one in polyester, which shows that he is a boss, and the other khaki, which shows that he belongs to the service class. Neither looks bright or pleasant. They ignore questions as they strike out on foot at a swift pace for an hour, further disorienting him. In a crowded, flooded alley, incense, bells, and atonal singing alert Bobby to the presence of a temple. The silence of the people among whom they pass convinces Bobby that his guides are Kapalikas. Bobby stumbles up a hill and passes through a fence and an eerily silent factory before the guides point out a steep stairway and depart. Pocketing a large rock for protection, Bobby climbs.

Chapter 11 Analysis

In Chapter 11 Amrita and Victoria fly out of Calcutta, against her will, and Krishna slips him an automatic pistol, in anticipation of a meeting with Das. Clearly, trouble is approaching. Amrita's mentioning Kamakhya playfully as a potential romantic rival in her absence and writing down her address on a matchbook both point to Kamakhya returning to prominence in the story. Bobby also writes on the matchbook the address where he is to meet Das, reinforcing the sense that the matchbook will be important going forward.

Much of the chapter deals with Das' manuscript, which Bobby begins reading while unable to sleep. Simmons summarizes the legend of Kali's birth. She is the gods' last hope of defeating the demon Mahishasura. Ten-armed Durga, whom Muktanandaji has described as a maternal deity, here is fearsome and becomes Kali's progenitor. All of the gods fear Kali from the start. She demands worldwide human sacrifice as a condition of her taking on Mahishasura. Bobby does not say explicitly that Das' enthusiasm over the coming of the Age of Kali upsets him, but he is tense. The drama of the situation keeps him reading, even when the style puts him off. The literary critic in him calls Das' new translation of the *Kālidāsa: Kumarāmbhava* 400 A.D. is turgid (excessively ornate) and remarks colorfully that it sounds like "vintage Homer via Rod McKuen" (pg. 174), Homer being ascribed as the author of the Greek epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and McKuen being a best-selling American poet, songwriter, and pop singer in the 1960s, whom critics often put down as sentimental. Bobby gives up reading only at 3:45 AM and sleeps through the taxi and Amrita's flight. They spar verbally about this and he unilaterally decides to drive to the airport and try to get them on another flight.



Bobby is upset with himself for having a sensuous dream in which Kali ravishes him. This, it would seem, even more than the manuscript leaves him aware of Kali's power. When he demands to meet Das, he characterizes the work to Gupta as a "pornographic paeon to a local demon" (pg. 186) that is unworthy of the great writer or of the Writers' Union. The dream is thoroughly erotic in image but chaste in expression. In another literary allusion, Bobby suggests that the Das manuscript could be the greatest hoax since Clifford Irving claims to write an authorized biography of billionaire Howard Hughes. This occurs in 1972 and would be in mid-1977 still topical in literary circles. The novel is published before the infamous Hitler diary hoax, but readers of the first edition would certainly have thought of and associated it. Bobby's threat to the Writers' Union also includes linking them with the outlawed Kapalikas.

Bobby knows that he is escorted from the address that Gupta provides him to another, equally unknown location, by Kapalikas because the dense crowds on the street give them a wide berth. Bobby weakly threatens a libel suit before offering to try to arrange something. He observes how odd it is that anyone in hot, humid India would wear polyester as a sign of social status when it cannot "breathe," over khaki, which is endemic to the subcontinent but marks the wearer as belonging to the service class. This is another illustration of how the caste system survives in India. Bobby emphasizes that he does not know where he is. His gun is hidden in the hotel. He feels sufficiently threatened to pick up and conceal a large rock. The silent Kapalikas leave him at the foot of a rickety stairway. Clearly, the stage is set for action.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Bobby enters a small, dark room hung in tattered black netting. On the small table sits a copy of his book. It reminds him of the Riverview Park fun house and hiding under his porch. After a while a tall figure shuffles in. Its eyes show great suffering. Seeing the symptoms of leprosy, Bobby gasps and cannot take his eyes off this horrible apparition. After talking about one another's work, with Bobby declaring that the Kali poem is memorable but terrible, Das, who insists that it must be published, talks about how he gradually grows sick at the time of his father's funeral. He ignores the symptoms for too long while trying Gandhi's ineffective natural cures, refuses both to enter a leprosarium and to leave his beloved India to seek modern treatments. He jumps from the middle of the Howrah Bridge into the Hooghly River, suffering an interminable drop before hitting water as hard as concrete, and watching his twisted body sinks into the mud from above, without concern or horror. Eventually something dislodges his body, he floats ashore, is found by children, and gathered in lovingly by Kapalikas, who resurrect him in their temple. Now he serves only the purposes of the Dark Mother, Kali, who alone defies death and time, as her poet, priest, and avatar.

As he listens, Bobby feels his own consciousness floating near the ceiling and cannot laugh, cry out, rage in disbelief, or flee. Bobby asks why so great a poet would get involved in this. He rejects the idea of there being beauty in death and corruption and that a pupil of Tangore could sing hymns of violence. Das in turn insists that power is the only thing in the universe that matters. It motivates through fear. All religions try to control power, but Kali alone, the Devourer of Souls, is power incarnate. Even a sentimental poet like Bobby should realize that cruelty is the only reality that the universe recognizes. Bobby recalls a few fights as a child, including forcing a little girl to remove her pants, but insists that he has never been tempted to serious cruelty. Das is dubious.

Bobby says that he may not publish the poem and prefers that Das accompany him to the U.S. and publish it personally. He silently recalls his cousin talking him into playing Russian roulette and feels the same senselessness. He had never touched guns afterwards. Das insists that his final work, a kind of birth announcement, must appear in the U.S. Finally Bobby agrees to publish at least parts and then agrees to pick out some books of poetry for Das. He promises to return with them, but intends to leave them for the Kapalikas to fetch. Das specifies Edward Robinson Arlington, author of "Richard Cory," a poem that he finds it apt to his situation.

Leaving the building, Bobby feels free and finds Calcutta beautiful. Leading him to a main street where he can hail a cab, the Kapalikas hand him a reminder to bring the books to the Kalighat at 9 PM. He laughs that Harper's will never accept this fantastic story, but the National Enquirer might. At Manny's Bookseller, Bobby spends a half hour selecting titles, two simply for their size. In his room Bobby recalls how Simon and



Garfunkel popularize Richard Cory putting a bullet through his head, and hopes that he has correctly understood Das' request. After dinner, Bobby hollows out a large hardback books to hold Krishna's gun and puts it in the book bag, third from the bottom. As he is ready to head out, Amrita and Victoria return.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 finally puts Bobby and Das face-to-face in a terrible dark room. The physical ravages of leprosy - Das reminds Bobby that it is now called Hansen's Disease, but himself uses the old term - are described in morbid detail, driven in hard for emotional impact. This shows how futile euphemism is. He tells of jumping to his death from the Howrah Bridge and muses on how horribly long a 100-foot drop takes. After feeling his back and neck snap on impact, he watches his body sink. He declares that death is banal, like most acts in life. Recall Bobby's light-hearted promise in Chapter 1 to avoid bridges while in India. Recall also how this account matches Muktanandaji. Bobby does not plan on revealing that he has heard this story but blurts it out. Das is shaken, but then claims that the Kapalikas occasionally re-enact his resurrection. He portrays these outlaws as loving and gentle with him.

As he listens, Bobby experiences the same detached, free-floating consciousness but does not share Das' sense of peace. He wants to react but cannot. They disagree strongly over the nature of the universe and the meaning of violence, evil, and power. Das declares that his teacher, Tangore, is blind and hopes that he turned to Kali in his final moments. All religions, Das declares, try to control power, but Kali alone succeeds. Bobby recalls two childhood incidents in which he acts cruelly. He notes that after a foolish game of Russian roulette he has never touched a gun. He is about to deliver Krishna's gun to Das secretly, and later will learn to shoot in preparation to returning to India to avenge his family's sufferings. Das' skeptical "We will see" (pg. 209) in response to Bobby's denial of any attraction to violence shows that he knows human nature better than Bobby. As he has with Amrita, Bobby tells half-truths and promises things that he has no intention of delivering.

Besides wanting to know that his final work will be published, Das wants new poetry to read. Bobby agrees to find him some books. He is perplexed that Das considers Edward Robinson Arlington a new poet. The author of "Richard Cory" dies in the 1930s. Bobby is intrigued by what Das means that this poem is apt to his situation. He knows the final verse, made famous in a Simon and Garfunkel song in the 1960s: "And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head." Believing that this a call for help to escape his hopeless situation, Bobby hollows out a book and inserts Krishna's loaded .45. He arranges this book beneath a few paperbacks and one hardback, hoping that searchers will get tired and miss it. At this point, he is planning to leave the bag for the Kapalikas to fetch, but they remind him that he is expected to bring it in person to the dreadful Kalighat. He realizes that the hollow book device makes smuggling the illegal weapon out of the hotel easier. He contemplates ditching it in an alley somewhere if his courage fails him.

Released and put safely into a cab, Bobby experiences the kind of exhilaration that Muktanandaji describes when the initiates' ordeal ends. Bobby is about to head out to fulfill his last obligation in Calcutta when Amrita and Victoria return. This unexpected event cannot portend good, because their departure had been such a relief to Bobby.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Amrita describes her dreadful airport experience as Bobby watches his 9 PM deadline pass. He has never seen her so upset, but still has to go. Claiming that it will take but a few minutes, Bobby cautions Amrita not to answer the door or the phone, kisses Victoria, and tells her to take care of her mom. He is scooped up by a large black car outside the hotel. Argument is futile. Bobby is sure that the Kapalikas will inspect the bag and begin beating him soon. After following a different route than before, they arrive at a locked gate. Bobby notes two tall chimneys nearby. He is patted down and his bag is inspected, but only down to the first hardback before being handed back to him. He is taken to a small room, not curtained, and finds Das seated on the floor. Bobby finds it odd that there is a tiny statue of Buddha on a shelf.

Das thanks Bobby for the books. He recalls Manny the Bookseller's kindnesses to him long ago. When Bobby suggests that hopeless Richard Cory is not worthy of a great poet, Das responds that sometimes there is no hope. Sometimes one must defy pain. Das gives Bobby an autographed volume of Tagore's poetry. He appears very weak. He whispers about Kali's power, about the power in violence and pain and the need for anarchy to be loosed on the world through Kali's song. Even in this age of the unspeakable, some acts are beyond unspeakable. One can do them by following Kali. Coming back from his rave, Das dismisses Bobby. Four Kapalikas are escorting him to the car when two shots ring out. He is dragged back to see Das bleeding, the .45 in his mouth, and is then thrust into an empty room.

