

Twilight in Delhi Study Guide

Twilight in Delhi by Ahmed Ali

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Plot Summary

Twilight in Delhi, by Ahmed Ali, is a historical novel. The story focuses on Mir Nihal and his family as changes occur in their personal lives and in Indian culture. As Mir Nihal faces his own challenges due to the personal changes he undergoes, his son Asghar goes through dramatic changes as well. Asghar's marriage is not turning out to be the marriage of his dreams as he had expected. Along with this, India itself undergoes a change of its own as England's King George is crowned the ruler of a newly conquered India. Like Mir Nihal's life, the former glory of Delhi fades into the twilight.

On a hot, summer evening, Mir Nihal comes home to find his wife awake and wanting to talk about the marriages of their two children. As Mir Nihal discusses why his son, Asghar, must be married first, he finds a snake in the house of his prized pigeons. After easily killing the snake, Mir Nihal finishes his conversation just as Asghar enters the house. Upon noticing Asghar's English boots, Mir Nihal is offended and berates Asghar. Asghar leaves before an argument can begin. He goes to the roof to sleep and dream of his beloved, a girl from a lower social class named Bilqeece. Asghar is so intent on marrying her that he becomes lovelorn and sends for his older sister, Begam Waheed, to come home and help him arrange his marriage. Once she arrives, Asghar indicates that if he cannot have Bilqeece, then he will have no choice but to commit suicide. Out of worry for her brother, Begam Waheed goes to Begam Nihal, their mother, to ask for help in getting Mir Nihal's blessing for the marriage. After a lengthy discussion over the fact that Bilqeece comes from a lower class family and therefore the marriage would not be approved of, Begam Nihal concedes that she will aid in Asghar's cause as she does not want her son to hurt himself. Begam Nihal goes to Mir Nihal, but he instantly becomes angry at the thought of Asghar ruining the family reputation and leaves the house. The servant Dilchain overhears this and tells Begam Nihal's sister in law, Begam Jamal, who instantly gloats over this to Begam Nihal. Begam Nihal becomes slightly angry, but Begam Jamal is helpful as well, telling Begam Nihal that the marriage can still be arranged even without Mir Nihal's blessing.

Asghar goes to visit his mistress, Mushtari Bai, with a friend of his. The friend tells Mushtari Bai that Asghar is in love with Bilqeece, which hurts Mushtari Bai's feelings as she is in love with Asghar herself. After spending some time with Mushtari Bai, Asghar goes home to hear the outcome of Begam Waheed's help. He is ecstatic that he now has his mother's help in marrying Bilqeece. Begam Waheed suggests that Asghar go with her back to her home in Bhopal so that he can wait out the year before he can marry Bilqeece.

Some time later, on another hot evening, Mir Nihal arrives at home again to find his family stricken with heat sickness. After he helps his family, he checks on his pigeons to find that quite a few of them have died. He purchases new ones from the local marketplace and brings them home to put with his other pigeons. As he is doing this, one of his servants comes to him with news that his mistress, Babban Jan, is close to death. Upon hearing this, Mir Nihal hurries to her home, leaving the pigeon coop unlocked. Mir Nihal arrives at Babban Jan's house to find that she has been dead less



than half an hour. He takes one last look at her before giving her mother some money before going home. Once at home, he goes to check on his pigeons only to find that they have been murdered by a stray cat. Despondent over the loss of his birds and his mistress, Mir Nihal decides that the best thing to do would be to retire and to allow Asghar to make his own decisions about marrying Bilqeece.

Since Mir Nihal has retired, he spends most of his days studying alchemy, one of his old hobbies. During this time, the coronation of King George of Britain occurs. Mir Nihal, his other son Habbiddudin, and others of the family go to the parade, but Mir Nihal has a flashback of the violence that occurred as the British took over the country. Mir Nihal decides to walk home by himself and along the way he comes across a beggar who happens to be a member of the recently deposed royal family. Mir Nihal pities the man and gives him some money before continuing his walk home to ponder over the major changes in his life.

Asghar and Bilqeece get married in a celebration that occurs over the course of a few days. The only hitch in the process is when one of Asghar's family members insults one of Bilqeece's. However, the altercation only lasts a few moments. At the end of the rituals, Bilqeece and her family feel extreme sadness over the fact that she is leaving them to be with Asghar. The marriage begins unsteadily, with Bilqeece feeling uncomfortable being with Asghar and remaining silent with his family. After a while, she tries to fit in, even cooking Mir Nihal's favorite food for which he gives her green sateen in return. Due to her uneasiness, Asghar wonders if there is any romantic spark between them, but his fears are soon alleviated once Bilqeece opens up and begins talking about Asghar getting a job and dreams of a home of their own. They do and fill it with English items, which brings about criticism from others, but Asghar and Bilqeece are happy and do not care. Shortly afterwards, they have a daughter, Jehan Ara, but Bilqeece's father passes away, causing Bilqeece to go into depression. This depression worsens as Asghar's feelings towards Bilqeece change and he often mistreats her because he no longer loves her as he once did.

Over time, Bilqeece gets worse, but this is actually due to tuberculosis. She gets better for a while, but dies a short time later, leaving Asghar to care for their daughter. Bilqeece's younger sister, Zohra, helps Asghar to care for the child, but Asghar becomes infatuated with Zohra. At first the feeling is not mutual, but after a while, Zohra is infatuated with Asghar as well. They keep the relationship a secret for a while, but Asghar goes to talk to his parents about marrying her. They agree, but before anyone can talk to Zohra's mother, Begam Jamal talks to her instead. This causes Zohra's mother to become upset especially as she has seen how Asghar treated Bilqeece while she was alive therefore she refuses to accept Asghar's marriage proposal. Asghar's brother Habibuddin comes home as he is very sick. Mir Nihal is practically an invalid as he watches Delhi disintegrate into violent chaos as Indian revolutionaries try to once again battle the British. Habibuddin worsens and dies shortly after coming home. After his funeral, Asghar comes home to find Zohra's servant waiting for him. She gives him a letter from Zohra saying that she has found out that her family is marrying her to someone else first thing in the morning, leaving Asghar broken hearted. Mir Nihal goes

back to his room as he ponders over all of the death and negativity that has happened in his life. He slips into a coma and dies.



Part 1: Chapters 1 - 6

Summary

In Part 1: Chapter 1, Begam Nihal, her daughter Mehro, and nephew Masroor are lying in their beds on a late, hot evening waiting for the family patriarch, Mir Nahal to come home. When Mir Nahal enters, Begam Nihal begins to talk to him about the marriage of their son, Asghar as well as the engagement of their daughter. Mir Nahal wonders about Asghar and states that he does not like the friendship between Asghar and a young man named Bundoo. As they are talking, Mir Nahal hears a noise coming from his pigeon house. He goes to look in and finds a snake among the birds. He calls to the house servant Dilchain to bring his stick, but the snake goes down a drain pipe to escape. Mir Nahal grabs the snake with his hands and kills it so he may return to his discussion. As the conversation finishes, Asghar walks in only to hear his father berating him for wearing an English styled boot. Asghar leaves again before an actual argument can begin.

In Part 1: Chapter 2, Asghar is asleep on the roof of the house. While he sleeps, he dreams he is dancing on the Milky Way with all sorts of beautiful women. As the dream continues, the women fade until they are one woman. It is Bilqeece, the sister of his best friend Bundoo. Asghar wakes up in the middle of the dream.

In Part 1: Chapter 3, the next day begins just like every normal day for Mir Nihal and the rest of his family. After everyone prepares for the day, Mir Nihal goes to see his pigeons. Mir Nihal watches his pigeons as they fly in the air for most of the morning. His pigeons fly with the pigeons of the next door neighbor's for most of the morning. When Mir Nihal's pigeons return, he finds that new pigeons have flown in to be a part of his flock. As the day wears on, the heat intensifies, causing many people to stop what they are doing to rest inside their homes.

In Part 1: Chapter 4, it is later in the evening and cooler as Asghar leaves to visit his friend, Bundoo. When Asghar does not find Bundoo at home, he speaks for a bit to the wife of Asghar's cousin. When Bilqeece is briefly mentioned, Asghar becomes embarrassed and leaves the house to visit another one of his friends. Asghar watches as the friend flies his kites. Asghar does not want to participate. Noticing something is wrong, the friend asks Asghar what the problem is. Asghar replies that he is in love with Bilqeece, but he knows that he cannot do anything about it as she is the sister of one of his friends. Also, he knows that his father will never agree to the marriage, as Bilqeece's family is considered in a lower social class. The friend tries to cheer Asghar up, but it is in vain. Asghar gives up the conversation and leaves.

In Part 1: Chapter 5, Asghar writes to his older sister Begam Waheed to come home for a visit. Both Begam Nihal and Mir Nihal are happy that their daughter will be returning for a visit. As they wait for her arrival, the family carries on in its usual fashion, with



Begam Nihal taking care of the home. Mir Nihal continues to fly his pigeons, work, and make regular visits to his mistress, Babban Jaan.

In Part 1: Chapter 6, the arrival of Begam Waheed and her children is met with joy by her entire family. She immediately notices that something is wrong with Asghar and the pair spend a few moments talking about the past. They especially talk about the instance where Begam Nihal went temporarily insane due to Mir Nihal's affair with Dilchain and they were sent to stay in their uncle's home. The conversation continues with remembrances of shortly after Begam Waheed was married, allowing for a discussion about Asghar's love life to commence. Asghar reveals he is deeply in love with Bilqeece and that he needs Begam Waheed to convince their father that it would be a good idea. At first, Begam Waheed does not have a reply to this, but when Asghar threatens to commit suicide if he does not marry Bilqeece, Begam Waheed promises him that she will do her best to help him. Satisfied, Asghar leaves to walk through the city alone.

Analysis

The beginning of the novel introduces the main setting, the city of Delhi in India. The city is described in detail which helps to introduce the novel's theme of culture. From the description of Delhi, it is reasonable to assume that Mir Nihal's is filled with pride and loyalty for his country. The setting's introduction also presents the emerging idea of a switch from an Indian monarchy to a part of the British empire. At the onset of the novel, the author gives a brief history through the use of circumlocution. Circumlocution is the use of many words when a few words are sufficient. By using so many words, the author is trying to convey that the city is rich with beauty and depth.

The visualization continues throughout as there is a heavy use of metaphors and similes. In one instance metaphors are used to describe the tops of the mosques by comparing them to topless women in the sun. Another example is of how the city itself has decayed over time by comparing it to a beaten dog. The occasional style in which the author furthers the imagery is to try to engage the reader in using all senses as there is an extensive use of detailed descriptions of the smells and sounds of the streets. Throughout this section, the scenery is very vivid. This is exemplified by the peddlers in the streets doing business, children out in the street taunting a homeless woman, and teens teasing another young lady, among other activities. In doing so, the author encompasses the world around Mir Nihal and his family giving insight into the typical daily life in Delhi which also gives a visual perspective of the culture theme. In order to further depict ordinary life in the Nihal home, Chapter 5 takes an extensive look at how each member of the family goes through their day.