Bobby cannot focus on anything. Eventually he is offered tea. When he refuses it, his left little finger is broken, and he drinks. Feeling like a coward and close to fainting from the pain, Bobby passes out. He awakens, dizzy in total blackness. After checking that they have not blinded him and have left him dressed in his own clothing, Bobby lights matches to explore his environment: an alcove closed by a black curtain. A river sounds like a giant breathing. Worried about the Kapalikas, he runs through the darkness until he collides with something and falls down. A match reveals Kali's idol. He torches his airline receipt, looking in vain for an exit. The idol disappears, to be replaced by a giant six-legged, large-breasted, hairless spider. Kali's crimson tongue rolls out, seeking him. He runs blindly, pursued by scrabbling sounds and glowing eyes. Finally seeing a window set high in the wall, Bobby leaps and holds on painfully, only to be dragged down by the legs.

Being carried by four arms, roughly, Bobby recalls what Das says about one's spirit watching after death. He hears voices and finds himself outside in the rain, and then loaded into a green van with a dented door. Recognition brings anger, which helps clear his head. To avoid being hurt further, Bobby pretends to be unconscious. Fearful of physical pain, which he has largely been spared in life, Bobby figures that if the thugs concentrate on him, Amrita and Victoria should be safe. The van moves into traffic. It



stops fast when an ox blocks the road. The Kapalikas get out to curse it, leaving only one guard. Bobby realizes that this is his only chance to escape but cannot move. Suddenly, the doors fly open. Krishna, looking maniacal, kills the guard with a blow to the throat, and drags Bobby out. His legs feel numb.

The three Kapalikas stare briefly before starting the chase through alleys and doorways. Cornered in an upstairs flat, Krishna jumps out a window into waist-deep putrid filth. Bobby eventually follows. A Kapalika, armed with a large knife, also follows, but Krishna after a long struggle kills him, bare-handed. Bobby and Krishna wade to the end of the alley and race down the street, shop-to-shop. When they seem to be safe, Krishna says goodbye. Bobby asks if he is Sanjay and asks what game they are playing, Krishna confirms that there are many games and this one is not yet over.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 brings fast-paced adventure and utter horror to Bobby, as Kapalikas deliver him to Das, Das turns the .45 on himself, the Kapalikas throw Bobby in what sounds like a dungeon and drug him, causing hallucinations about Kali's idol coming to life and pursuing him, and finally throw Bobby into the truck that Sanjay and Muktanandaji had used for transporting their stolen corpses to the initiation rite. In pain and despair, Bobby is rescued by Krishna, who reveals himself to be a skilled martial arts fighter. At the end of the chapter, Krishna does not deny that he is Sanjay, as Bobby suspects.

Raving during their brief, final meeting, Das talks about the reality of hopelessness, violence and pain. Kali's Song will unleash anarchy and her followers will be empowered to perform unspeakable deed that heretofore only she, as the unlimited goddess, has performed. This explains why in the previous meeting Das had been so insistent that his manuscript be published in the West. Recall that he had termed it a birth announcement. Bobby tries lamely to suggest that Richard Cory's solution might not be best, but to all appearances, Das when left alone puts a bullet through his head. Note that two gunshots sound. Only later does Bobby register that even with an automatic pistol, suicide should require only one shot.

Bobby's state of shock is deepened by the fact that he never breaks a bone as a child. He is amazed that someone could so matter-of-factly snap another person's finger. The pain is intense and grows with every movement. He is fairly well incapacitated even before the doctored tea takes effect. When he comes to, Bobby shows considerable survival skills, gradually burning paper products that he finds in his pockets to scope out his environment. From time to time, however, panic overtakes him and he runs blindly - once into the stone arm of Kali's idol. It sounds as though he is held in the temple in which Sanjay and Muktanandaji had been initiated. Kali's animation is probably a combination of fear and hallucinogenic drug. When later questioned about his experience, this detail will raise the most questions. Note the smooth transition effected when Bobby feels Kali's four arms embrace him but then realizes that he is being handled by two Kapalikas.



The familiar green van is again brought to a halt by a sacred animal blocking the road. Pious Hindus can and do try to convince bovines to move on, but cannot use violence on them. This aspect of Hindu culture is mentioned several times, including Amrita's condemnation of treating their urine as a means of blessing. Bobby notes that ordering a cold beef sandwich in India is a culinary mistake. The Kapalikas climbing out of the van to curse the ox gives Bobby his one chance to escape, but he cannot take it. Having several times confessed himself to be a coward, he prefers to live a few more minutes without pain than take the chance. He escapes only because Krishna kills the lone guard with a blow to the larynx and drags Bobby away. Bobby cannot get out of his head the sound of breaking plastic and refers to it several times. Perhaps it is the swift, sure violence that makes Bobby suspect that Krishna is actually Sanjay. They both enjoy blood games. Krishna menacingly suggests that many games are afoot and the present one is not yet over. The reader's thoughts turn automatically to Amrita and Victoria, whom Bobby believes to be protecting by keeping the Kapalikas' focus on himself. In the next chapter, this proves tragically wrong.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Bobby laments not catching a taxi and heading straight to the hotel. Instead, he spends a frightening hour on foot. Passengers on a bus shrink back from his horrible smell and appearance. No one speaks English and Bobby is lost. Seeing a free taxi, he offers a \$20 bill to gain admittance. At the hotel, he wonders what to tell Amrita. Seeing Inspector Singh at their open door, he figures that Amrita has reported him missing. Shortly he learns that Victoria is missing. Amrita had admitted Kamakhya, whom she had trusted. She leaves Victoria with for a minute when she needs to splash water on her face. Singh has the entire police force mobilized, but they have no clues. Extra phone lines have been added. The Luczak room's line will remain open for the inevitable ransom call. Concerned about Kapalika involvement, Bobby tells his full story, omitting only the fact that he gives Das the suicide weapon. He recalls too few details for the police to follow up. Singh shocks Bobby by clarifying that Kamakhya is not Das' niece.

Amrita is braver and smarter than Bobby. She motivates him to clean himself up and allows herself no wishful thinking. When Chatterjee phones to protest that his name being tarnished by this affair, Bobby wishes that he could strangle him. Amrita phones relatives to ask for help and hospitals and the morgue to ask about white babies being admitted. These leave her trembling and she and Bobby share their common pain. Bobby torments himself with "if I had only not..." scenarios. The police reveal the many lies: no M. T. Krishna teaches at the university, no USEFI office exists in Calcutta and the one in Madras knows nothing about Krishna or Sanjay. A Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji is not enrolled and has been missing for days. None of the Bahrati families in the phone book know Kamakhya. Her rare first name Singh points to a particularly unwholesome Kali sect. No informers have offered useful information. The Kapalikas are officially a myth. Hearing that there is no new information, Amrita phones the U.S. Embassy.

Bobby phones Abe to ask about his contact, whom Krishna had mentioned. Police discover that A. B. Shah's subordinate, R. L. Dhavan, whom he sends to Calcutta, has been murdered. Just before a massive storm knocks out power, Amrita places half-page ads in the morning papers, offering large monetary rewards for information. Singh takes the Luczaks to the morgue for Bobby to identify an adult body. Muktanandaji has been brought in after being skinned alive and left to die. In the morning the Luczaks fail to find Kamakhya in police mug books. Wednesday night Bobby goes out to find the Kapalikas and agree to do anything they want in exchange for Victoria's life. Otherwise, he will find and kill Kali. Getting nowhere, he returns to the hotel, where Amrita excitedly reports that Victoria has been found. The newspaper ad has paid off. A young couple has been detained at the airport on a visa matter. Amrita recognizes Victoria and snatches her from the girl's arms. Everyone is yelling, but Amrita's scream brings total silence. Singh's official report gives particulars about Victoria being kidnapped by



Sugata and Devi Chowdury and her body used to smuggle stolen gems out of India. Victoria is dead 2-5 hours before being found.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Chapter 14 marks the novel's tragic climax, as the police mount a massive search for baby Victoria, whom Kamakhya apparently kidnaps. Her rare first name (they learn too late) suggests a connection with a particularly nasty sect of Kali worshippers. Bobby assumes that the Kapalikas must be involved, but there is no hard evidence. There are no leads of any kind until Amrita takes out ads in the morning papers with Victoria's picture and offers rewards of \$10,000-\$50,000 - nearly a million rupees - more than they have, but not too much to appear artificial. From the opening of the chapter, Bobby observes that Amrita is the practical one during this ordeal. Feeling guilty about leaving Amrita and Victoria alone, Bobby wanders the streets in a daze, trying to make contact with the Kapalikas, to offer to do anything in exchange for Victoria's life. He appears to feel sorry enough for himself that he would welcome being murdered, but he can attract no assailants.

During the ordeal, Bobby learns the truth about the apparent airport mix-up upon their arrival. Abe Bronstein had asked a friend to help his friend out and the man dispatched has turned up murdered. At the morgue, Bobby identifies Muktanandaji's body and is horrified to learn that he had been skinned alive. Bobby recalls studying human anatomy illustrations in Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia. The corpse resembles the plate showing Muscles & Tendons, and he assumes that the morgue has begun an autopsy. Eyewitness accounts of Muktanandaji's agonizingly slow death on the street make clear the order of events. The evil that is always at work in Calcutta touches Bobby closely that night. In the morning the Luczaks cannot find Kamakhya in police mug books.

The climax is swift. There is a moment of hope as a young couple is detained at the airport when a security guard recognizes Victoria's picture from the fliers. Singh races the Luczaks to the airport and into an authorized persons only area. The sad truth that they are too late is crystallized in Amrita's scream that turns to sobbing denial. The pandemonium that breaks out during the take-down of the suspects falls instantly silent. Simmons lets the official police report, filled with jargon and dramatically set in all-capital letters, give the particulars. Victoria has been sacrificed to smuggle 3,135,000 rupees' worth of stolen gems from India to England. Victoria has been dead just 2-5 hours at this point. The emotional letdown is overwhelming.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The bereaved parents are kept for two days during an autopsy and preparation of the body. They give depositions rather than wait the weeks that Singh says it could take to close the case. Don Warden, a timid official from the U.S. Embassy apologizes to Indian bureaucrats for the difficulties that the Luczaks are causing by trying to circumvent normal procedures. At the airport there is a final delay: they must wait until Monday to get proper papers to authorize transfer of the body to the airliner. Warden suggests that they respect local custom by cremating Victoria in India, but Bobby recalls that Kali is the goddess of all cremation grounds and adamantly refuses. He threatens to kill anyone who interferes with is putting the body in the required steel coffin and leaving. He carries Victoria as he had at her birth, thirty steps. The two events mark the best and worst days of his life. The parents do not look out the windows as they leave Calcutta, carrying their baby home.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Chapter 15 begins a three-chapter anti-climax. An American official sides with the Indians in the Luczaks' battle to take Victoria's body home for burial. The reader is already acquainted with the complex red tape involved, thanks to Chapter 7's description of Sanjay and Muktanandaji's machinations to obtain corpses for their initiation into the Kapalikas. One can imagine the emotional strain of dealing with this now. Bobby refuses to let Victoria be cremated in India, recalling that Kali is the goddess of all cremation grounds. His anger flares and no one interferes as he transfers Victoria's body from a decorative coffin to the steel one required by the airlines. He touchingly parallels that transfer with the one he makes at Victoria's birth, from the delivery table to the nurses waiting to minister to her. Both require thirty steps. Bobby will relive both incidents repeatedly in the final chapters of this novel.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Victoria is buried in a small Catholic cemetery overlooking Exeter. Children cavort on the road that passes it to town. Amrita resumes teaching while Bobby does nothing. Abe comes to see his friend after a drunken late-night phone call. He advises against publishing Das' manuscript and then tells how most of his family perishes in the Holocaust. He does so to correct the idea that somethings are inevitable. In fact, some things happen out of pure bad luck and no one is to blame except the bad guys. Bobby blames himself for many mistakes and wonders who all the principles were. Abe points out that there had been two shots when Das dies. Some Kapalika, perhaps Krishna/Sanjay, must have set them both up. There is no explanation why Victoria has to die. Abe tells Bobby that he will never understand and never forget, but he must keep going, day by day. Otherwise the bad guys win.

Singh sends a brief follow-up on how Sugata Chowdury dies in prison but Devi is expected to stand trial. Bobby never hears from Singh again. Recalling how the Parsees in India dispose of their dead by feeding them to vultures in Bombay's Tower of Silence, so as not to pollute earth, air, fire, and water, Bobby shreds the manuscript and throws it into a garbage dump. The Song of Kali still echoes in his mind. Relations with Amrita deteriorate. She resumes work on her Ph.D. and teaches. Bobby reads books that he has long neglected and eventually takes a teaching position at a college near Boston. After commuting a while, he rents an apartment there and soon is not bothering to drive home weekends. The spouses never talk about Calcutta or Victoria. Things briefly improve when Bobby nurses Amrita through a bout of acute pneumonia, but then they go back to their separate lives.

Influenced by a colleague, Roy Bennet, Bobby buys a vintage 7.65mm Luger pistol. He never masters the approved two-handed stance but is able to hit targets at 20 yards. Amrita says nothing when she sees it. When he hears about a new book about Kali, which is causing quite a rage in the literary world, Bobby tries to get information from a book salesman just back from India. He gets no title or author. In mid-July, Bobby receives a photograph labeled "Das is alive." Leprous Das is easily recognized as he talks with eight other men. Bobby is sure that he also recognizes Krishna/Sanjay. Bobby destroys the photograph and packs for a trip to India, taking his Luger. Amrita wants to talk, but Bobby puts her off, claiming that he is going to New York for a few days.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Chapter 16 tells briefly of Victoria's funeral and her parents' predictable reaction to calamity: Amrita throws herself into her work and Bobby does nothing. Abe visits to tell him that he must get on with life or the bad guys win. He draws on experience with senseless tragedy, his family having perished during the Holocaust. Bobby's first



proactive step is to destroy Das' manuscript. There is an aside on Parsees funereal practices, whereby vultures devour corpses. Bobby comes as close to this as possible in destroying the manuscript. This rounds out the novel's depictions of India's diverse religious practices. Even Indians find the Tower of Silence bizarre.

Bobby, a lifelong advocate of limiting gun ownership, rather stumbles into learning to shoot as a hobby and buys a Luger. He describes the rush he feels firing the weapon. When he hears about a sensational new book about Kali published in India and then receives a photograph of Das and perhaps Krishna/Sanjay alive, Bobby packs the Luger and flies to Calcutta, again lying to Amrita about his plans. At this point they are largely estranged.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

On the flight to India, Bobby gets violently ill in a Tehran restroom during a refueling stop. The Song of Kali is loud in his head. They land in Calcutta at 3:10 AM and Bobby passes quickly through customs. He believes that Krishna/Sanjay will meet him and tell him Kamakhya's whereabouts. Chatterjee and Gupta must die for their complicity. In his mind, Bobby sees Kali dancing over the dying city. He surges along with the crowd, eyes closed, suitcase pressed to his chest. He feels his hand unzip the outer compartment, which holds the Lugar. At first he relishes letting the vengeance against Victoria's killers begin, but then fights the feeling off. As the Song grows louder, he ducks into the Restricted area in which he had transferred Victoria's body. The Song stops. Remembering his two 32-step walks holding his daughter, Bobby flings his bag far away, buys a ticket home, and catches the plane without delay. Reaching Boston, he phones Amrita about a ride home. He is shaking so badly that she wants to take him to a hospital, but he refuses.

Amrita does not interrupt as Bobby rambles about what Kali had wanted him to do but not why. He does not care if the plan is to bring him back for some other insanity at a later date. He realizes that both are blaming themselves and must get past it - or they will be part of the darkness. For the first time, they admit to missing Victoria and weep together.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Chapter 17 takes Bobby to his personal nadir, preparing with pleasure to kill all of those even complicit in Victoria's death. Again he details the surging airport crowd and relishes the feeling of letting the vengeance begin here and now. He likens it to a sacrament. He then realizes that Kali is the source of this feeling and rejects it, as he had rejected the idea of cremating Victoria, because of the inevitable connection with Kali. One gets the sense that the area in which he had transferred Victoria's body becomes a holy place, for the Song stops and Bobby flees temptation for good. Driving home from Boston, Bobby and Amrita realize that by their estrangement they are becoming part of the darkness and they vow to change. The transformation begins with the acknowledgment that they miss the daughter about whom they have not been able to talk. As a sidelight, Bobby is shown getting sick in the Tehran airport in the last days before the Islamic Revolution.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

In 1982 the Luczaks move to Colorado. Both teach in a small, underfunded college. Their salaries are lower, they miss their friends, and it is a long drive to civilization in Denver. The light and clear air help heal them. They fly to New York in 1983 for Abe's funeral and learn that he has left control of Other Voices in Bobby's hands, trusting that he will either continue it as an organ of excellence personally or through others whom he trusts, or give it a dignified funeral. Bobby takes over editorial work and finds it stimulating. Amrita enjoys advanced computer services. Bobby writes no poetry after Calcutta and the Song of Kali remains a discordant background in his life. He suffers vivid nightmares. The media cover horrors from California to Cambodia that prove that the Age of Kali has begun.

After researching the so-called Black Hole of Calcutta, prominent in rebellions in the 19th century. Bobby concludes that black holes dot the fabric of human existence. Amrita explains Dr. Stephen Hawking's theories about astronomical black holes and the possibility that, contrary to popular thought, light and other captured energies can, in fact, tunnel out of them. Furthermore, if black holes were ever to gobble up all the energy and matter in the universe, there would be a new Big Bang that would start everything afresh, with new law, forms, and galaxies. It is all too technical for Bobby to comprehend. He recalls his last words to Victoria: take care of your mom.

Amrita does not tell Bobby yet, but she is pregnant and he knows. He thinks that having a boy this time will be less painful. Occasionally he dreams of nuclear clouds rising above Calcutta, obliterating its evil. There are people elsewhere to sing the Song of Kali, who agree that all violence is power. Bobby wants their child to live in a friendly atmosphere. He has begun writing bedtime stories, not for publication. These are the songs that ought to be sung, not Kali's.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Chapter 18 is a postscript, summarizing how in the early 1980s the Luczaks move to Colorado and begin a new life, including a new child, yet to be born. Bobby takes over publication of Other Voices when Abe dies. A warm, witty letter that explains Abe's wishes is included in full. Bobby contemplates how the news reveals constantly that the Age of Kali has begun. He relishes the idea of Calcutta being destroyed by nuclear bombs, but knows that evil and the quest for power is everywhere. There is a note of hope as Amrita explains to Bobby how black holes do not, in fact, prevent the escape of all light, and that even if black holes were to consume all of the energy and matter in the universe, this would create the conditions for a new Big Bang that would start everything anew. They do not go into whether evil would inevitably invade that start-over, so one

can hope that it need not be so. Bobby's hopes for the baby seem to allow such optimism.



Characters

Robert C. (Bobby) Luczak

The 35-year-old narrator and protagonist of *Song of Kali*, Bobby is an obscure poet writing for Harper's magazine and collaborating with Abe Bronstein in publishing a small literary magazine, *Other Voices*. He grows up in a Polish-American neighborhood in Chicago, IL. A small book of his poetry, entitled *Other Voices* has recently appeared and has met with positive reviews. Bobby lives in Exeter, NH, with wife his Indian-born wife of eight years. Amrita is a 33-year-old mathematics professor, born in India. They have a baby daughter, Victoria, over whom Bobby dotes and gushes enthusiastically. In June of 1977, Harper's pays for Bobby to fly to Calcutta, India, to fetch a manuscript, purportedly written by the poet M. Das. He is to write up the adventure, including an interview with Das, who has been presumed dead for years. Bobby is reluctant to take along his family but can use Amrita's language skills. She agrees only because it will let her stop in London, England, and introduce Victoria to her parents.