A short distance into the first chapter comes the introduction of several of the main characters. Along with these characters, certain themes are made apparent by use of the initial dialogue between them. As the discussion between Begam Nihal and Mir Nihal centers on the subject of marriage, this theme emerges as something that is important to the plot development. The author uses the marriage theme here to develop



the dilemma for Asghar as his desire to marry Bilqeece is his top priority but getting the approval to do so is met with the challenge of dealing with his parents and their thoughts on the subject. The discussion also encompasses other themes as well. It is apparent that Begam Nihal defers to her husband in most matters, allowing for a small glimpse at the gender theme as the gender theme in this case identifies the roles of a husband being the dominant half of the couple and the wife is to remain subservient to him. Even within the discussion, this theme emerges as Mir Nihal makes his prevalence known that Asghar should be the one to marry first instead of Mehro. This also shows within the gender theme that it is more important for a man to marry. The main quandary lies in the fact that Asghar is in love with his friend Bundoo's sister, Bilqeece. To Mir Nihal, even the friendship between Asghar and Bundoo is undesirable as Bundoo's family is considered socially beneath Mir Nihal's family. This is a brief glance also at the culture theme as there is a distinct division in the classes, in which the mixing of the classes is considered taboo. This disdain for Bundoo's family is a definite obstacle to Asghar's desire for his father's acceptance.

The marriage theme continues with the addition of Asghar's older sister Begam Waheed. Because Asghar feels that no one is listening to him about his love for Bilqeece, he feels it necessary to contact his older sister to come home and be a liaison between himself and his parents. With this comes a small insight into the characters of Begam Nihal, Mir Nihal, and Dilchain as Begam Waheed and Asghar reminisce about their childhood. The themes of marriage and gender are again at the forefront with this discussion as there is an implication that Mir Nihal and Dilchain once had an affair, causing Begam Nihal to go temporarily insane. This anecdote shows that as a man Mir Nihal has the ability to cheat on his wife and Begam Nihal as a woman and his wife has no ability to stop him. There is also a point of character development with Asghar in his threats to commit suicide if he is not allowed to marry Bilqeece. This shows that he is deeply immersed in his emotions to the point where nothing else matters if he cannot get his way, showing a petulant and child like nature.

The characters of Mir Nihal and Asghar are a direct attempt by the author to personify differences within the culture theme. This idea will be developed further in the narrative, but it is abundantly clear that there is a great deal of division between father and son. This is first showcased by Asghar's entry into the narrative. The English boots that Asghar wears are offensive to Mir Nihal as he is archetype of Indian Muslim heritage and the wearing of English items would be disrespectful to the Indian culture. It is obvious that Mir Nihal has had previous comments about this, with Asghar not complying with his wishes to not have English items in the house. This is also a symbol of Asghar's preference for the English culture which adds to the cultural differences. Another symbol is also established in this first segment as well as the English boots. Mir Nihal's pigeons represent a certain sense of peace in his life and the continuation of his life's habitual patterns. As the segment continues, further insight is given to particularly these two characters and this is the initial mention of Mir Nihal's mistress Babban Jan. This gives a sub theme within the gender roles theme as Babban Jan is a young dancing girl who is only used for Mir Nihal's entertainment. Begam Nihal does not provide the same kind of care that Babban Jan does, showing that there is a distinct



difference between the role of a wife who must remain quiet and subservient and the role of a mistress who is usually young and given more freedoms.

Discussion Question 1

Is Asghar's love for Bilqeece honest or is it because she is someone he knows he should not love? What are the reasons that others give for him to not be in love with her?

Discussion Question 2

What are the main differences between Mir Nihal and Asghar? Why does Mir Nihal get so angry about Asghar's boots?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Asghar write to his sister, Begam Waheed? Discuss their relationship.

Vocabulary

offal, exude, doleful, insidious, monotony, furtive, sallow, diminutive, transience, lithe, inhibitions, amorous, auspicious



Part 1: Chapters 7 - 12

Summary

Begam Waheed and Begam Nihal have a discussion about Asghar in Part 1:Chapter 7. Both women are concerned for Asghar and agree that he must marry soon. Begam Waheed explains that Asghar is in love with Bilqeece, but Begam Nihal thinks that getting approval from Mir Nihal will be virtually impossible. She also tells her daughter that Bilqeece's family is not of the same social class as they are and that the marriage has no chance of happening. Begam Waheed further explains Asghar's threat to commit suicide if he is not allowed to marry who he chooses. As the conversation continues, one of Begam Nihal's sons-in-law comes in to visit. He explains the virtues of what they should be looking for in a proper wife for Asghar. Since the son-in-law is a widower, he is hoping that he may marry the youngest daughter, Mehro, but Begam Nihal has already picked a husband who comes from a wealthy family. The man leaves, allowing the conversation between Begam Waheed and Begam Nihal to continue, with Begam Waheed trying to gain support for Asghar's marriage to Bilqeece. Begam Nihal does not want to hear of this marriage, echoing the sentiments of her husband that Bilqeece's family is not of the same social standards but nothing is resolved as Mir Nihal comes home.

In Part 1: Chapter 8 a powerful thunderstorm comes through the city. Mir Nihal's family take shelter in the house waiting for it to pass over. Begam Waheed's son asks about why the storm is so loud with his sister answering that it is because a pair of powerful jinns are getting married. As the storm continues, Begam Waheed talks again to Begam Nihal about Asghar and his desire to marry Bilqeece. Reluctantly, Begam Nihal agrees to talk to Mir Nihal on Asghar's behalf, just as the storm fades away.

Begam Nihal gets a chance to talk to Mir Nihal in Part 1: Chapter 9 after thinking about Asghar's past and how his father has always controlled Asghar's every action. After a small joke between Begam Nihal and Mir Nihal, Begam Nihal tells him that she thinks Asghar should marry Bilqeece. Instantly, Mir Nihal is in a bad mood, shouting at Begam Nihal that he will never approve of Asghar's marriage. He is furious that Asghar does not want to marry the girl of his parents' choosing and instead wants to marry someone who is considered from an inferior family. Begam Nihal tries to make Mir Nihal understand that if they do not support the marriage, Asghar may kill himself, but Mir Nihal does not care. Enraged, Mir Nihal leaves the home angrily yelling at anyone who gets in his way.

In Part 1: Chapter 10, the house servant Dilchain gossips with Begam Jamal, the wife of Mir Nihal's deceased brother who also lives in the house, about the argument between Begam Nihal and her husband. Later in the evening, Begam Jamal comes to Begam Nihal to gloat in the fact that Asghar wishes to marry someone that is considered beneath him as Begam Jamal was once teased. Begam Nihal is adamant that she is not planning anything at first, but then relents and tells her sister in law that Asghar wants to marry Bilqeece but Mir Nihal is upset about this. Begam Jamal reminds Begam Nihal



that it is the mother's duty to make sure her son gets married, prompting Begam Nihal to begin plotting how she can arrange Asghar's marriage without her husband.

Asghar is out in the evening alone in Part 1: Chapter 11. He goes to a friend's house hoping to be cheered up but it does not happen. The friend persuades Asghar to go to his mistress, Mushtari Bai, in hopes that her companionship would suffice. While the men are visiting with Mushtari Bai, the friend lets it slip that Asghar is in a bad mood because he is in love. Mushtari Bai is upset, but is clever enough to hide this from Asghar, choosing to sing love songs instead of saying anything. The evening continues, but Asghar leaves to go home leaving Mushtari Bai and his friend behind.

In Part 1: Chapter 12, Asghar arrives at home to find his sister Begam Waheed awake. She tells Asghar about Mir Nihal's reaction to Begam Nihal supporting Asghar's marriage. This upsets Asghar until Begam Waheed says that the wedding will take place, even without their father's consent. She also suggests that Asghar come to live with her in Bhopal for a year while everything is prepared. This causes Asghar to come out of his depression and be happy as he goes to bed. The next day, Begam Nihal visits Bilqeece's mother who gives the family's consent for Bilqeece to marry Asghar.

Begam Waheed and Asghar prepare to go to Bhopal in Part 1: Chapter 13. During the days, the wind is extremely hot until the day before Asghar leaves home when it becomes spring-like. Before Asghar and Begam Waheed leave, they go with their family to have picnics and enjoy the nice weather. After the picnics, Begam Waheed and Asghar tell their family goodbye and board the train to Bhopal.

Analysis

The main objective of this section is to further examine the dilemma Asghar faces in obtaining his parents' support to marry Bilqeece. Dialogues are the most important factor of this section as they continue to propel the narrative and provide the reader insight into the character development. There is a sense of urgency that is felt in this discussion as both women are truly concerned for Asghar. This feeling is not shared by Mir Nihal, as expressed in the dialogue between himself and Begam Nihal in Chapter 9. With Mir Nihal there is only anger that the subject would even be approached. Both dialogues continue to show the conflict between father and son although Asghar is not directly involved in the conversations. While Chapter 7 is devoted to this with no decisive outcome, Chapter 8 is mostly a deviation but does provide the foreshadowing item of weather to suggest that the storm the city is undergoing will somehow parallel the necessity to allow Asghar to marry Bilqeece as Begam Nihal finally gives her consent for the marriage.

There is a small anecdote made by a relative that relates to the marriage theme in Chapter 7 as the anecdote humorously defines the physical notions of what a good wife would be. The inclusion of this relative as a possible suitor for the youngest daughter, Mehro, adds a slight deviation to examine another side of the marriage theme. The main idea behind this inclusion is to allow the reader to establish the intricacies of the



parents arranging their children's marriages as preference is given to marry Mehro into a prominent family. This also is another factor in not only the marriage theme but in the culture theme as well as the marriage that Begam Nihal wants for Mehro would mean a rise in social status for the family. The marriages of Asghar and Mehro are contrasting in this manner as Asghar will be marrying beneath the family social status but Mehro will advance it.

Part 1: Chapter 9 is significant as the author chooses this point to provide Asghar's backstory to slightly justify the conflict between Mir Nihal and Asghar as Mir Nihal has been a stifling authority figure in Asghar's life. This short biography is the inspiration that Begam Nihal needs to confront her husband, but to no success. There is a unanticipated action in Chapter 10 that helps to propel the narrative as Dilchain overhears the argument between Mir Nihal and Begam Nihal. The gender theme is enhanced here as Dilchain converses with Mir Nihal's sister in law, Begam Jamal. With Begam Nihal being representative of the subservient housewife, Dilchain and Begam Jamal represent a more conniving and gossiping kind of woman. Begam Jamal is more of a troublemaker as she gloats to Begam Nihal that Asghar wants to marry outside of the family's social status. It is apparent but not fully disclosed the circumstances of Begam Jamal's marriage, there is only a slight inference that Begam Jamal did not come from the same social class as Mir Nihal and his family. In this case, the gloating turns out to be a positive influence on Begam Nihal as she has an epiphany that she has the ability to arrange the marriage for her son herself without Mir Nihal. This allows the Asghar's story line to advance although he is not directly involved in these scenes.

Asghar does not make an appearance until Chapter 11. The main importance of this particular chapter is to show how Asghar's feelings affect others around him. Mushtari Bai is not a significant character, but as Asghar's mistress, she represents the more sensual and romantic side of of the gender theme. Mushtari Bai's involvement in the plot also shows a contrast to the other women so far in the novel as Mushtari Bai is considered someone only for Asghar's entertainment and is not considered suitable for a wife. The author also uses her presence to show Asghar's melancholy as he visits her but does not wish to fully participate in what is supposed to be a pleasant visit. There is an ample amount of poetry used here as a display of the romanticism that is typical of one of Asghar's visits to Mushtari Bai. The romantic feelings are lost for Asghar at this moment, especially when the friend Asghar is with makes a revelation to Mushtari Bai that Asghar is deeply in love with someone else. This creates a small amount of tension as Mushtari Bai's tone in her poetic response is that she is actually in love with Asghar but he is oblivious to this knowledge. This highlights the effect that Asghar is only out for his own needs and has no regard for anyone else, adding to his childish and selfish persona.