Calcutta is a misadventure from the start. The Bengali Writers' Union stonewalls Bobby's attempts to meet Das. A menacing-looking young stranger, M. T. Krishna, who picks them up at the airport, claiming that it has been arranged by Abe, shows a keen interest in the Das story. He arranges for Bobby to hear the story of a friend, Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji, whose initiation into the cult of the goddess Kali involves stealing a body. He claims that he steals Das' bloated corpse and sees it resurrected by the goddess. Bobby knows that the story is too bizarre for Harper's. Bobby eventually meets Das, who is shockingly deformed by leprosy, and hears the story confirmed. Bobby is also shocked by the violent and sexual nature of the manuscript and only agrees to publish it in order to get away. He also insincerely agrees to bring Das some works of poetry, including specifically Edward Robinson Arlington's poem "Richard Cory," whose final verse, made famous in a Simon and Garfunkel song in the 1960s, reads: "And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head," Bobby hollows out a book and inserts a loaded .45 pistol, which Krishna had provided him, into a hollowed out book. Das apparently uses this following a second visit, which Bobby cannot avoid. Bobby is briefly imprisoned and drugged, and barely escapes with his life, thanks to Krishna.

Bobby is thus away from the hotel when Victoria is kidnapped. He is incapacitated for day while Amrita takes control of the situation and the Calcutta Municipal Police conduct a massive search. Bobby believes that the Kapalikas are behind it and tries, but fails, to contact them and offer to do anything in exchange for his daughter's life. Victoria is found hours too late, murdered. Bobby fights India's infamous red tape to get the body onto a plane home. Back in Exeter, Amrita throws herself into her teaching and resumes work on her Ph.D., while Bobby does nothing. Eventually he takes a teaching job in Boston and an apartment, and rarely comes home. A colleague introduces him to shooting as a hobby and he buys a Lugar .45mm gun. A life-long opponent of guns, he books a secret flight to Calcutta, intending to kill everyone involved in Victoria's death.



He had received a photograph of Das, alive with students, and a declaration that Das lives. In the airport, in the security area where he had last held his daughter's body, Bobby changes his mind when he realizes that this will make him part of the Kali's darkness. He returns to Amrita, reconciles, and they move to Colorado to start a new life. He takes over as publisher of *Other Voices* and makes a go of it. Amrita gets pregnant again.

Amrita D. Luczak

New Delhi, India-born, Amrita emigrates at age seven to England. Her father is an engineer. She recalls visits to grimy Bombay with her mother and sisters. After coming to the U.S, Amrita translates at the United Nations. She and narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak marry in 1969, while he is a struggling young writer. In 1972, Amrita dips into her trust fund to buy a house for them near Exeter, NH, unable to endure life any longer in Boston, MA. On 22 Jan. 1977, at age 33, Amrita gives birth to a daughter, Victoria, and months later agrees to accompany Bobby on a business trip to Calcutta. Her motive is stopping in London and introduce Victoria to her parents. In addition to English, Amrita speaks Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and Punjabi, but not the Bengali used in Calcutta. She also knows German and Russian. She swears only in languages that no one nearby understands.

Amrita has strong cheekbones, soft brown skin, and luminous, dark eyes. After eight years of marriage, Bobby is still amazed at her beauty and only when he compares her to young Kamakhya Bharati, does he see that Amrita is beginning to age. A Cambridge University graduate, Amrita teaches graduate-level mathematics at Boston University. Her English is free of Cambridge's flat, clipped accent. Returning to Calcutta, Amrita finds everything about India simultaneously alien and familiar, frightening and seductive. Always a strictly rational person, Amrita recalls seeing a ghost of herself on her last night before emigrating.

Amrita breaks the taboo against women speaking their minds in public when she objects to M. L. Chatterjee's contention during high tea that urban poverty begets barbarism, without reference to the specific social forces at work in a given culture. She cites two incidents that she has personally witnessed since returning to Calcutta: 1) people ignoring an untouchable woman being accidentally electrocuted and 2) a teenage girl piously anointing herself with cow urine, because it is sacred. Amrita takes action to save the first woman and believes that hygiene should trump piety. Chatterjee finds her an insult to the culture of her birth.

When Victoria is kidnapped by her supposed friend, Kamakhya, Amrita is devastated, but keeps her head far better than Bobby. She phones relatives, hospitals, the morgue, and the U.S. Embassy, and takes out an ad in the newspaper, offering a substantial reward for information. This proves successful. Victoria is seen at the airport and her kidnappers are detained until the baby can be positively identified. Victoria has been dead for 2-5 hours when Amrita snatches her out of the female suspect's arms. After returning to Exeter, Amrita throws herself into her teaching and resumes work on her



Ph.D. Bobby takes a teaching job in Boston and rarely comes home. They reconcile after he makes a second, secret trip to Calcutta, intending to kill everyone involved. They move to Colorado and start a new life. Amrita gets pregnant again.

M. Das

India's most renowned poet in the mid-20th century, Das disappears after his father's funeral in July of 1969, during the Festival of Shiva. Family and colleagues presume that he is dead and mourn him greatly. Calcutta Metropolitan Police Inspector Yashwan Singh, however keeps the official case open and continues for eight years to look for clues. In 1977 Das contacts the Bengali Writers' Union to tell his story and begins sending a new poem, *The Song of Kali*, which he wants widely and swiftly distributed. Harper's magazine flies poet Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak to Calcutta to collect the manuscript and interview Das, if possible. Through two sources, one being Das' own words, Bobby puts together what has happened.

At age 54, Das had seen no meaning in his career. Taking Gandhi's advice that one can only live by dying at least once, Das gives away his suitcases to a random beggar and enters Calcutta afresh, and devotes himself to telling the city's story completely. He lives among the dispossessed, the Scheduled Classes, formerly called untouchables. He recognizes the dark gods. The poetry fragments that reach the West are violent and sexual, at odds with Das' normally lyrical, sentimental (or better: optimistic) style. Bobby hears from Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji, a reluctant follower of Kali, that Das has drowned but been brought back to life by Kali. When Bobby and Das meet, Das confirms the drowning and resurrection, but is suffering an advanced case of Hansen's Disease or leprosy. The drowning was suicide caused by jumping from the middle of the Howrah Bridge. His spirit watches dispassionately as his body sinks and becomes food for fish. At some point his body is dislodged, is found by children, reanimated by Kali's followers, the Kapalikas. He becomes Kali's poet, priest, and avatar. He insists that Bobby published his work, which announces the coming of the Age of Kali. Hinting that he needs the pain to end, Das asks Bobby to buy him some recent books of poetry, including Edward Robinson Arlington's poem "Richard Cory." He finds it apt to his situation. Knowing the final verse, made famous in a Simon and Garfunkel song in the 1960s, "And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head," Bobby hollows out a book and inserts Krishna's loaded .45, which Das apparently uses following a second visit. At the end of the novel, Bobby receives a photograph of Das, alive with students, and a declaration that Das lives.

Bobby destroys the 500 pages of Das' materials that include a turgid new translation of the *Kālidāsa: Kumarāmbhava* 400 A.D. It sounds like "vintage Homer via Rod McKuen" (pg. 174.) It gives the full myth of Kali's birth and demand for human sacrifice. Bobby cannot be part of promoting the Age of Kali, to which Das is fanatically devoted. He learns, however, from American book dealers that this book has appeared in India. He wants to kill, yet again, Das and everyone connected with his misadventure, but refuses to become part of the darkness.



Kamakhya Bharati

Ostensibly the poet M. Das' niece, Kamakhya, 22, visits the Luczaks at their hotel to ask if Bobby has seen her long-missing uncle. In narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak's eyes, she is even more beautiful than his beloved wife Amrita, who is amused to see Bobby so smitten. Kamakhya has shoulder-length, jet-black hair, an oval face, sensual lips, and huge and penetrating eyes. Her body is voluptuous without being heavy. Bobby is disappointed to hear that she will soon marry her fiancé of eleven years. When Kamakhya takes Amrita to a good sari dealer, their purchases get mixed up and she shows up at the hotel room while Bobby is out on a misadventure that nearly gets him killed. She snatches baby Victoria, setting off a massive police search. None of the Bharatis in Calcutta has a relative with the rare first name Kamakhya, which suggests a connection with a particularly nasty faction of Kali worshippers.

Abraham (Abe) Bronstein

The editor of a small literary magazine, *Other Voices*, Abe is a long-time, personal friend of the much younger narrator, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak. Abe is a sweaty, disheveled, cigar-chomping, little man who works in a crowded little office in uptown Manhattan and at age fifty still lives with his mother in Bronxville, NY. He interacts with few people. Abe stands to gain material to publish in his magazine, but argues against Bobby's trip to India, and particularly against him taking his wife and daughter with him. Abe is upset by the shift from lyricism to sex and violence that he sees in M. Das' latest work. He declares from first-hand experience as a reporter in 1947 that Calcutta is a miasma, a swamp. Nevertheless, he arranges with A. B. Shah of the Times of India and the U.S. Education Foundation in India or USEFI to assist Bobby. Shah dispatches R. L. Dhavan, who goes missing and is eventually found murdered before Bobby's arrival in Calcutta, allowing evil forces to surround him. When they meet after the disastrous Indian trip, Abe reveals that most of his family perishes during the Holocaust, in order to convince Bobby that he understands senseless violence, as he recommends that Bobby move on with his life. At the end of the novel, Abe dies at a ripe old age and turns over *Other Voices* to Bobby, no-strings-attached.

Michael Leonard Chatterjee

A prominent member of the Bengali Writers' Union in Calcutta, India, Chatterjee is supposed to pick up at the airport narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, his wife Amrita, and daughter Victoria, and to settle them into their hotel. Chatterjee is not there when the delayed flight finally arrives because, he claims, his driver had learned that the flight would not be in until morning. Chatterjee is short, light-skinned, almost bald, impeccably dressed, and wears thick glasses. He claims on the basis of six months' worth of correspondence that M. Das, India's finest poet, long believed dead, is alive.

Chatterjee invites the Luczaks to high tea at his home in the old British quarter. His wife plays with their grandson, staying out of the conversation. Chatterjee tries out a number



of languages on Amrita and offers Bobby excellent Scotch. He avoids the topic of Das. Preferring to talk about politics and to bate Bobby into speaking candidly about Calcutta. They exchange metaphor and debate the idea of a national psyche. Chatterjee maintains that his city is no worse than London at the opening of the Industrial Revolution. When Bobby talks about the seething violence that he perceives, Chatterjee recalls the childhood horror of watching a Muslim family butchered outside their gate during the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1947. He likens this to spontaneous looting in New York City during the famous 1965 blackout. Urban poverty begets barbarism everywhere. Chatterjee resent Amrita, a woman, arguing for a particularly backward Indian mindset. When Victoria is kidnapped, Chatterjee threatens legal action if Bobby links his name to the crime. Bobby is angry enough to kill him.

Sugata and Devi Chowdury

The young Indian couple found at the Calcutta airport in possession of the newly-deceased remains of Victoria Luczak, the Chowduries are charged with conspiracy to kidnap and to murder and with attempting to transport stolen goods across an international border. Victoria is dead 2-5 hours before being found with some 3,135,000 rupees' worth of stolen gems inside her. Sugata is murdered in jail while awaiting trial but Devi is expected to be tried.

Mr. Gupta

The Director of the Bengali Writers' Union, Gupta is a tall, middle-aged man with a thin face, massive overbite, and a no-nonsense manner. He has a voice like an oboe and the look of a rodent, particularly when he smiles. He tries unsuccessfully to keep Amrita Luczak from accompanying her husband Bobby to handing over of M. Das' manuscript.

M. T. Krishna / Sanjay

A tall, skinny, unkempt but clean-shaven young man with black hair that stands out in electric tufts with piercing, frog-like eyes, a nose like a falcon's beak, and a smile like a baby shark's grimace, Krishna appears at the Calcutta airport and whisks narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, his wife Amrita, and their baby Victoria to their hotel. Bobby, on a mission to collect a manuscript from the renowned poet M. Das, had expected an official greeter, but is grateful that anyone would meet them so late. In a high-pitched voice, Krishna claims to have contacts with the U.S. Education Foundation in India, and to have been sent by his boss, Mr. Shah, acting on behalf of Bobby's good friend, Abe Bronstein.

Bristling when Bobby generously tips the porters, Krishna loads them into a USEFI-logoed bus, which races dangerously through the streets. Krishna claims to have studied for three years in the U.S. before he can no longer stand the ignorant, conservative professors. When one refuses to accept a paper on Walt Whitman's debt to Zen Buddhism it is the last straw and Krishna drops out and returns home to



Calcutta, where the Bengali Writers' Union turns him down for membership, claiming that his prose lacks "maturity, style, and restraint" (pg. 154.) Bobby is surprised to see Krishna exhibit tremendous grief at the passing of writer Vladimir Nabokov, whom he describes as the greatest stylist in the English language.

Krishna arranges for Bobby to meet Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji and translates his lurid story about being initiated along with his benefactor, Sanjay, into the Kapalikas, servitors of the goddess Kali. When Bobby falls afoul of the Kapalikas and is on the verge of being murdered, Krishna appears, shows skill in the martial arts in helping him escape, and then disappears. His grin seems to confirm Bobby's intuition that Krishna is in reality Sanjay, Muktanandaji's fellow initiate into the Kapalikas.

Victoria Carolyn Luczak

Robert and Amrita Luczak's daughter, born 22 Jan. 1977, Victoria is shown doing typical baby things that unerringly enthrall her parents. She receives her exotic name when a joke sticks. Her parents feel that it evokes the mystery, beauty, and elegance of Victoria Station in Bombay, India. Against her father's better judgment, Victoria at seven months accompanies him and her Indian-born mother, Amrita, on a trip to collect a manuscript. Victoria is kidnapped and dies within 2-5 hours of being rescued, following an intense police search. Her captors use her body to transport some 3,135,000 rupees' worth of stolen gems out of India. Despite massive red tape, Victoria is returned home for burial in Vermont. The parents for a long time cannot bear to talk about her and grow estranged.

Chet Morrow

The editor of Harper's magazine, Morrow commissions the narrator, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, a minor poet, to fly to Calcutta, India, and collect newly-found materials from the supposedly-deceased poet M. Das. Morrow arranges for M. L. Chatterjee of the Bengali Writers' Union to pick them up at the airport and settle them in their hotel. Everything goes wrong as the sinister forces of the goddess Kali intervene. The manuscript and article that Bobby obtains are too ghastly for Harper's taste, but Morrow, honorably, does not refuse to pay Bobby's bills. Morrow leaves Harper's.

Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji and Sanjay

A friend of M. T. Krishna, Muktanandaji is a nervous young man with a thin face, thick glasses, terrible acne, sweaty hands, and a high-pitched voice. He agrees to tell his story to the American writer Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak in the university coffee house, late at night. Krishna translates from Bengali on the fly. Muktanandaji belongs to the Sudra or lowest caste and comes from the village of Anguda, near Durgalapur. He is proud of his large, increasingly impoverished family, which has links to Gandhi's Walk to the Sea. Jayaprakesh is sent to school and university to become a doctor or merchant,



but arrives in Calcutta too poor to afford lodgings or food. Classes are in English, which he does not understand.

Muktananandaji is in despair when a brilliant older student, Sanjay, takes pity on him, allowing him to share a room at reduced rate and lending him money. Sanjay is a member of both the Maoist Student Coalition or MSC and the Communist Party India or CPI, considers his parents "decadent capitalist parasites" (pg. 66), but accepts their monthly dole of money. Sanjay teaches Muktananandaji to survive cheaply in Calcutta and buy his way through classes. He fails to interest Muktananandaji in politics but introduces him to the "bourgeois decadence" of women dancing in their underwear in the Lakshmi Hotel Nightclub. After three months, Sanjay also introduces his roommate to the gangs of goondas, thugees, and Kapalikas that run large parts of Calcutta. Sanjay works for the goondas dealing drugs and extorting students, but wants to join the more prestigious Kaplalikas. When finally invited, Sanjay asks Muktananandaji to go along.

Muktananandaji is used to the maternal goddess Durga and as a youth is warned by an old Brahman against dangers of the tantric nonsense that characterizes Kali's cult. Feeling indebted to Sanjay, Muktananandaji goes along and finds the members and ceremonies both dignified. Sanjay appears nervous about joining, lacking the childhood grounding in religion that Muktananandaji has enjoyed. Marxist materialism wars with his Hindu soul. Sanjay wants to join because the Kapalikas instill fear in people. Kali's initiation includes offering her corpses as sacrifice. Sanjay and Muktananandaji have quite an adventure, making the rounds of the institutions that deal with the disposal of bodies. Sanjay shows imagination and quickness of mind, which yields the needed corpses. When Muktananandaji balks at dragging his into the temple, Sanjay pulls a gun on him. Once their initiation is complete, Muktananandaji and Sanjay part company for good. Muktananandaji returns to his village but is found by the Kapalikas, flayed alive, and left to die screaming on Sudder St.

Yashwan Singh

An inspector with the Calcutta Metropolitan Police, Singh, a tall, bearded, turbaned Sikh, receives military training in England. This gives him the accent of Sandhurst rather than Oxford. His tailored tan suit is almost a uniform. A steel bracelet and concealed miniature dagger remind him constantly of his faith. Singh first visits narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak at Calcutta's Oberoi Hotel to ask if he knows the whereabouts of the supposedly-deceased poet M. Das. Das' file, begun in 1969, is still open and Das' influential friends would like closure. Bobby tells him all that he has recently learned, omitting only Jayaprakesh Muktananandaji's fantastic tale about Das being resurrected by the goddess Kali. Bobby has not yet been allowed to interview Das, if he indeed survives.

Bobby gets his interview abets Das' suicide, and narrowly escapes being killed by Kali's devotees by the time he again meets Singh, but Singh is then preoccupied with coordinating a massive search for Bobby's infant daughter, Victoria, who is kidnapped



from their room during her father's misadventures. Singh is professionally offended when Amrita Luczak takes out newspaper ads offering rewards for information. These break the case, but Victoria is already dead when Singh and her parents arrive at the airport. Singh fills out an official report and sends Bobby one update on the case before his role in the novel comes to an end.

Rabindranath Tagore

A historical figure incorporated into the novel, Tagore is the premier literary, artistic, and musical figure in Eastern India or Bengal from the end of the British Raj period until his death in 1961. Tagore begins writing poetry and stories in his youth, joins the independence movement, founds a university, and writes the Indian national anthem. His writings, poems, short stories, and novels, revolutionize Bengali art. His style of oil painting resembles N. C. Wyeth.

The novel concentrates on Tagore's final days, as he passes in and out of coma and fears the approach of death. He dies in an upstairs room of the mansion in which he is raised. American cartoons are being projected on the walls to entertain the vast crowd that gathers. The mansion, located in the Chitpur section of Calcutta, is turned into a museum and temple to his memory, which narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak and wife Amrita visit during his trip to Calcutta to collect a newly-discovered manuscript by Tagore's protégé, M. Das. Luczak, a minor American poet, has written a number of pieces about Tagore's epic poems, including one about Mother Teresa. Bobby characterizes Tagore's outlook as optimistic, like his own. At the museum Tagore is heard on recordings reading from his works in a high, squeaky voice.

Don Warden

A timid official from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, Warden deals with the Luczaks' grief over their daughter's murder by apologizing to Indian bureaucrats for their seeking to take her remains home as quickly as possible. He suggests that they respect local custom by cremating Victoria in India, but narrator Robert G. "Bobby" Luczak recalls that Kali is the goddess of all cremation grounds and adamantly refuses. He threatens to kill anyone who interferes with him. Not surprisingly, Warden backs down.



Objects/Places

Calcutta, India

The primary setting for the novel *Song of Kali*, Calcutta is described from the preface onward as a place too evil to exist. Narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, a man who has shunned violence since childhood, wishes that nuclear bombs would rain down on Calcutta and expunge it. Indian poets variously call Calcutta a "half-crushed cockroach of a city" (pg. 130) and dying courtesan. Bobby's friend, Abraham "Abe" Bronstein, who spends several months in 1947 covering Mohandas Gandhi, describes Calcutta as a miasma, worse than Burma, Singapore, and even Washington, DC, in August. It is not only a "sewer city" (pg. 10), but also scary. Seen from the air, coming in at midnight over the Bay of Bengal, Calcutta is 250 square miles of light. Bobby imagines that London or Berlin had looked that way to bomber crews during World War II. He notices from the air a "fungal phosphorescence" (pg. 21) that oozes from countless sources.

During frequent drives through the crowded streets, he sees the same phenomenon at ground level. He often describes sprawling chawls, the terrible slums that grow up outside grim factories. Calcutta is a "panorama of human hopelessness" (pg. 125.) During Indira Gandhi's Emergency, which has just ended, Calcutta is flooded with 10-15 million refugees and gangs of goondas, thugees, and Kapalikas that seize control of large parts of Calcutta. The police are afraid of them and refuse to enter some areas without army protection, which is not forthcoming.