The final two chapters of Part 1 show a reversal of Asghar's mood as he comes home to hear the news of discussions that were held in his absence. A significant item to note is the close relationship that Asghar has with Begam Waheed as they are both joyous over the news of Begam Nihal's willingness to help Asghar. The conversation between Begam Waheed and Asghar is much different than those they have had recently. There is a tone of hope in Asghar, something that has been lacking in Asghar's persona from



the start of the novel. As a method to close this part of the novel and to temporarily suspend Asghar's subplot, Begam Waheed makes the suggestion that Asghar accompany her to Bhopal to live for a year while he waits for the wedding. The weather becomes an integral item as the climate changes from hot to mild shortly before their departure. This can be seen as metaphoric for Asghar's moods shifting from melancholy to ecstatic. The final scene of this part denotes a peaceful time especially as families gather for picnics to enjoy the warm weather and to tell Asghar and Begam Waheed goodbye.

Discussion Question 1

Does Begam Nihal approve or disapprove of Asghar's desire to marry Bilqeece? How is she persuaded to finally agree to help Asghar?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dilchain tell Begam Jamal about the conversation she overhears between Begam Nihal and Begam Waheed? Why did Begam Jamal gloat over this information? How does this help Asghar's cause?

Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between Mushtari Bai and Asghar? How does she feel about him compared to how he feels about her? Does Asghar know of her feelings?

Vocabulary

incorrigible, allegorical, misconstrue, conciliatory, livid, conical, pathos, despondent, imbued, oppressive



Part 2: Chapters 1 - 4

Summary

In Part 2: Chapter 1, it is 1911 and Delhi has become incredibly hot as men are working on repairing the city ahead of the coronation of a British king. Mir Nihal walks through the marketplace Chandni Chowk, contemplating his age as he purchases some green mangoes to make into sherbet for Babban Jan as a way to combat the heat. As he is walking, he runs across an acquaintance who has a question for Mir Nihal. The man wants to arrange a marriage between his newly orphaned niece and Mir Nihal's servant, Ghafoor. Mir Nihal thinks that the girl is too young as she is only 14 and would prefer that the man speak to Ghafoor directly, but the man says that since Ghafoor is just a servant, this is the proper way to handle this situation. The man asks Mir Nihal again, who gives his consent as a way to end the conversation. As Mir Nihal walks away, he begins to worry about how his birds and Babban Jan, who has recently been ill, are handling the heat.

In Part 2: Chapter 2, Mir Nihal arrives home to find the family suffering from heatstroke. Giving the green mangoes to Dilchain to make a sherbet for the family to cool them down, he goes to the rooftop to see his pigeons. A few of the birds had already died due to the heat, but a few survived and Mir Nihal gives them cool water immediately. He is so upset about the loss of some of his birds that he does not have the remaining birds fly for the day. He also contemplates giving his pigeons up altogether, but he decides that he has put too much work into them to give them away so easily. The next day, Mir Nihal takes one of his servants to Chandni Chowk to help with the purchase of new birds. Mir Nihal's next door neighbor and main rival in pigeon flying, spots Mir Nihal going to the pigeon market and follows him. As Mir Nihal picks out his birds, a discussion begins between them and another man who flies a different breed of pigeons. The conversation continues until the evening prayers are called, causing the men to stop and head to the mosque. When the prayer service ends, Mir Nihal goes home to check on his family and put his birds away. As he puts the last bird in the cage, his servant comes to him with an urgent message that Babban Jan's illness has gotten dangerously worse, causing Mir Nihal to stop what he is doing to rush out of the house.

Mir Nihal arrives outside of Babban Jan's apartment in Part 2: Chapter 3. Once he arrives at her apartment, he knows that his beloved mistress is dead. Babban Jan's mother is in the home and confirms that she passed away almost a half an hour before Mir Nihal's arrival. He goes over to Babban Jan's body to look at her one last time. Mir Nihal is too overcome with grief to stay in the place long, and he gives the mother some money before going home to bed. The next morning, Mir Nihal wakes up still saddened by his mistress' death. He goes to check on his birds, but he is shocked to find that a cat had gotten into the pigeon house and killed the majority of pigeons. The cat is still sitting on the roof and in his anger and grief, Mir Nihal severely beats it with his stick before kicking it out of the house. After this, Mir Nihal thought about Babban Jan and of how she was the main reason he continued to work so he could support her in a house of



her own. With her gone, Mir Nihal decides that he has enough money and support from his sons to retire.

In Part 2: Chapter 4, Mir Nihal goes inside the house where he informs the family that his pigeons are dead. Begam Nihal makes a comment about Mir Nihal's sad look, but he does not tell her what is truly on his mind as he is thinking more of Babban Jan than his pigeons. Mir Nihal calls for one of his servants to have the few remaining pigeons gathered up and sold as he no longer wants to fly them. Later, he goes out and notices that the cat had not been beaten to death, but he was no longer angry. Instead, he did not care about the cat as he walked to the house of a friend. Once at the friend's house, Mir Nihal's mood is not lifted as the friend learns that Babban Jan has passed away. The friend remarks that Mir Nihal has the ability to find a new and younger mistress, but Mir Nihal states that he has become too old and tired to find someone new. After the evening prayers, the friend mentions that he has heard about Asghar's upcoming marriage to Bilqeece. Mir Nihal remembers that Asghar is going ahead with his plans even though Mir Nihal himself has not given his consent. Due to Mir Nihal's grief over the loss of Babban Jan and his pigeons, Mir Nihal realizes that he is powerless to stop Asghar from marrying who he wants and he no longer cares about what may become of Asghar's decision. Upon his return home, Mir Nihal gives his consent for Asghar's marriage.

Analysis

A year has passed between the end of Part 1 and the beginning of Part 2. This section mainly encompasses the major changes that are starting to take place in Mir Nihal's life. The first of these changes affects Delhi and the rest of the country as the city is preparing for the coronation of King George. As the preparations are ongoing, the author uses the symbol of weather to draw a direct parallel between the oppressive heat and constant wind to the political climate as the transition of power from an independent Indian society to a part of the British empire has enraged some of the people. At this time, Mir Nihal is only concerned with the physical heat as he walks through the Chandni Chwk marketplace. His first thoughts are of his mistress, Babban Jan, and of her illness as of late. He seems to put more focus on thoughts of her than on anything else, which is demonstrative of his preference for her over his wife. The walk through the market place is flowing with imagery to conceptualize the amount of noise and activity of the area. The smells of the market are a catalyst for Mir Nihal's thoughts of Babban Jan, but an ominous feeling comes over him, causing him to buy green mangoes to make sherbet for her. He also gives a great deal of thought to his age which is also a focus on this section as he begins to consider himself as old and to wonder about the effects of his age.

The scene adds a bit of depth to Mir Nihal's character as he continues to walk through the market. He is considered to be a well respected man and much attention is given to the greetings given by shop workers and people passing by. The theme of marriage comes up via the dialogue between Mir Nihal and a friend. The friend has a niece who is unmarried and has no family. The idea is to get her married quickly to Mir Nihal's



servant Ghafoor, that way the girl will have a permanent station in life. The arrangement of this marriage should go to Ghafoor himself as Mir Nihal says, but since Ghafoor is only a servant, the appropriate process begins with getting permission from Mir Nihal. This advances the marriage theme as it is clear that the young girl in question has no say in her own wedding as well as the fact that the girl is only fourteen years old. This also is a subtle allude to the culture theme as the master must make wedding arrangements for his servant.

Mir Nihal's home life is briefly looked at after his walk in the marketplace. The weather has caused a great deal of sickness in the house, with almost everyone having heatstroke. Although the motive is presumably guilt over being selfish, Mir Nihal gives the mangoes intended for Babban Jan to Dilchain to make sherbet for the members of the house. The weather is still important in this section as it has not only affected the people in Mir Nihal's life, but it indirectly affects him as he checks on his pigeons. Several of them have died due to heat and lack of water. This makes him feel a great deal of sadness as they were considered to be a beloved part of his life. This brings back the thought of his age and of how his life has changed. The remorse he feels over getting older shifts into remorse for his birds as well causing him to want to give up the hobby of pigeon flying. This feeling is short lived, prompting Mir Nihal to go back to the market the next day to buy more pigeons.

As he and another servant are purchasing pigeons, Mir Nihal proves once again that he holds a high position in the community. The gathering of other pigeon enthusiasts to watch as Mir Nihal chooses each bird carefully sparks a conversation between a rival pigeon flyer and Mir Nihal. The comparison of different kinds of pigeons and techniques is given here, allowing the reader to see the intricacy of the sport as well as the prowess of Mir Nihal and his late brother as people recollect the late brothers capability of flying his pigeons in competitions. The conversations are amicable and awe inspiring for the crowd of people that have gathered around to listen to the rival. It should be noted that Mir Nihal is mostly silent during all of this, but it is visible that he is pleased to be showered with so much attention.

The gathering is broken up by the ritual prayers, which is a way for the author to show that in Indian culture, religion is at the highest priority in a person's life. Once the prayers are finished, Mir Nihal goes home, but his mind shifts back to Babban Jan with foreboding thoughts as he has not been able to visit with her in some time. The return home is a scene full of foreshadowing as Mir Nihal goes to put his pigeons in their cage while worrying about his mistress. This preoccupation with her well being strips him of his focus as he is putting the pigeons away. The foreboding feelings that he has had comes to fruition as a servant boy runs in and tells him to come to Babban Jan's quickly as the plot is beginning to twist in a morbid fashion. The author makes an important insinuation as Mir Nihal is hurrying to Babban Jan's that is a powerful piece of foreshadowing when it is mentioned that in his haste Mir Nihal does not fully shut the pigeon cage correctly.

The narrative moves along with Mir Nihal as he rushes to Babban Jan's house, full of worry for his beloved mistress. The tone is dismal as the city is engaged in its night time



activities, but Mir Nihal takes no notice of anything. Mir Nihal's arrival at Babban Jan's home is full of irony as she had passed away almost half an hour before. Babban Jan's mother and Mir Nihal do not have a lengthy conversation as both are too full of grief to partake in any lengthy discussions. The entire scene is not filled with a lot of detail or conversation as Mir Nihal takes a last look at Babban Jan before leaving as other family members are on their way to assist with her burial.

Although the death of Babban Jan is certainly heartbreaking for Mir Nihal, the plot twists once again in a negative fashion for him after his arrival at home. The narrator mentions that Mir Nihal did not close the pigeon cage correctly earlier in the chapter. The outcome of his carelessness is evident as a cat killed the majority of his brand new pigeons while Mir Nihal was trying to get to Babban Jan. The deaths of these birds and Babban Jan cause a sudden metamorphosis within Mir Nihal. He has gone from a sharp, virile, and strong man to being suddenly weak and careless.

The theme of indifference presents itself here as he shifts from wanting to fly his birds to selling the remaining ones and not wanting to be bothered with the subject again. The next morning when he announces his decision, his daughter and wife misconstrue Mir Nihal's sadness over Babban Jan as grief for his pigeons, but it is clear that it is a mixture of the grief he feels for both of them. He is angered at their misunderstanding but as a man, he is unable to say what he truly feels as that would be seen as weak. When he goes back to the pigeon area, the cat who killed the pigeons is lying there, satisfied over last night's buffet. The beating of the cat when Mir Nihal sees it is symbolic as it is the release of the fear, guilt, worrying, remorse, and negativity building up in Mir Nihal to this point. As a final measure of getting rid of his feelings, he kicks the cat out of the house into the street.

The final part of this section allows for Mir Nihal's character shift as he visits a friend. The friend is unaware of Babban Jan's death, but is remorseful when Mir Nihal recounts the details of her death. The remorse is short lived however, as the friend suggests that Mir Nihal find a new and younger mistress for his needs. This shows a callous view of mistresses and shows that within the gender theme, that mistresses are replaceable to many men. Mir Nihal does not share this point of view, but he says nothing to correct his friend. Instead, Mir Nihal makes light of the situation to mask his true feelings. The conversation continues with talk the first mention of Asghar. It is unknown how the friend has information that Mir Nihal does not, but the friend's questions about Asghar's upcoming marriage are met with a small amount of disdain. Mir Nihal still does not approve of any kind of relationship between Asghar and Bilqeece, but he also knows that the wedding will take place even without his consent. Since saying that he does not know about the marriage preparations would cause a certain amount of embarrassment to his friend for creating a story from potentially nothing, Mir Nihal is simple with his answer that it is still too far away, allowing him some time to grow accustomed to the idea of Asghar being married to someone beneath him.

The conclusion of this segment is also the metaphorical conclusion of Mir Nihal's life as a strong independent and outgoing man. His decision to retire is the culmination of the last few days of death that he has been dealing with. The reader sees an almost



instantaneous shift as he decides that he no longer cares who Asghar marries. This is the first real evidence of the indifference theme as Mir Nihal gives up trying to direct his son away from people of a lower social class. He also becomes indifferent towards himself as well, noting that he only worked to provide for Babban Jan's home and needs. Since she is gone, he no longer cares about money, with the expectations that his sons will look after him as he looked after them. With the plot continuing to develop under these new changes, the narrative continues into the next section.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mir Nihal pay so much attention to his pigeons? What causes the deaths of the majority of the pigeons? How could their deaths been avoided?

Discussion Question 2

How does Mir Nihal react to Babban Jan's death? How do the loss of both his pigeons and his mistress affect Mir Nihal?

Discussion Question 3

What changes are occurring in Mir Nihal's feelings? What changes in his lifestyle does he intend to make? How will this affect Asghar?

Vocabulary

impermanence, transience, reverence, dilapidated, opulent, impunity, hullabaloo, complacent, cajoling, satiety, dissuade,



Part 2 Chapters 5 - 8

Summary

In Part 2: Chapter 5, Mir Nihal has entered retirement and taken up alchemy, something that was a hobby at his at one time. Friends gather at his home regularly to discuss their own interests in alchemy and share stories of their experiences. Mir Nihal shares his own experiences as a boy who once visited his uncle's village and was told the true recipe for making gold. After an evening full of discussion, the men leave. Mir Nihal thinks back on his youth and tries to remember the secret to making gold, but all of his attempts at it fail.

Ramazan occurs in Part 2: Chapter 6. Before the morning prayers, the family is allowed to eat and drink a small amount. Once the prayers begin, they are not allowed to have any food or water until sundown. Once the sun goes down, the family is allowed to engage in a full meal. Various beggars come out and the family is very generous in giving food and money to them. A few days before the end of Ramazan, Asghar and Begam Waheed return home to help with the wedding preparations. Asghar is excited and has been working at various jobs to save money for his new life. He offers some of his money to Mir Nihal, which makes him incredibly happy. Mir Nihal's other son, Habibuddin also comes home to take part in the celebrations. After the prayers for the final day of Ramazan, kites, trinkets, and treats are bought by Mir Nihal and his sons. The entire day is of celebration and family bonding. Afterwards, life carries on as normal, with the preparations for Asghar's wedding continuing. Along with those preparations, the entire city is getting ready for the Coronation of King George IV, but there is a mixed feeling about this. Some people are excited and hopeful of the potential of a new government in Delhi, but many are resentful that they are being oppressed by outsiders.

In Part 2: Chapter 7, time for Asghar's marriage and the Coronation are very close. More of Mir Nihal's sons and other relations are staying at his home, where there is a feeling of animosity toward the new king. In the marketplace, some of the merchants discuss the Coronation. Their business have become more prosperous and some are looking forward to having even greater riches as they see the new British government as new hope for Delhi. Some still are less than eager to accept the British and feel that once the grandeur of the Coronation is over, they will be in worse shape than before. They all lament about the days that have passed by and feel resentful that they have been conquered by the British. In retaliation for this takeover, several places, including the governor's mansion, have been set on fire. Outwardly, everyone is saddened by this, but secretly they are happy that a rebellion has started. This leads Mir Nihal and the other men in the family to discuss what actually happened in the past to cause the British invasion. Habibuddin tells the group of how the British were successful as the Indian army did not follow the orders of their general. Another in the group says that because two lovers were not allowed to be buried next to each other, the downfall of the Indian government was karma. Since this person is highly respected in



religious circles, Mir Nihal and the others believe that this reason is the true reason for the British invasion.

In Part 2: Chapter 8, all of the men of Mir Nihal's house go to witness the Coronation parade. As Mir Nihal stands with the others, he remembers the beginning of the British invasion and the bloodshed that happened afterwards. This causes him to feel an extreme amount of anger at what he is witnessing. Mir Nihal decides that he will go home by himself through one of the back streets. As he is walking, he runs into a beggar that happens to be the son of the former Indian king. Mir Nihal gives him some money before walking off, disgusted at how at his world has changed.

Analysis

This section deals with the changes that are occurring, not just with Mir Nihal as he begins retirement, but cultural changes as well with the coronation of King George. This marks the true end of the Indian monarchy and the beginning of British rule.

There is a noticeable change in the tone, especially at the beginning of the section. There is a sense of contentment as Mir Nihal takes up alchemy. The author uses Mir Nihal's childhood hobby as a symbol for Mir Nihal holding on to older traditions.

As a group, the men remind themselves of the past by telling stories of their youth. Their conversation takes a resentful tone. This is their way of dealing with the changes of the culture which they cannot embrace. Even as they are watching the Coronation parade, Mir Nihal is thinking about the British invasion. After the parade, he walks home alone with a feeling of disgust over the changes in his culture.

For those who remain adamant about not trusting change and embracing it, their future remains in the past.

Discussion Question 1

Why is alchemy so important to Mir Nihal? How does his involvement in this hobby signify his personal change?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the daily process during the time of Ramazan. How is this different from other holidays?

Discussion Question 3

How do most people feel about the Coronation? Will the Coronation help the people of Delhi or hurt it? How does Mir Nihal feel about this?

Vocabulary

pathos, lament, agog, pomp, caustic, retinues, indomitable, inscrutable, petulance, raze



Part 3: Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

In Part 3: Chapter 1, it is a few days after the Coronation and a few days before the wedding of Asghar and Bilqeece. A great number of Mir Nihal's family have arrived, and everyone is helping with the preparations for the event. Three days before the wedding, Asghar's family sends Bilqeece a set of clothes to begin the proceedings. Bilqeece sends items for Asghar's ritual bath in return. Everyone in Mir Nihal's home is happy as they wait for Bilqeece's family to arrive to begin the engagement party. Even Dilchain is extremely excited as she dances and sings around the house. Around one in the morning, Bilqeece's family arrives to take part in the engagement ceremony. During a ritual drink, her family is somewhat humiliated when one of Asghar's relations mistreats one of Bilqeece's elders, sparking a small argument between the families. This is quickly extinguished by Asghar's brother Habibuddin, but Asghar still feels extremely embarrassed. The evening carries on without any further complications.

In Part 3: Chapter 2, the wedding of Bilqeece and Asghar takes place. Asghar leads the family procession to the home of Bilqeece's parents where a small ceremony is conducted. Bilqeece's family is sad at the thought of Bilqeece leaving their home forever, but Asghar can hardly hold in his excitement. He is brought inside to meet Bilqeece finally where they are able to see each other's faces, since Bilqeece's face is to remain concealed until the entire wedding process is concluded. Afterwards, Asghar is allowed to take Bilqeece back to his home for the reception. Bilqeece cries because she is saddened by her leaving her parents home and her relatives feel the same way. The next day, the bride's face is shown to all of the guests. Afterwards, she spends the rest of the afternoon at her parents' home. While she is gone, Habibuddin pays for colored waters for the guests to toss at each other as a part of the celebration. Everyone happily takes part in this, even Mir Nihal, and the wedding is concluded.

In Part 3: Chapter 3, Bilqeece tries to settle in to her new life. She is very quiet and reserved, to the point where she does not even ask for a glass of water. She asks her servant to ask for it. Begam Waheed and Begam Nihal constantly tell her that she this is her new home and that she should allow herself to be comfortable in it, but she cannot. Even with Asghar, Bilqeece is extremely shy. She does not allow him to display any affection towards her and does not show any affection for him. Asghar is somewhat saddened by this as he is hoping that his dreams of her being madly in love with him will somehow come true but wonders if he had only imagined that there is a great love between them. Asghar begins to think about how his other lovers, including Mushtari Bai, were more supportive and affectionate. Asghar does understand that some of Bilqeece's silence comes from the fact that she was raised in a traditional Indian home where females are not allowed to show any sort of emotion. Bilqeece actually is in love with her husband but because of her upbringing she does not know how to completely show it. Instead, she makes herself useful to the entire house by helping with Mehro's wedding preparations and cooking. Everyone is very impressed with her skills, including



Mir Nihal, who gives Bilqeece green silk as a way of showing his gratitude towards her. As time passes, Bilqeece is comfortable enough to have a candid chat with her husband. She notices that he is often restless and sad as he goes throughout the day. Bilqeece thinks that if Asghar gets a job then he will be fulfilled. Asghar agrees that it is time that he takes more responsibility for his own life and is very content that he is having the loving relationship with Bilqeece that he has dreamed of.

Bilqeece is pregnant but constantly sick in Part 3: Chapter 4. She does not mind being sick as she feels that being pregnant is the ultimate joy of being married. Asghar is thrilled with his wife and the relationship is better than ever. He even brings her presents, including a pair of English shoes, which Bilqeece loves. Although she is pregnant, Bilqeece continues to help Mehro prepare for her own marriage. When the wedding day comes, Mehro learns that her intended husband is deformed and looks like a lunatic due to a recent hunting accident. When Mir Nihal and Habibbuddin find out, they want to stop the marriage. Habibbuddin knows that they cannot stop this as the guests and community will gossip that there is something wrong with Mehro, not the boy, and Mir Nihal and his family would lose their respectability. Although Mir Nihal does not want to give Mehro to this man, he knows that Habibbuddin is right and proceeds with the ceremony. At the ceremony, Bilqeece is happy as she is wearing her new English shoes. Some of the women attending the ceremony make vicious comments about them and the fact that Bilqeece comes from a lower class family. This greatly upsets her and when she tells Asghar about this later in the evening, he vows that they shall have a home of their own where she does not have to listen to what others have to say.