A large number of specific locations throughout Calcutta are mentioned in the novel. The Luczaks stay at the Oberoi Hotel, located on Chowringhee St. They fly in and out of "Dum-Dum Airport," so called because hollow-point bullets, now illegal, had been manufactured there before World War I. The main train station and the major bridge spanning the Hooghly River and linking the city with the outside world. Both are named Howrah. Famed author M. Das commits suicide by jumping from the Howrah Bridge. The Bengali Writers' Union is headquartered in a hulking gray building off Dalhousie Sq. Amrita Luczak goes shopping for sari material near the Elite Cinema, where she sees a teenage girl blessing herself in cow urine, which shows how backward India is. Strand Rd. is a major thoroughfare. Prostitutes work Sudder St., where one character is also murdered by being flayed alive. The Luczaks sightsee a bit, enjoying the India Museum on Chowringhee, lunch at Shah-en-Shah's, and walk through Maidan Park near the racetrack. The zoo animals are too hot to move. The Sassoon Morgue, like Mr. Chatterjee's mansion, stands in the old English section of the city. Unclaimed bodies go to the Naidu Infectious Diseases Hospital on Upper Chitpur Rd. for disposal. Also in the Chitpur district is the late writer Rabindranath Tagore's home, which has been turned into a museum.

Calcutta or Kalisetra means "the place of Kali" (pg. 56.) The Kalighat, Kali's holiest temple, is located just blocks from the Oberoi. Bobby meets Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji in a warehouse-like coffee house at the university in a decrepit part of



town and hears about a great warehouse-like temple to Kali on the Street of the Clay Idols. Like the Kalighat, it is built over the river. Bobby's brief imprisonment by the Kapalikas appears to be beneath the Kalighat.

Bengali Writers' Union

The professional association that contacts Harper's magazine about publishing newly-discovered materials from the pen of the supposedly deceased poet, M. Das, the Bengali Writers' Union is headquartered in a hulking gray building off Dalhousie Sq. in Calcutta, India. Narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak cannot keep straight the long names of the five men and one woman, the Executive Committee, whom he meets. Mr. Gupta is the Director. The Writers' Union does everything it can to slow transfer of the manuscript to Bobby and prevent his interviewing Das. Finally they give in, but Das' espousal of the Song of Kali makes it impossible for him to publish the manuscript or to write an article. He destroys the work.

Exeter, NH

The town closest to narrator Robert C. "Bobby" and Amrita Luczak's home, Exeter provides perfect solitude for a writer. The house has a Scandinavian simplicity, contrasting with Amrita's memories of Bombay. She buys it with her dowry money in 1972, when they first wed and Bobby is a struggling writer. She can no longer stand living in Boston. She buys nine paintings, including an oil sketching by Jamie Wyeth to adorn it. While teaching at a Boston college, Bobby rents an apartment near campus and rarely comes home. Amrita is teaching and working on her Ph.D. and the marriage founders. In the 1980s, they move to Colorado to start over, renting the Exeter house. Their baby, Victoria, who is murdered in Calcutta, India, is buried in a Catholic cemetery overlooking Exeter.

Harper's Magazine

America's premier literary magazine since before the Civil War, Harper's in 1977 is being run by a temporary editor, Chet Morrow, who as a third choice hires an obscure contributor, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, to fly to Calcutta, India, all expenses paid, to collect a manuscript from the great poet, M. Das, who had been presumed dead. Bobby is to try to interview Das and write up his experiences. Morrow suggests that Bobby take his Indian-born wife Amrita along, as she speaks a number of the local languages. Bobby collects the manuscript, which he finds repulsively evil, and interviews Das. After his daughter's murder, Bobby returns to America and Harper's passes on the story, while honoring his expense vouchers. Morrow leaves the magazine.



Kali

A beautiful, terrifying Hindu goddess, the wife of Shiva, Kali is associated with death, violence, and sexuality. She is usually depicted as jaghrata or "very awake," tall, gaunt, fanged mouthed, tongue extended, holding in her four hands a sword, a noose, a severed head, and a staff. Her beautiful feet stand on a corpse, Shiva. Other statues of Kali are Chandi, "The Terrible One," and Chinnamasta or "She who is beheaded," drinking her own blood (pg. 72.) The Kanalikas are her sworn servants, priests, and avatars. Sanjay and Muktanandaji are shown finding dead bodies to serve as sacrifices during their initiation.

Narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak learns from reading the 500 pages of materials prepared by the poet M. Das, which includes a new translation of the Kālidāsa: Kumarāmbhava 400 A.D., that Mahishasura, a powerful, malevolent demon holds off the gods in a battle that rages for millennia. Eventually they reach a group decision and Kali is born from Durga's forehead, powerful, violent, unfettered, wrapped in darkness, and feared by both gods and mortals. Before taking on Mahishasura, Kali demands human sacrifice from every village and town on earth. In his own hand in a marginal note, Das hails the Age of Kali, which has begun. When Bobby realizes the full depth of Kali's evilness, he destroys Das' manuscript rather than perpetuate it, but the Song of Kali somehow is published in India. Headlines around the world demonstrate that the Age of Kali indeed has come and there are people everywhere willing to serve Her.

Kapalika Society

The most notorious of the gangs that rule and terrorize large parts of Calcutta, India, the Kapalikas worship the goddess Kali. In 1831 the British ban them for sacrificing a boy child every Friday at the Kalighat Temple, and they go underground, where they thrive during the Nationalist period. Sanjay, already associated with the Goona Brotherhood of extortioners, works a long time to get invited to membership in the Kapalikas and invites his roommate, Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji, to attend the initiation rite. Both are inducted, and the price of initiation is procuring a dead body to offer to Kali. Several initiates perish during the ritual. Kapalikas later accompany narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak to conduct an interview with the poet M. Das, and that night force him to pay a second visit. When Das apparently commits suicide using a gun that Bobby smuggles in, Kapalikas imprison him and are taking him, most probably, to execution, when he is freed and runs for his life. When the Luczak baby is kidnapped, Bobby is convinced that the Kapalikas are behind it, and promises to do anything they want in exchange for Victoria's life. The police discount his theory, officially considering the Kapalikas a myth.

Nailu Infectious Diseases Hospital

An institution, located on Upper Chitpur Rd. in Calcutta, India, the Nailu Hospital is the second place where Sanjay and Muktanandaji seek bodies for their initiation into the Kapalika Society. When a nervous intern takes them for newspaper reporters, Sanjay



plays along, asking for the hospital's official response to an incident earlier that day in which bodies are left exposed to the heat in heavy traffic. Sanjay and Muktanandaji are shown acres of land into which corpses have been bulldozed. Feral dogs try to make off with exposed morsels of flesh. The hospital has paid to have 37 corpses transported to the Ashutosh Crematorium Grounds, which becomes Sanjay and Muktanandaji's final destination.

Oberoi Hotel

The Oberoi is the centrally-located and luxurious hotel at which narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, his wife Amrita, and their infant daughter stay in Calcutta, India. It is located on Chowringhee St., has a large granite facade. Its tattered entryway is being picketed by Communist demonstrators. Inside, the lobby is protected from the street by a labyrinth of dark hallways. The Luczaks' sixth-floor room is cavernous and shadowy, but relatively clean and secure. They often take meals in the Garden Café or order room service. Once they visit the Prince's Room, where overweight, middle-aged Fatima the Exotic Dancer gives a tepid show. When Victoria is kidnapped, the Metropolitan Police bring in extra phone lines and take over the adjacent room as a command headquarters.

Other Voices

A ten-year-old literary magazine, Other Voices is published quarterly by Abraham "Abe" Bronstein, with contributions from poet Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak, this novel's narrator. Bobby has contributed from the start, serving at various times as assistant editor, poetry editor, and unpaid proofreader, and believes in its purposes. Other Voices stands to receive a boon from Bobby's trip to Calcutta, India, for whatever parts of new-found materials by Indian poet M. Das are not used by Harper's magazine will find its way to Other Voices by private arrangement of Bobby and Abe. No one publishes the manuscript, because Bobby destroys it because of its evil nature. When Abe dies in the 1980s, he leaves the magazine entirely in Bobby's hands. Bobby continues publication from Colorado and somewhat expands the scope to find new readers without alienating the old.

Sassoon Morgue

Located in the old English section of Calcutta, India, the Sassoon Morgue stands behind two stone lions and a locked gate. Access is through the rear. Human remains are picked up overnight by men of lowest caste and delivered to the crowded and stinking facility. Seeking bodies for their initiation into the Kapalika Society, Sanjay and Muktanandaji claim to have come from Varanasi to return for proper cremation the bodies of two cousins who are said to have died recently in the city. Their stories do not match and the attendant suspects that they might be medical students. Sanjay identifies a body, but is informed of all the red tape and fees required before they can remove it.

They leave. Later in the novel, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak is summoned to the morgue to identify Muktananandaji's tortured corpse.



Themes

Religion

Religion is woven throughout Dan Simmons' horror novel, *Song of Kali*. As one character says of the majority religion, Hinduism, all things are as aspects of divinity. One cannot separate the sacred from the profane. Everything, even a relief map meant to teach geography, can turn into an object of cult. The novel describes how sacred cattle routinely cause traffic jams by lying down on main roadways and young girls rush out to anoint themselves with sacred urine, should it become available. Shuddering, Indian-born Amrita Luczak declares this unhygienic and typical of the kinds of things that must change. She is accused of having lost her Indian soul.

Characters belonging to various religions allow narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak to summarize their practices and beliefs. He dwells on colorful and generally well-known aspects, avoiding controversy. Sikhs are known for violence and have done well in police and technology jobs. What they believe in is not mentioned, but they wear red turbans, mustaches, and symbols to remind them of their faith at all times. Less charitable is the description of the Jains. Haughty M. L. Chatterjee scoffs at the fanatical lengths to which Jains go to preserve life in all of its forms such as wearing masks to avoid breathing in and killing insects, avoiding bathing to spare microbes, and of course, eating nothing that has ever lived. The final minority community mentioned is the Parsees who holding fire, earth, water, and air all sacred, cannot pollute any of these for funeral purposes. They have a Tower of Silence in Bombay, where human remains are devoured by vultures. Even some Indians find this bizarre and repulsive.