Asghar receives a job through his father in law in Part 3: Chapter 5. Bilqeece is at the end of her pregnancy and goes to her parent's home to have the baby since her father is extremely sick. Once the ritual days around the baby's birth are completed, Bilqeece returns with her newborn daughter, Jehan Ara, to Mir Nihal's home. A short time later, Bilqeece's father passes away from his illness. Since Asghar has taken over his father in law's business and no one else is left in the home to take care of Bilqeece's mother, Asghar purchases a house next to his mother in law so that Bilqeece can keep her company. Asghar decorates the house with English furniture and decor. When a friend of the family stops by for a visit, he looks at all of Asghar's new things with a sense of curiosity and disgust. He then goes on to tell Asghar a story about the virtues of the past and makes a comment on how those virtues are currently dying. The friend left shortly afterwards, but it left Asghar feeling somewhat ashamed of himself.

Analysis

Part 3 opens up with the wedding of Asghar and Bilqeece, shedding light on the marriage, gender, and culture themes as the author gives a detailed account of a typical Muslim wedding. The grandeur of the preparations is highlighted as the author uses imagery to help the reader understand how luxurious each piece of clothing is to show the importance of this event. The rituals leading up to the ceremony itself lasts a few days, but the account is given mainly from the men's side of the celebration. There is



little account of the bride's preparations, highlighting the gender theme in that the wedding is more about the groom rather than the bride. Even the engagement party takes place without the bride present, only the men of her family come to Mir Nihal's home. In the engagement party itself, the culture theme is present but shown in a more negative light as a small argument breaks out when one of Asghar's cousins is mischievous and the joke gets out of hand. A comment is made about how wealthy Bilqeece's family is the main cause of the argument, which is the author's way of exposing the social class difference between the families.

The tone of this section is jovial even with the small deviation of the argument, but the narrative is almost cacophonous as the parties continue the celebration all the way up to the wedding ceremony itself. It should be noted that the wedding ceremony itself is not as descriptive as the parties before this. There is in this area a heavy use of poetry as songs are sung to commemorate the occasion. The tone changes somewhat after the ceremony as Bilqeece and her family have come to the realization that their family is breaking up as Bilqeece will move into Mir Nihal's home. This gives weight to the gender theme as Bilqeece will no longer be considered a part of her own family, but a part of Asghar's, but it also shows the transition of a daughter into a wife as a part of the marriage theme. The final piece of the wedding process is the showing of Bilqeece's face to the wedding guests drawing the almost week long celebration to a close.

The introduction of Bilqeece as a major character in the narrative shows that she is a very quiet and reserved girl. There is a strong inference that because she grew up in a traditional Indian home, she has not been allowed to speak her own mind or partake in any sort of activity that does not include taking care of a home for her husband. Her integration into Mir Nihal's home is slow as she struggles to fit into these new settings although every effort is made to make her feel at home by her new mother and sister in law. She does make an effort to become more comfortable after some time, showing a desire to be helpful and thought of as a good wife. The only person who has not made a great effort to welcome Bilqeece into the family is Mir Nihal who still has reservations about this marriage. The presentation of green sateen after Bilqeece successfully cooks one of Mir Nihal's favorite meals is allegorical as it is a manifestation of Mir Nihal's appreciation and finally acceptance.

As for Asghar, it is noticeable to the reader that his disposition is slightly changing from being overly in love to a sense of slight rejection as Bilqeece is not as openly affectionate as he had hoped. He is reminiscent of other lovers as he begins to worry that perhaps the great love affair he had dreamed of is only a dream in a circular comment that shows this recognition. There is a resurgence in the relationship once Bilqeece is comfortable enough to speak her mind around Asghar. There is an observation of Asghar's character that suggests he is bored with his life as it is currently and needs something to channel his energy and challenge him. Her suggestion of getting a job is only a starting block to fulfilling her desires of having a house that is solely hers and Asghar's. This dialogue is able to shift Asghar's feelings back to being completely in love with her as this is the kind of conversation and affection he has been looking for.



The marriage is shown in sense of contentment as time goes on, especially with the advancement of their relationship as Bilqeece is pregnant. This comes at a time when another wedding is about to be performed however, there is a distinct difference with Mehro's wedding. Instead of the wedding being a light hearted and lively celebration, the author depicts a scene of complete dread in the parts of Mir Nihal, his son Habibuddin, and Mehro. This showcases the negative side of the marriage theme as it creates a contradictory image of the original vision of what Mehro had envisioned for her own marriage. There is an allusion to the gender theme in this scene as well. Since Mir Nihal's family has never seen the groom before, they have no knowledge that the groom is mentally challenged and is grotesquely deformed due to a recent hunting accident. This knowledge does not come until the day of the wedding itself, posing an immediate conflict as Mir Nihal does not want to give his daughter away to this family. There is no simple resolution to this conflict as Mir Nihal's son Habibuddin points out that to back away from the marriage would have serious social class consequences which also has an impact on the culture theme as Mir Nihal knows he must keep his standing in the community. For this reason, the unfortunate circumstance reaches a conclusion when Mir Nihal decides that the wedding must continue, without giving any thought of what could happen to Mehro or any sort of consideration for her feelings.

Another small controversy occurring at Mehro's wedding takes place among the guests as the author uses the British shoes Asghar gives Bilqeece to create a culture clash with some of the ladies. Not only are the ladies offended that Bilqeece is using a British item, but they also mock her for being of a lower social class. Their loud jeers are intended for Bilqeece to hear, causing Bilqeece's hurt feelings. This triggers a sense of outrage in Asghar after he learns of this showing that his intense feelings for Bilqeece still exist at this point. This protective feeling is an enhancement of their marriage especially as he vows to do whatever it takes to make enough money for them to buy a home of their own. He is successful in this, thanks to a job he gets with the help of his father in law.

Bilqeece's character development continues with the arrival of their daughter, Jehan Ara. Once again, culture has a great influence over this event as there are rituals around this especially as Bilqeece goes back to her parent's home to have the baby. This shows that family This is a supposed time of happiness, but it is marred by the death of her father. This unfortunate event spurs a sense of depression in Bilqeece that is foreshadowing of even worse times ahead as her depression lasts for some time. It is through this death that Asghar chooses to purchase a home beside Bilqeece's mother as both she and Bilqeece can comfort each other in their loneliness as Asghar's position with his job grows.

Asghar's home is a stark contradiction of Mir Nihal's home as the layout and decor are completely in a British fashion. A family member stops by the home to visit, but is critical of the furniture and of Asghar's choice of clothes. He relates a short parable about keeping to old traditions. The inclusion of this parable is the author's way to illuminate the family member's disappointment that Asghar is choosing to abandon the culture of his people in preference of the new ways of their oppressors. The intended comments have affected Asghar as there is a slight sense of shame felt, but this feeling is noticeably short lived.



Discussion Question 1

How are Indian weddings different from those in Western civilizations? How do the weddings of Bilqeece and Mehro differ?

Discussion Question 2

What is the difference between Asghar's and Bilqeece's feelings about getting married? Why is Bilqeece's family so sad? How does Bilqeece overcome her sadness?

Discussion Question 3

At Mehro's wedding, why are people mean to Bilqeece? What does the owning of English items mean to people other than Asghar and Bilqeece?

Vocabulary

lewd, myopic, aggrieved, auspicious, riotous, woebegone, contagion, chivalrous, insipid, trousseau



Part 3 Chapters 6 - 11

Summary

Part 3: Chapter 6 begins in 1913. Delhi has changed a great deal, especially the Chandni Chowk bazaar area as all the trees have been cut down. Violence is on the rise as small revolutions have broken out against the British. More people from all over the world are starting to move into the area, causing the Indians to worry if they will have any part of their culture left. Due to this, Mir Nihal does not often want to come out of his home any longer. He receives friends in his home who gather to talk about the past and the sadness they feel at the changing times. On most days, Mir Nihal is contented to spend the afternoons with his grandsons as they read their lessons to him and he gives them treats. On one occasion he is angry with them as they stole money from one of the female relatives of the house, causing him to shout at them when he finds out, otherwise his days are spent in peace.

In Part 3: Chapter 7, Jehan Ara is one and a half years old. Bilqeece spends more time taking care of the child and her own mother, causing Asghar to become jealous and resentful. His attitude is worsening towards Bilqeece, finding fault with everything she does. Bilqeece's mother notices this and asks Bilqeece if something is wrong with her marriage. Bilqeece is quick to deny that something is amiss, but in the evening she goes to Asghar to ask what she has done to displease him. This softens Asghar's mood towards her and he says that he is under a lot of pressure at work. He vows to be more loving, but within a few days, he goes back to being indifferent towards Bilqeece, her mother, and Jehan Ara. Bilqeece's mother confronts Asghar herself and demands to know why he is acting this way towards everyone. The argument continues with Asghar contending that everyone knew his attitude before he married Bilqeece and that he is not in the wrong. Later, Asghar confronts Bilqeece accusing her of complaining to her mother. When Bilqeece cries and denies this, Asghar tells her that his life has become a living hell because of her and her mother. With this, Bilqeece thinks that the happy times in their marriage is over.

In Part 3: Chapter 8, World War I breaks out and many men join the army. A few of the locals are sitting around watching military recruits walk by and they discuss promises made by the British army that include a whole host of good things, like plenty of money, women, and other things. The men believe that these are lies and that the British military is tricking Indians into joining. They remember that during the coronation, they had high hopes of a new time of prosperity and they realize that they were very wrong about this. To them, life has only gotten worse as prices have gotten higher on everything. Only one person in the room disagrees with the others, saying that the new government is good. He leaves after he is ridiculed for his comments and before any actual arguing can start.

In Part 3: Chapter 9, Mir Nihal is walking home from a friend's house. He looks up at all the pigeons flying and realizes that there are less pigeons in the sky since no one can



afford to take care of them, causing him to miss his own birds. As he continues to walk, he sees a funeral and decides to help with the procession. As he does this, he starts to feel dizzy and light headed. Once at home, he begins his evening prayers when suddenly he falls over. His servant tries to help him as Mir Nihal cannot move nor speak. A doctor is called in who says that Mir Nihal has suffered a stroke but that it is not dangerous before leaving. As the family gathers and sits with him, he tries to talk but cannot. His entire left side is paralyzed and he is permanently bed ridden. To pass the time, he traps rats during the day and has his servant take them out and kill them. Mir Nihal becomes sad as over time as he thinks about the past and of the strong carefree man he used to be.

In Part 3: Chapter 10, Begam Nihal falls and injures herself because she can no longer see the steps in the house. She has to rely on a stick to help her get around, but she only goes to Asghar's home whenever she does go out. Bilqeece is sick and Begam Nihal goes to take care of 5 year old Jehan Ara. As much as Asghar loves Jehan Ara, he has no feelings whatsoever for Bilqeece, opting to avoid her by finding other women and activities that keep him away from home. As Bilqeece lays in bed, she has a constant nightmare about a man she is convinced is death. When she wakes up, she makes her mother promise to take care of Jehan Ara as she feels that she may die soon. Her mother is originally reluctant but agrees to it, if only just to make Bilqeece happy.

In Part 3: Chapter 11, Asghar takes more notice of Bilqeece as he remembers how much he really did love her at the beginning. He comes to sit with her as much as she can as she has become weaker and thinner. One evening he is sitting with her and she tells him that she understands if he gets married again after her death. Asghar suddenly is hopelessly in love with her again He tells her to not worry and that when she gets well they will be the happy and loving couple they had dreamed of. IN the morning, he calls for a doctor who informs Asghar she has tuberculosis. He gives Asghar medicines for Bilqeece and Asghar begins taking care of her himself. Due to Asghar's attention, Bilqeece starts feeling much better.

Analysis

This section marks notable changes not only with Mir Nihal but with the city of Delhi itself as there is an influx of strangers in the city forcing Mir Nihal to withdraw into his home. The author's tone depicts the sadness of the city being assimilated into British culture as the main attractions of the city are torn down to make way for new construction. The culture element is relevant here as incoming waves of new people and construction are considered to be the end of the Indian culture as the locals know it. This causes feelings of resentment that they have been conquered and that their way of life is over, but also feelings of sadness that there is nothing that can be done to stop it. The author uses the location Chandni Chowk to highlight the excessive amounts of demolition going on within the city, once the beautiful tree lined bazaar area is now dirty and barren.



The people's fears are substantial as they have their claims of hopes of prosperity have gone unfulfilled, as market prices have risen steeply on essential items like butter and grain. Almost everything is considered a luxury at this point, even the hobby of flying pigeons. The conversations in the marketplace show a mainly mutual understanding that the hopes they had during the coronation of prosperity with the incoming surge of new people will never be realized. There is a strong sense of betrayal as they speak amongst themselves during Chapter 6 and once again during 8. The author makes use of political dissidence to show that the people are not happy in the manner of small revolutions aimed at the British military. This goes on in Chapter 6, but with the beginning of World War I in Chapter 8 there is an ironic reversal as the British are recruiting Indian soldiers. The main motivation they use are the promises of money, liquor, and women but men who have gathered in the local milk seller's shop know that based on the former hopes during the coronation, these promises are only meant to lure men to their deaths. The main lament in both chapters is that their world is gone at this point, the great Indian civilization is lost forever and they will never be free again.

At the same time, Mir Nihal is also acclimating to this new world. There are several references to items that have developed Mir Nihal's character in the past. These thoughts are used to promote a sense of nostalgia in Mir Nihal but to also show the reader a quick synopsis of how his life has changed in a negative sense as he has lost his pigeons, his mistress, and his culture. The loss of these things has made him become indifferent to the world, preferring to spend most of his time in his home. The indifference and loss themes are greatly seen here although he enjoys spending his afternoons with his grandsons, he no longer has the cares he once did. This section is most significant as while Delhi faces major challenges with its changes, Mir Nihal undergoes a a devastating transformation. The author uses a paralytic stroke suffered by Mir Nihal is a metaphor for the state of Delhi's citizens as their culture is paralyzed due to British domination. The stroke leaves Mir Nihal an invalid, no longer the successful and virile man he once was.

Discussion Question 1

What changes are going on in Delhi? How do the changes make Mir Nihal and his friends feel?

Discussion Question 2

What is the relationship between Asghar and Bilqeece at this point? How does Bilqeece's illness affect Asghar's feelings for her?

Discussion Question 3

What happens to Mir Nihal? How does he spend his days? How does he feel about this?

Vocabulary

idiom, caterwauled, forbearance, discourse, macabre, unguent



Part 4: Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

In Part 4: Chapter 1, the year is 1918 and World War I has started, with many thousands of Indians fighting and dying for England. Along with this, influenza is spreading through Delhi and the death count is so high that the most prosperous people at the moment are grave diggers. Many of the grave diggers would steal from the dead once families have left the newly created cemeteries. They do not care about the grieving families, only about the money that can be made. Almost everyone in the burial business cheats families out of money for their own purposes. Although the people of Delhi are downtrodden, they still write songs and poetry to unsuccessfully try to lift their spirits.

Bilqeece's improvement makes a drastic turn for the worse as she hears of people dying all around her in Part 4: Chapter 2. She is now bedridden and very close to dying. Asghar, Jehan Ara, Bilqeece's mother, and other family members have gathered around Bilqeece and are caring for her at all hours. In the middle of the night, Asghar is awakened as Bilqeece wants to talk to him one last time. He tries to console Bilqeece, but she says goodbye to him and dies within minutes.

Bilqeece is buried in Part 4: Chapter 3. Asghar goes to her grave every day to grieve over her and ask for forgiveness for his indifference. He does not come home till many hours later, many times he does not come home until well after dark.

Mir Nihal lies in his bed all alone on most days in Part 4: Chapter 4. Many of his alchemy friends and others who used to visit the house are either dead or unable to come visit. As Mir Nihal spends his days thinking about the past and how much he misses it. Mir Nihal is a permanent prisoner of his bed, he even needs help from his servants for the smallest of things. When Asghar comes to visit, he wears mostly British clothes, but Mir Nihal no longer cares enough to confront Asghar about this. By this time, Begam Nihal is blind, she spends most of her time untangling rope or depending on her servants to get around. Begam Waheed is an older woman with grandchildren. Mehro can only write to her family as she is not allowed to visit as her husband is extremely controlling of her.

In Part 4: Chapter 5, Asghar takes care of Jehan Ara by himself every day. Bilqeece's sister Zohra comes regularly to help as she feels that taking care of a child should be left to a female. As Zohra spends more time with Asghar and Jehan Ara, Asghar begins having romantic feelings for Zohra. One evening, Asghar begins to explain his troubles to Zohra resulting in the sudden acknowledgement that they both have feelings for each other. Zohra gets scared and leaves the house, and does not come back for a few days. When Jehan Ara falls down and will only let Zohra console her, Zohra comes immediately. Asghar asks her why she has been away for a few days. He reaches out and hugs her, acknowledging that a romance is beginning.



Analysis

This brief section is significant as it is the point in which loss is the main motivating factor in the city as well as in Asghar and Mir Nihal's lives. The author uses the metaphor "city of death" to describe Delhi at this point as not only the death toll from the war but an epidemic of influenza has swept through the city. Once again, the author uses imagery to engage the reader by providing a thorough observation of the city's declination as death becomes a lucrative business. There is an emphasis placed in the corrupt burial practices that have made common thieves rich by preying on the grief of families, particularly ones who do not have much money in the first place. There is a strong sense of dread and sadness from the beginning of this section, however the author interjects that even though the people are grieving, they still try to maintain their positivity by writing more poetry and songs. This tactic is not always successful, but it does show that the people continue to be resilient above all else.

The most prominent event in this section is the death of Bilqeece. Although at the end of Part 3, Bilqeece was committed to getting better for her family, here she rapidly declines as her mind is preoccupied with all of the death around her. As Bilqeece is bedridden, the author includes a nightmare that she has to provide a sense of the fear that Bilqeece is experiencing as she knows she is dying, but no effort made to improve her condition. Asghar has kept his word from the previous section and has been acting as the doting husband, showing a considerable difference from his usual coldness. As Bilqeece breathes her last and tells Asghar goodbye, there is an incredible sense of sadness exuding from Asghar as Bilqeece's involvement in the narrative is completed.

Bilqeece's death causes a shift in Asghar's priorities as he is the sole caretaker of his daughter, Jehan Ara. He becomes more involved in her life as he must now do everything for her child in both mother and father capacities. This allows for the introduction of Zohra, Bilqeece's younger sister. Zohra takes the place of a mother figure to Jehan Ara, and alleviating Asghar's struggle to maintain both roles. He still feels an incredible amount of grief over the loss of his wife, spending several hours a day by her grave to ask for forgiveness for his prior attitude towards her.

Zohra's inclusion to the narrative not only is helpful in the care of Jehan Ara, but provides a catalyst for Asghar to return to his womanizing and selfish ways. He incurs pity from Zohra as he laments the loss of Bilqeece and the hardships of raising a daughter. Through this, Asghar develops feelings towards Zohra and although the feeling is not mutual at first. This small difficulty is short lived as in a sharp turn of events Zohra there is the inadvertent revelation of her feelings towards him. This new declaration of feelings propels Asghar's story line but it also completely ends any thought of grief he has over his late wife. This causes a break in the narrative for the author to directly interact with the reader to deliver a snide comment about Asghar's ability to easily forget Bilqeece.

As for Mir Nihal's experience with loss, he is battling both the loss of his culture as well as the loss of his physical abilities, causing him to withdraw into his own kind of world



fully of memories of a long ago past. There is a feeling of neglect, something different for any other time in Mir Nihal's plot course that suggests that he himself is forgotten throughout the day. Mir Nihal has a very limited appearance in this section, with the author conveying a sort of helpless and weak nature that no longer wishes to have any part of the world. Indifference comes into play here as he no longer cares about Asghar's openly wearing all British clothes, showing a vast change in Mir Nihal's firm hatred in the British shown in the past. Now, Mir Nihal does not care at all about his own position in society, being loyal to his country, or about anything that used to occupy his mind.

Updates on the rest of the family are given as a slight deviation by the author. This allows the reader to continue to be informed of the smaller roles in the story and a glimpse at how time has affected them. All of the characters have aged considerably, most notably Begam Nihal, who is mostly blind and dependent on the use of a stick or servants to go anywhere. Otherwise, she is in the house for the majority of the time, spending her days untangling strings to keep her busy. Begam Waheed and Mehro's updates provide a parallel of outcomes. Begam Waheed is living peacefully as a grandmother but Mehro is living unhappily as her marriage has not worked out to the point where she no longer allows him to visit her family, in a show of dominance over her.

Discussion Question 1

What has happened to Delhi? How are the people surviving?

Discussion Question 2

How does Mir Nihal now spend his days? How has his family changed?

Discussion Question 3

How does Asghar react to the death of Bilqeece? How does he move on from this?

Vocabulary

lamentations, acquiesce, bereaved, woebegone, reverberate, transience, prophetic, martyrdom



Part 4: Chapters 6 - 10

Summary

In Part 4: Chapter 6, as Asghar walks home from his office, he notices how deserted the streets have become and the massive presence of British troops and Indian police. It is during these times that revolutions are breaking out in the open, but the men involved are quickly dealt with. Asghar does not care about any of this. He is in love again, this time with Zohra and nothing else matters to him. He passes by the milk seller's shop and sees the milk seller walking around in a daze and his wife screaming. He asks someone what is happening and is told that the milk seller's son was killed in the afternoon after he left the shop to protest against the British. Asghar feels sorry for this family, but he turns and walks away from them.

Asghar's brother Habibuddin comes home in Part 4: Chapter 7 as he has not been feeling well lately. Asghar tells him about the milk seller's son and Habibuddin's son recites a poem about politics and war. Asghar gives the boy some money to show his appreciation. A friend of Habibuddin's comes in and all of the men talk about politics, with the friend saying that he does not mind the British as his business is not directly affected by what is going on although he disagrees with their traditions and way of life. At this, he goes on to tell a story about the past and interceding with fate.

Asghar talks to Begam Nihal about proposing to Zohra in Part 4: Chapter 8. He says that he must marry here on behalf of Jehan Ara who needs a mother influence in her life and since Zohra and she are already close, it would make a fine match. Begam Nihal agrees and says that she will talk to Zohra's mother. Even Mir Nihal is pleased with this arrangement.