The majority faith in India is Hinduism, with its great many gods and goddesses whose festivals are constantly being celebrated. Kali has her feast days along with the others and they are generally bland in the villages. Muktanandaji is partial to the maternal goddess Durga and as a youth is warned by an old Brahman against dangers of the tantric nonsense associated with Kali's cult. While in college, he joins his roommate in visiting the Kalighat Temple and finds both the members and the ceremonies dignified. Some of the chants are only slightly different from his home village. They quickly learn however, that Kali's initiation requires offering human corpses as sacrifices and that membership is irreversible. The Bengali poet, M. Das, declares that all religions try to control power, but Kali alone succeeds. Brought back from death by Kali, he becomes her fanatic poet, priest, and avatar, intent on publishing Her unexpurgated story as a birth announcement of the Age of Kali. More moderate forms of Hinduism go by the wayside in the novel. It is mentioned, however, that in 1947 Hindus and Muslims fight bloody wars over how the subcontinent is to be divided up politically. Not to be let the Jews of Europe be forgotten, Abe Bronstein talks about the senselessness of Hitler's Holocaust, concluding that no one can find a meaning for the meaningless.



Violence

Violence flows throughout Dan Simmons' novel, *Song of Kali*, both as acts of commission such as in the form of street assaults, rapes, murders, and abductions and as acts of omission, where the government and society fail to guarantee some minimal and even survivable quality of life for all. Many times the horrors of the sprawling chawls, the slums or tenements that grow up outside grim factories, are described. In them a "panorama of human hopelessness" (pg. 125) thrives. During Indira Gandhi's Emergency, which has just ended, Calcutta is flooded with 10-15 million refugees and gangs, which seize control of large parts of the city. The police are afraid of them and refuse to enter some areas without army protection. Extortion becomes a regular way of life. M. L. Chatterjee, an upper-class and educated character, insists that conditions are no worse than in London at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution and scoffs at Lyndon B. Johnson's efforts to fight a war on poverty. In 1947 Chatterjee as a young boy sees a Hindu family butchered by Hindu neighbors because they want to emigrate to Pakistan. He observes that these are normal and everyday people who get caught up in passion and then revert to their old and peaceful ways. He equates it to the phenomenon of spontaneous looting that breaks out in New York City in 1965 the instant that electricity fails. He concludes that urban poverty begets barbarism everywhere. Amrita Luczak, an educated Indian-American, claims that Indian society suffers from a particular form of violence based in the caste system.

The most intense discussion of violence comes after the poet M. Das tells narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak his life's story, which ends with suicide and resurrection by the goddess Kali. He wraps violence, evil, and power together and declares that all religions try to control power, but only Kali succeeds. Bobby can recall only two childhood incidents in which he acts cruelly and minimizes their importance. Das is skeptical about whether Bobby will feel the attraction of violence under proper conditions. Bobby does not realize that from the moment he lands in Calcutta his temper has grown foul and several times he has felt murderous. When his infant daughter Victoria is kidnapped, the novel's premier case of violence, Bobby becomes unresponsive for days before wandering the streets to offer to do whatever Kali's thugs want in exchange for his daughter's life. When Victoria is found murdered, he again flares, threatening to kill anyone who tries to block his taking her home for a decent burial.

Some time later, learning that Das' *Song of Kali* has appeared in India and the poet, after a second suicide that he abets, is still alive, Bobby returns to India, intent on killing everyone associated with Victoria's death. He smuggles a .45mm Luger in his suitcase, and feels the attraction of pulling it out and firing. He hears the *Song of Kali* throbbing in his head. Being in the part of the airport where he for the last time holds Victoria's body calms him. The *Song* stops, and he throws away the gun. He refuses to be part of Kali's darkness. Bobby and Amrita reconcile for the same reason: to prevent what they had enjoyed but lost to violence from winning out in their lives. Even these lofty ideals, however, do not keep Bobby from wishing that Calcutta would be turned into a lake of glass by nuclear weapons.



Parenthood

The light touch in the first half of Dan Simmons' dark novel, *Song of Kali*, comes when narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak meditates on his beautiful daughter, Victoria. Bobby writes his account no sooner than five years after the tragic trip to Calcutta, India, that he, wife Amrita, and Victoria make. Several times he makes clear that he is still haunted by specific memories and feels guilty about having taken them along. He does not reveal until mid-novel that Victoria is kidnapped and holds open hope for her safe return for several chapters more, before dashing all hopes and revealing that Victoria has been senselessly slaughtered to serve as a means of smuggling stolen gems out of India. Nevertheless, knowing what will eventually happen makes him savor every memory of his daughter's short life.

Chapter 2 is largely given over to Bobby's amusement at how he had always been intolerant of new parents' doting over their children. It bores other adults to tears and makes the parents appear like babbling fools. Rather than changing his mind about the behavior, Bobby insists that Victoria is altogether different from other babies and worthy of extolling. Descriptions of baby behaviors, here and up to the tragic climax of the novel, are accurate and charming, providing welcome relief from other themes.

When a timid official from the U.S. Embassy apologizes to Indian bureaucrats for the difficulties that Bobby causes, trying to circumvent normal procedures, Bobby grows violent, threatening to kill anyone who stands in the way of him taking Victoria's body home for a decent burial. He recalls hearing that the bloody goddess Kali presides over all cremation grounds in India, he adamantly refuses to let her follow normal procedures. As he transfers Victoria's remains to a steel airport coffin, he recalls carrying her from Amrita's belly to the waiting maternity nurses for weighing and other normal procedures. Both trips require thirty careful steps. The two events mark the best and worst days of his life. After Victoria's funeral, the parents never mention her again. Amrita wraps herself up in teaching and Bobby does nothing for a long while. Eventually, hearing that the *Song of Kali* has appeared in India, Bobby snaps, buys a gun, flies back to Calcutta, intending to kill everyone connected with Victoria's death. The *Song* plays in his head until he enters the secure area where he had transferred Victoria's remains. The *Song* dies and he rejects becoming part of the darkness. He and Amrita reconcile and eventually conceive another baby, whom they intend to raise in an atmosphere of happiness. They hope for a boy, to make memories less immediate and painful, but will welcome whichever sex they get.



Style

Point of View

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons is narrated in the first person and past tense by a promising poet, Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak. He has been hired by prestigious Harper's magazine to fly to Calcutta, India, collect a newly-found manuscript by the renowned Bengali poet M. Das, and interview him for an article, if, indeed, Das is alive. He has vanished for eight years and is presumed dead. Bobby sees this as a major opportunity to advance his career, and has written and lectured about Das and Das' mentor, Rabindranath Tagore. Bobby is conflicted about taking his Indian-born wife, Amrita, and infant daughter, Victoria, along. He believes that Amrita's linguistic abilities and cultural insights could come in handy, but he knows Calcutta's reputation for violence and squalor.

Calcutta is, from the start, a misadventure. Bobby dismisses seemingly minor incidents as coincidence or easily explained, but also has a tendency to lose his temper violently over incidentals. He knows when he is behaving badly and admits it. He often recalls events from his childhood in Chicago, IL, which resonate in events in India. He does not believe that he is cruel in any significant way, and is shocked when Das declares that that is yet to be seen. Bobby readily admits that he falls apart following Victoria's kidnapping, leaving it to Amrita to seek help from family and the U.S. Embassy. He claims that he could never have phoned the hospitals or morgue to see if a white baby had appeared.

Chapters 7-9 relate Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji's first-person telling of his life's story. Bobby is invited by M. T. Krishna to hear it because of its connection to M. Das. Krishna serves as translator. Bobby several times suggests that Krishna may be twisting the tale to his own ends. Ostensibly a poor university, Muktanandaji tells how he is drawn into the Kapalikas, violent devotees of the goddess Kali. He describes in gory detail the initiation rituals, which include human sacrifice and a scavenger hunt for each initial to bring a corpse as an offering to Kali. This takes Muktanandaji's and Sanjay all around Calcutta and ends by revealing that Muktanandaji brings in Das' corpse, which Kali then resurrects. Knowing that this is too wild for Harper's, Bobby figures that he will not be able to complete his assignment. When he finally meets Das, the poet confirms that he has drowned and been brought back to life. He now serves as Kali's poet, priest, and avatar. His fanaticism turns Bobby off and he eventually destroys the *Song of Kali*.

Setting

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons opens in New York City, in a small publisher's office and ends in Colorado, as narrator Robert C. ("Bobby") Luczak and his wife Amrita begin a new life after a tragic misadventure in Calcutta, India. Brief scenes are set in Exeter, NH, and Tehran, Iran, and Boston, London, and Bombay are mentioned in passing.



The primary setting is Calcutta, repeatedly described as a place too evil to exist. Indian poets variously call Calcutta a "half-crushed cockroach of a city" (pg. 130) and dying courtesan. Its steamy atmosphere is worse than Burma, Singapore, and even Washington, DC, in August. It is not only a "sewer city" (pg. 10), but also scary. From the air it looks like London or Berlin after bombings during World War II. It has a "fungal phosphorescence" (pg. 21) that oozes from countless sources. Bobby often describes life in the sprawling chawls, the terrible slums that grow up outside grim factories. He sees in Calcutta a "panorama of human hopelessness" (pg. 125). Many areas are controlled by gangs too fearsome for the police to enter some areas without army protection.

A large number of specific locations throughout Calcutta are mentioned in the novel, chiefly the upscale Oberoi Hotel, "Dum-Dum Airport," the Howrah Bridge and Howrah Railway Station. The Luczaks attend high tea at M. L. Chatterjee's mansion in the old English section of the city, near the Sassoon Morgue. In the Chitpur district the reader enters both the home of the late Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore, which has been turned into a museum/shrine and the Naidu Infectious Diseases Hospital, where unidentified corpses go for disposal. Major dramatic scenes are set in the fearsome Kalighat Temple and a number of large warehouse-like buildings used as temples or coffee houses. Much time is spent fighting Calcutta's permanently snared traffic and at one point Bobby flees for his life through waist-deep refuse in narrow alleys between buildings. Twice Bobby flies away from Calcutta without looking back.

Language and Meaning

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons uses as a narrator an obscure but promising American poet who has some professional familiarity with two deceased Bengali poets, the indisputably great Rabindranath Tagore (a real person) and M. Das (an invented character, Tagore's disciple). Prestigious Harper's magazine hires Robert C. ("Bobby") Luczak to fly to Calcutta, India, pick up a newly-found manuscript ascribed to Das, and attempt to interview him, if rumors about him being alive are true.