During this time, another of Asghar's aunts is living in the house who is overhearing this conversation. She goes to Begam Jamal about this and in turn Begam Jamal goes to Zohra's mother to warn her about Asghar's intentions. Zohra's mother then tells Zohra not to visit with Asghar any more, but she continues to sneak over to his house. She tells Asghar that Begam Jamal had informed her mother about them and that Zohra has been ordered to stay away. This angers Asghar, who goes to Mir Nihal with this problem. One of the servants tells Begam Jamal that she overheard Mir Nihal yelling about her, causing Begam Jamal to confront Mir Nihal. She wants to know who told him about what is going on and of her discussion with Zohra's mother. Mir Nihal does not wish to accuse his son and tells Begam Jamal that he cannot. Begam Jamal threatens to leave the home permanently if he doesn't tell her. After a week, Mir Nihal continues to not denounce his son, causing Begam Jamal to move out and into a home she had been renting out to someone else.

Mir Nihal is greatly upset by the departure of Begam Jamal in Part 4: Chapter 9. He is left alone to cry and be bored most of the days and is often kept dirty and halfway fed. His servants become unhappy that they have to serve and help him, but he does not



think about this. Asghar is impatient to get approval to marry Zohra, who has already told him she is willing to do so. Mir Nihal's other son, Habibuddin, is still sick and comes home again to be taken care of. His friends bring all kinds of medicine and religious people to treat him but nothing works. Mir Nihal can do nothing but lay in his bed and worry about his son while he continues to get worse, while Mehro and Begam Jamal come home to see their brother. Muslim clerics are brought in to try to heal Habibuddin, but nothing works. One afternoon, his wife cries in front of him, but quickly stops as he assures her that he will be better soon.

Habibuddin is close to death in Part 4: Chapter 10. He begins to ask his family for forgiveness for any wrongdoing he may have done. After three days, Habibuddin dies while talking of deceased relatives. People in the community mourned his death, talking about what kind and generous person he was. Habibuddin is taken to be buried in the cemetery and Mir Nihal is brought to the funeral in a stretcher. Mir Nihal weeps openly for his son. When the funeral is over, everyone goes back to Mir Nihal's house for an after funeral meal. As Asghar is about to eat, he sees Zohra's servant waiting in the courtyard. She hands him a letter stating that she will no longer be seeing Asghar as she has just been told that the family is marrying her to someone else first thing in the morning. With this, the servant leaves Asghar to handle his loneliness. While everyone else is eating, Mir Nihal is back in his bed by himself, remembering the past as he slips into a coma and dies.

Analysis

The conclusion of the narrative comes in this section as the metaphoric "twilight" comes to Mir Nihal and others in this extremely short section. The author's tone in this section is a continuation of the previous section as there is a great sense of dread and sadness. The author continues the narrative with a poetic ambiance, especially as Asghar is thinking about his love for Zohra in Chapter 6. He is oblivious to the plight of the city around him, and shows little regard for the main action of this chapter as the milk seller's son has been killed during a protest against the British. This is a clear example of the conflict that still remains in the area and that no one is safe. The city's role in the novel concludes with this chapter as the milk seller and his family are left to mourn.

Instead, Asghar's preoccupation with his love for Zohra has made him impatient to hear when he might marry her. Once again, his mother is enlisted in helping Asghar talk to Zohra and Bilqeece's mother to arrange the marriage. This time, there is no need for aid from anyone else as Begam Nihal readily agrees to help Asghar. Even Mir Nihal, who was previously against Asghar's marrying below his social class, is greatly enthused by the idea, showing that Mir Nihal has changed greatly although it is not known if it is due to his recent paralysis or if there is a true liking at this point for the other family. Asghar cleverly uses the fact that Zohra is a logical solution to finding a surrogate mother for Jehan Ara as she is her aunt and is already close to her to secure his parent's help. There is no indication that he talks of his own feelings towards Zohra nor of her feelings towards him.



This time, the proposal is met with a complication. No longer is Zohra and Bilqeece's mother so eager to accept a proposal from Asghar as the mother is upset that Asghar's selfishness has caused him to completely forget about Bilqeece so quickly. This is also aided by a visit from Begam Jamal, whose gossip about overhearing Begam Nihal's conversation about Asghar's marriage has helped before, this time it does not. Begam Jamal is told by one of the other aunts about Begam Nihal going to see Zohra's mother, but Begam Jamal goes to see her first with the notion that she must express her opinion about the situation. The result of this conversation is that once Begam Nihal comes with the marriage proposal, Zohra's mother is reluctant to give any kind of answer, but the implication is that she will end up saying no to the arrangement.

Asghar's brother Habibuddin has been seen in short points in the novel and has not had a very integral role in the novel up to this point. Here, he re-emerges, but has a more pivotal role in the novel as the family worries about his illness. He has contracted tuberculosis like Bilqeece, but it shows that more efforts are made to save him. Muslim clerics, religious healers, and others are brought in to help him. The author makes use of the same person who gives Begam Waheed and Begam Nihal a parable about marriage and a parable to Asghar about losing traditions to enter the story again to give a short anecdote about fate. This is especially relative as it seems that nothing is curing Habibuddin, no matter what kind of cure they try.

Mir Nihal's condition is remarkably worse during this time as well. There is a distinct change in his demeanor as the servants no longer take good care of him. They consider him to be childlike and a pain to deal with as they must complete all tasks for him, including helping to use the bathroom. Because of this, Mir Nihal is dirty, the author points out that his sheets and pillows are nearly black due to neglect and that Mir Nihal is often underfed and alone. This change does not affect his memory as he spends most of his days reminiscing about the better times in his life, although he is sometimes depressed at the thought of his current situation and in comparison to what his life once was. The author uses an argument between Mir Nihal and Begam Jamal to highlight a great emotional change that has happened. When Asghar comes back to Mir Nihal as he has learned of the reluctance by Zohra's family for the marriage, Asghar relates that it was Begam Jamal that went to them first. The confrontation between Mir Nihal and Begam Jamal shows Begam Jamal's angry nature at having been accused of any wrong doing and wants to know who informed Mir Nihal about this. With Mir Nihal's reluctance to say who told him about what was said, Begam Jamal moves out of the home. This incident is remarkably hard on Mir Nihal, causing him to cry a great deal, which can be speculated as something he would not do before his stroke. The author points out that he has a great respect and love for Begam Jamal as he and his brother, Begam Jamal's husband, were extremely close. With this, Begam Jamal's involvement in the narrative is completed.

Habibuddin's rapid decline is considered the climax of the novel as everyone is gathered around him, knowing that the end is near. The situation becomes so dire that his sisters, Begam Waheed and Mehro come home to sit with him. Although Mir Nihal can do nothing about this, there is a considerable amount of concern for his son that is visible. As Habibuddin is close to death, the tone is soft and quiet, a sense of foreboding



can be felt as he asks forgiveness to anyone he thinks he may have mistreated. Within three days, Habibuddin passes away. The despair and sorrow is felt throughout the entire neighborhood as they mourn Habibuddin's loss and prepare for his burial. Mir Nihal cannot contain his grief over the loss of his son. Due to his paralysis he is unable to help with any of the preparations and must be carried to the cemetery, which can be speculated causes Mir Nihal great shame as he is helpless to do anything.

The finale of the novel rests with Mir Nihal and Asghar shortly after Habibuddin's funeral. Both outcomes are anti-climactic and ironic as the return to Mir Nihal's home after the funeral end in two different events. The first is Asghar's as he is still under the notion that he will be able to marry Zohra at some point. In a complete reversal of fate, Asghar is denied in a particularly callous manner that would seem as a certain sense of justice being meted out by Zohra's family. The denial does not come through a conversation or direct contact with Zohra. Instead it comes in the form of a short note delivered by her servant which states that her family is marrying her to someone else first thing in the morning. This unexpected twist in Asghar's story line resolution is intended to be a reversal of the same callousness in which he so easily forgotten Bilqeece. His story line ends on a cliffhanging note as he is left standing in the courtyard unsure of what to do next.

As for Mir Nihal, the ending of his story line is the ending of the novel itself. The metaphoric "twilight" is depicted here as he returns to his bed following the funeral. Mir Nihal is left as a shell of the man he once was and is left thinking about the repercussions of his life and that his decline into indifference towards everything is somehow the cause of the ruin of his family. This reflection is a mirror image of the fall of Delhi and of the once great society that Mir Nihal loved so much. With this, the author closes on the coming night as an allegory for not only the death of Delhi, but of Mir Nihal himself.

Discussion Question 1

How do Begam Nihal and Mir Nihal feel about Asghar wanting to marry Zohra? What does he tell them that makes this idea seem like Zohra is the logical choice for a wife?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mir Nihal's life during this time. Is he happy? How does Habibuddin's death affect him?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Begam Jamal go to Zohra's mother? What happens when Zohra's mother finds out that Asghar wants to marry her?

Vocabulary

askance, placidity, prescience, obstinate, peremptory, vagaries, credulity, efficacious, emaciated, incumbent, reproachful



Characters

Mir Nahal

Mir Nihal is the protagonist of the novel. He is a devout Muslim and successful businessman who is well respected in the community. Mir Nihal believes in the old customs of Delhi society and is fervently against India becoming a part of the British Empire. He goes with his family to watch the coronation of King George, but he is so upset by the fact that many of comrades are giving in to the British so he goes home by himself.

Mir Nihal is adamantly against his son, Asghar, using English items, including the boots Asghar wears in the beginning of the novel. He is also adamantly against his son marrying Bilqeece, as she comes from a family who is not of the same social class. He has already picked out Asghar's future wife, the daughter of a prominent Delhi family. Mir Nihal is more concerned with the reputation of his family rather than his son's happiness, which is a major dilemma between the two. The loss of his two favorite things, his mistress and his pigeons, changes that and causes him to go into retirement.

As time goes on, Mir Nihal delves into a childhood hobby, alchemy. He converses with several others on a regular basis about proper alchemy techniques, as they reminisce about their youth.

Toward the end of Part 3, Mir Nihal has a stroke, and his health begins to decline. His mental and emotional strength wanes. He becomes bedridden and simpleminded before his death at the end of the novel.

Asghar

Asghar is the other protagonist of the novel. He is also the source of Mir Nihal's beginning conflict in the fact that Asghar wants to marry someone who comes from a family who is not of the same social class as Mir Nihal. Asghar is a very petulant and impetuous man who harbors a small amount of resentment towards Mir Nihal not only for his initial disapproval of Bilqeece but for the fact that Mir Nihal is a conservative Indian Muslim. There is a small amount of tension between them at the beginning of the novel when Mir Nihal sees the English boots that Asghar wears, and Asghar feels that same tension when both he and Bilqeece are criticized for their preferences for English items later in the novel.

When Asghar is able to marry Bilqeece, he gives up on many lovers, including Mushtari Bai, who is secretly in love with him though Asghar is oblivious to this. He is set on Bilqeece. Initially, after he marries her, he slightly regrets that decision as Bilqeece does not openly show her affection for him. This frustrates Asghar. Although the relationship improves over time, Asghar falls out of love with his wife, who falls ill. Soon after, she dies. Asghar's mourning is short lived, as his arrogant and petulant nature returns.



Asghar's attention turns to Bilqeece's younger sister Zohra. There seems to be no sense of grief for his late wife as he pursues Zohra, even being so conniving as to try to convince others that he is pursuing Zohra so that she can take care of his daughter for him.