Bobby writes the story at least five years after the action and implies that this has given him some perspective. He also admits to ongoing nightmares about the events he describes and still plays back what-if scenarios about how things could have gone less tragically. He does not spare himself as he addresses his readers. He admits to using metaphorical language, which comes naturally to him as a poet. He has neglected reading for years and knows only vaguely who Vladimir Nabokov is.

Bobby writes with pathos about the poor and wretched of Calcutta. He curses its heat and humidity and frequent breakdowns in utilities. Its traffic is indescribable (although he describes it at length). He uses a good deal of profanity. Bobby also describes the views of the prominent *littérateur* M. L. Chatterjee (fictional) on the 1947 Hindu/Muslim violence, the corrupt government of Indira Gandhi, and Westerners' stereotypes about Indian culture, which spawn an embarrassing debate with Bobby's Indian-born wife, Amrita. For several chapters Bobby quotes an English translation of the life of a



frightened young student, Jayaprakesh Muktanandaji, about how he is inducted into the violent Kapalikas, devotees of the goddess Kali. A great deal of gore is splashed around this narration. Bobby has first-hand dealings with the Kapalikas and describes his desperate flight for his life. He describes dealing with the police about his daughter's kidnapping, and with other officials about getting her body out of India for proper burial. Gradually his poetic veneer is scraped away to reveal raw suffering.

In the end, Bobby and Amrita start life afresh in Colorado. He knows that the Age of Kali has begun and that the goddess has many terrible followers. Amrita, a mathematician, assures him that the physical universe will some day be renewed when all energy and matter is sucked into black holes and thrown back out in a new creation. The black hole of India need not be eternal.

Structure

Song of Kali by Dan Simmons tells of a tragic trip to Calcutta, India, by an obscure American poet, Robert C. ("Bobby") Luczak, his Indian-born wife Amrita, and their baby, Victoria. It consists of eighteen numbered but untitled chapters whose length varies considerably. Long chapters consist of multiple scenes, separated by extra spacing or typographical devices. A one-page preface states emphatically that there are some places too evil to exist and that Calcutta, the novel's primary setting, is one of these. It should be leveled by nuclear weapons. The sentiment is not ascribed, but late in the novel Bobby expresses the same thoughts in nearly identical words. Every chapter is headed by an epigraph, most from Bengali writers and poets, but the last several from William Butler Yeats.

The novel opens with crusty editor Abe Bronstein warning Bobby not to go to Calcutta, or at least leave his family home. It is a miasma. Although he has second thoughts, Bobby pushes ahead with plans and the situation in Calcutta from the start is not as he expects. Minor things infuriate him. The miasma clings to him. His attempts to pick up a manuscript by M. Das, which he has been sent to do, are delayed and he is told that it is impossible to talk directly with Das. His trip seems to be a failure. A shifty character, M. T. Krishna, insinuates himself and arranges for Bobby to hear a chilling story about initiation into the Kapalikas, the goddess Kali's inner circle. It ends with the declaration that Das has drowned and been resurrected. Bobby knows that Harper's will not buy this.

As delays continue, Bobby and Amrita go to tea at M. L. Chatterjee's mansion, where Chatterjee and Amrita clash over social systems. They are led to the railroad station, mobbed by beggars, and receive the manuscript in a briefcase. Bobby vows not to look at it until they are out of India, but in a fit of insomnia reads most of it and is shocked at its bloodthirstiness and lurid sexuality. Sending Amrita and Victoria home ahead of him, Bobby finally meets Das face-to-face in an unknown and menacing location. Das suffers from advanced leprosy and is obsessed with getting his *Song of Kali* published in the West. It is a birth announcement for the Age of Kali. Bobby believes that he is mad. Das asks Bobby to pick out for him some books of poetry and hints that he wants a gun to



end his misery. Krishna has conveniently give Bobby one. Bobby hollows out a book for the gun, hides it deep in a bag of books, and is ready to drop the bag off for the Kapalikas to find, when Amrita and Victoria return. Bobby goes out, is taken by force to see Das, gives him the books, and, when he is nearly free, hears gunshots. He is taken captive, drugged, and is on the verge of being murdered when Krishna rescues him. This section of the novel has an air of high adventure.

Bobby returns to the hotel to find Victoria kidnapped. The story turns into a police investigation mystery, which moves along with many peripheral questions being answered (like the nature of the first night's confusion at the airport and Krishna's true identity) but few clues as to Victoria's fate. When Amrita takes out newspaper ads offering considerable money for information, an airport guard spots the baby and with great hope the parents are rushed to the airport. Hope turns instantly to horror as Victoria is found to have been slain to carry stolen gems out of India. Horror turns to anger as Indian red tape keeps them in the country too long.

Back home, having buried their daughter, the Luczaks grow estranged. A spirit of despair reigns until Bobby returns to Calcutta, armed with a Lugar pistol, intent on avenging Victoria's death on everyone even tangentially involved. Eventually horrified at becoming part of Kali's darkness, he abandons his plans, flies home, and reconciles with Amrita. They move to Colorado and start a new life, including the promise of a new child. Bobby intends for this child to grow in a peaceful atmosphere, but knows that the Age of Kali has begun and she has willing followers everywhere.



Quotes

" 'Miasma,' I said.

"Abe nodded.

" 'I'll stay away from new bridges,' I said while walking toward the door.

" 'At least think again about taking Amrita and the baby.'

" 'We're going,' I said. 'The reservations have been made. We've had our shots. The only question is whether you want to see Das's stuff if it is Das and if I can secure publication rights'" (Chapter 1, pg. 12.)

"And what, I asked myself, had I done? I would be fifty-four years old in a few weeks, and to what purpose had I spent my life? I had written some verse, amused by colleagues, and annoyed some critics. I had woven a web of illusion that I was carrying on the tradition of our great Tagore. Then I had enmeshed myself in my own web of deceit" (Chapter 4, pg. 39.)

" 'It feels a bit like *déjà vu*,' she said very softly. 'No, that's not quite the right word. it's actually more like reentering a recurring dream. The heat, the noise, the languages, the smell - everything is familiar and alien at the same time.'

" 'I'm sorry if it upsets you,' I said.

"Amrita shook her head. 'It doesn't upset me, Bobby. It frightens me, but it doesn't upset me. I find it very seductive'" (Chapter 5, pg. 51.)

"To be a Hindu, especially in Bengal, is to accept all things as aspects of divinity and never to artificially separate the sacred from the profane. Sanjay shared this knowledge, but the thin layer of Western thought which had been grafted over his Indian soul refused to accept it" (Chapter 6, pg. 73.)

" 'Do you mean to say that the priest was the great poet, M. Das? Are you serious?'

" 'No,' said Krishna, levelly. 'Not the priest.'

" 'Well, who - '

" 'The sacrifice, said Krishna slowly as if speaking to a dull child. 'The offering. Mr. M. Das was the one Mr. Muktanandaji brought as sacrifice'" (Chapter 8, pg. 113.)

" 'One of our better poets has referred to Calcutta as that "half-crushed cockroach of a city." Another of our writers has compared our city to an aged and dying courtesan surrounded by oxygen tanks and rotting orange peels. Would you agree with that, Mr. Luczak?'

" 'I would agree that those are very strong metaphors, Mr. Chatterjee'" (Chapter 9, pg. 130.)

" 'Baba! Baba! Baba!' The entire mob was moving toward the edge of the platform. It was a six-or seven-foot drop to the metal rails. The woman with the cripple on her back screamed as the man was torn loose and fell into the surging pack. A man near me began screaming and repeatedly striking another in the face with the side of his hand" (Chapter 10, pg. 164.)



"I jumped. From the center span. It was well over a hundred feet to the dark water of the Hooghly. The fall seemed to go on forever. If I had known the interminable wait between execution and culmination of such a suicide, I would have planned differently, I assure you" (Chapter 12, pg. 204.)

"I did not have to open the newly purchased paperback to know the poem of which Das had spoken. 'And Richard Cory, one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head.' Simon and Garfunkel had made that particular image accessible to everyone in their song of the previous decade.

"I dream about it constantly." Chapter 12, pg. 213.

"Singh translated the other's brief sentence. 'No, Mr. Luczak. This was the way he came in two hours ago.'

"I reacted then. 'Jesus! Why would anyone kill and then skin a human being?'

"Singh shook his head. 'He was not deceased when he was first seen. He was on Sudder Street. Screaming. Running, according to witnesses. He fell. Sometime later the screaming stopped. Eventually someone sent for a police wagon'" (Chapter 14, pg. 265.)

"Each time I raised that oiled and balanced instrument I felt the power of its pent-up energy course through me like a shot of strong whiskey. The slow, careful squeezing, the deafening report, and the blow of the recoil along my stiffened arm created something akin to ecstasy in me" (Chapter 16, pg. 288.)

" 'Yes!' I said. It was almost a shout. 'I know. But we have to stop that. If we don't go beyond that, we'll not only destroy each other and ourselves, we'll destroy what the three of us meant. We'll be part of the darkness'" (Chapter 17, pg. 299.)

"I still believe that some places are too wicked to be suffered. Occasionally, I dream of nuclear mushroom clouds rising above a city and human figures dancing against the flaming pyre that once was Calcutta.

"Somewhere there are dark choruses ready to proclaim the Age of Kali. I am sure of this. As sure as I am that there will always be servants to do Her bidding.

"All violence is power, Mr. Luczak" (Chapter 1, pg. 310.)



Topics for Discussion

Narrator Robert C. "Bobby" Luczak frequently recalls events from his youth in Chicago, IL. Pick one of these and discuss how it clarifies his personality and adds to the story line at that point.

Amrita Luczak debates writer M. L. Chatterjee about the influence of specific cultural traits in explaining the universal phenomenon of violence. Summarize their arguments and explain why you agree with one or the other.

Narrator Robert C. ("Bobby") Luczak, a life-long pacifist, would like to see Calcutta, India, leveled by nuclear weapons. A life-long opponent of gun ownership, he twice obtains guns, is implicit in one suicide, and barely escapes becoming a mass murderer. Describe what brings about this transformation and how it makes him feel about himself.

How are India's various religions treated in this novel? How are they alike and how do they differ? Does the treatment seem fair or biased? Support your view by discussing one specific religion.

How are the violent religious wars of 1947 depicted in the novel? Do they provide only background information or contribute to the main themes of the work?

How is India's bureaucracy portrayed in the novel? How is the U.S. Embassy portrayed, helping its distressed citizens seeking to wade their way through it?

Identify the novel's most attractive and most repellent characters and explain why you select them.