The end of his story line is rather anticlimactic, as well as ironic. Instead of getting his way with marrying Zohra, he is left with only a note from her saying that her family is marrying her immediately to someone else. He does not have a chance to at least say goodbye to her.

Bilqeece

The daughter of a lower income family, Bilqeece is the the main romantic interest of Asghar's. Asghar becomes depressed and threatens to commit suicide if he is not allowed to marry her.

Bilqeece represents the quiet, yet loving aspect of a woman as she stays silent in the beginning of her marriage. Her upbringing has taught her to not show a great deal of emotion outwardly, but it is clear that she greatly loves Asghar. Bilqeece finds her own voice after becoming comfortable with living with Asghar and his family.

It is Bilqeece who motivates Asghar into finding full time employment and, eventually, a house of their own. Bilqeece's feelings do not diminish for Asghar. Instead, she just vocalizes them less as she spends more time with her daughter Jehan Ara. Bilqeece feels that the care of the home and children are the main roles of a proper Indian wife. Her quiet nature is the cause of an irreparable strain on the marriage as Bilqeece's silence causes Asghar to become indifferent towards her and eventually fall out of love with her. Bilqeece is aware of this not knowing how to make amends for her behavior. This is a downward spiral for her as the relationship causes her to go into depression until Asghar promises to do better. This only lasts a while before the tension comes back into the relationship, but there is a legitimate reason for this at this point. Bilqeece contracts tuberculosis, forcing Asghar to shift in his ways, although it is evident that he does not feel the exact same love he did for her before. Subsequently, Bilqeece dies.

Begam Nihal

Begam Nihal is the wife of Mir Nihal and the matriarch of the family. Her primary role is to keep the house running smoothly and to obey her husband's wishes. Begam Nihal is the personification of the submissive wife's role in Indian customs. She defers to her husband in all things and is tasked with maintaining the home and the lives of their children.

She does take matters into her own hands after conversations with Begam Waheed and Begam Jamal by deciding that she will arrange the marriage between Asghar and Bilqeece without Mir Nihal's consent this shows that while she still has to respect what



her husband says, there are still some things that Begam Nihal can do without him. Her devotion to Asghar is very evident by her decision to go ahead without Mirnial.

The only other time that Begam Nihal has not been the model wife is depicted in a discussion between Begam Waheed and Asghar as they recount the mental health crisis Begam Nihal experiences upon learning of an affair between Mir Nihal and Dilchain in the distant past. Begam Nihal's eventual acceptance of this shows that she is exceptionally strong willed and this continues as she faces her own physical health problems as she eventually goes blind.

Zohra

Zohra is the 14 year old sister of Bilqeece. Zohra has no prominent role in the majority of the novel, she mainly makes her entrance in Part 4, after the death of Bilqeece. Seen as a caregiver, Zohra's beginning function is to help Asghar take care of Jehan Ara. Zohra is very helpful in this as the little girl trusts Zohra, but over a short period of time, Asghar impetuously develops feelings for Zohra. The feelings are not mutual at first. Within a short amount of time, Zohra feels the same way about Asghar. This relationship is unusual because it goes against the arrangements of the marriages and the feelings expressed by the two of them are open between them. The relationship is not allowed to go any further once Zohra's mother finds out about this. Zohra's mother is unhappy about this relationship as she has watched Asghar's initial passion for Bilqeece dissolve into indifference and ultimately Bilqeece's death. In a surprise anticlimactic ending to Asghar's narrative, Zohra has a note delivered to him saying that her family is marrying her to someone else at dawn the following day.

Begam Waheed

Begam Waheed is the daughter of Mir and Begam Nihal. She lives in Bhopal with her late husband's family and her children as she feels that it would be wrong to return to Mir Nihal's home after her husband passes away. When Asghar is depressed at the thought of not being able to marry Bilqeece, he sends for Begam Waheed to come home so that she may talk to their parents and gain their support. Begam Waheed is considerably concerned for her younger brother's feelings and believes Asghar's threats to commit suicide if he is not allowed to marry Bilqeece. Begam Waheed is successful in convincing Begam Nihal to talk to Mir Nihal about the marriage. After the consent is given, Begam Waheed takes Asghar back to Bhopal with her so that he can wait during the customary year before he is allowed to marry Bilqeece.

Mushtari Bai

Mushtari Bai is the only one of Asghar's mistresses who is mentioned by name in the novel. When Asghar is desperate to marry Bilqeece, he and a friend go to see Mushtari Bai to provide solace for Asghar. It is not known to him that Mushtari Bai is secretly in love with Asghar. When the friend announces Asghar's intentions to marry Bilqeece,



Mushtari Bai is heartbroken but does not say anything to him. Mushtari Bai is the personification of the poetic and sensual side of a woman side as she has a passionate romance with Asghar. Although Mushtari Bai is only interacted with at the beginning of the novel, when Asghar marries Bilqeece he finds himself reminiscing about the intense passion he shared with Mushtari Bai. It is unclear towards the middle and end of the novel if he returns to Mushtari Bai once Asghar starts seeing other women.

Mehro

Mehro is the youngest child of Mir and Begam Nihal. She does not have a prominent role in the narrative, but her marriage highlights a slightly darker image of the marriage theme. Her marriage is only briefly mentioned throughout the novel, but it is starkly different from Asghar's. Mehro's marriage is already arranged prior to the start of the novel to a prominent family. Mehro never meets her husband before the marriage, causing her a great deal of anxiety. On the day of her marriage, her anxiety is increased as she overhears the talk of the her father and her brother Habibbuddin.

The main problem with this marriage is that Mehro's husband has been deformed due to a hunting accident. His features are quite hideous, and Mir Nihal considers him deranged looking. Although Mir Nihal gives a great deal of consideration to cancelling the marriage as he does not want his youngest daughter to go to someone like this. Unfortunately, Habibbuddin is quick to point out that if the marriage does not take place then the family's social status will be in danger as people will not question what is wrong with the husband, but suspect that something is wrong with Mehro.

Dilchain

Dilchain is the elderly, female house servant for Mir and Begam Nihal. It is unknown how long she has been with the family. However, she and Mir Nihal once had a romantic affair when Asghar and Begam Waheed were very young. Dilchain is the one who goes to Begam Jamal when she overhears the conversation between Begam Nihal and Begam Waheed about Asghar's marriage. This shows her character to be somewhat of a gossipy and trouble making kind of woman.

Begam Jamal

Begam Jamal is the sister-in-law of Mir Nihal. She lives in Mir Nihal's home after the death of his brother. Begam Jamal is representative of the conniving, gossiping, and dramatic demeanor in women.

When Dilchain overhears the discussion between Begam Waheed and Begam Nihal concerning Asghar's marriage, Dilchain goes to Begam Jamal to tell her everything. In turn, Begam Jamal is very snide when she confronts Begam Nihal about what she has heard. This comes from the fact that Begam Jamal was once looked down on and teased for marrying beneath her own social status.



Her gloating does come with a small benefit, as she successfully convinces Begam Nihal to proceed with Asghar's wedding preparations without Mir Nihal's consent. Her role in the narrative is rather small from this point until shortly after Bilqeece's death. When Asghar shows interest in Bilqeece's younger sister Zohra, Begam Jamal goes to Zohra's mother to warn her of Asghar's interest. It is unknown what her motivations in this are, but due to this, Asghar is not allowed to court Zohra.

When Asghar confronts his father about this, Mir Nihal is enraged with Begam Jamal, but he will not say how he knows this information. This leads to a conflict between Mir Nihal and his sister in law that ultimately hurts his feelings as she threatens to move out if he does not tell her. The result of this conflict is that Begam Jamal gets so frustrated that she ends up moving out of Mir Nihal's home and into a home that is used for rent.



Symbols and Symbolism

English Boots

The English boots that Asghar wears in the beginning of the novel are a material representation of the conflict between Asghar and his father. As a proud Indian who resents British rule, Mir Nihal is offended that Asghar is wearing these boots. Asghar is upset that Mir Nihal is angry about these, but he does not want to start an argument with his father, so he leaves so that nothing more can be said.

Pigeon

The pigeons represent a sense of peace and happiness for Mir Nihal, as they are his prized possessions. Mir Nihal takes a great deal of care of his pigeons, often putting them as a higher priority than his family. Mir Nihal enjoys flying his pigeons and talking to others who enjoy pigeon flying.

Some of the pigeons die due to heat exhaustion, but he quickly replaces them at the bazaar. Unfortunately, a short time later, Mir Nihal accidentally leaves the pigeon coop unlocked, allowing a cat to come in and kill the majority of the pigeons. After this and the loss of his mistress, Mir Nihal no longer feels the peace and happiness he once did. In his depression, he decides that the remaining pigeons should be sold and he no longer wants to deal with them.

Cat

The cat is used by the author as the method in which Mir Nihal must face one of the first major changes in his life. When Mir Nihal hears about Babban Jan's illness, he accidentally leaves the pigeon coop unlocked. When he comes back, he finds that the cat has eaten the pigeons. In his anger, Mir Nihal takes a stick and beats the cat severely before throwing it out in the street.

Weather

The author uses weather as a way to foreshadow drastic changes within the novel. It is the wind that is portrayed the most as it blows shortly before any major events happen. Usually the heat and wind are the two main items within this as the wind blows new events into the life of Mir Nihal.

During the oppressive heat, some of Mir Nihal's pigeons died, causing him to look in on them more often; which is where he is when news of Babban Jan's illness comes to him and makes him forget to close the door and allows the cat to enter. The heat is also reflective of Asghar's mood in the beginning of the novel as he is temperamental and



depressed at the thought of not being able to marry Bilqeece. Once he finds out that the arrangements for the wedding will proceed, the weather breaks into milder temperatures.

Coronation

The coronation of King George of Great Britain is the action that represents the fall of the Indian Empire and the drastic changes that occur afterwards. The coronation is highly anticipated by some, but resented by others who remember the violence that destroyed the monarchy.

Due to the expense dispensed during the preparations for the coronation, many believe that prosperous times are coming back to Delhi, but they are soon proved wrong when parts of the city are destroyed to make way for British construction and the cost of living rises dramatically. Violence rises as those who are resentful soon revolt against this new regime giving way to a new time of fear and uncertainty.

Green sateen

Bilqeece's green sateen is used by the author to show Mir Nihal's changing attitude toward her from dislike to acceptance. When Bilqeece moves into Mir Nihal's home, she is nervous toward everyone. Eventually, she starts to help in with the housework, but Mir Nihal still does not speak to her very much. One evening, Bilqeece makes one of Mir Nihal's favorite foods, which he greatly enjoys. The next day, he brings her the green sateen to show his appreciation and acceptance.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is the physical manifestation of the sadness and despair that has taken over Bilqeece since Asghar has fallen out of love with her. After the death of her father and the birth of Jehan Ara, Bilqeece becomes emotionally stressed out as Asghar begins to change his attitude towards her. Her mental health takes such a decline that she becomes bedridden and fears she may die.

After a conversation with Asghar about his mistreatment, Asghar promises to be more loving toward her, lifting her spirits. But, she is still sick. Asghar brings in a British doctor who declares that she has tuberculosis and it is thought that she will get better. She does improve for a while, but she ends up succumbing to the disease.

Alchemy

Alchemy is symbolic of Mir Nihal's continued determination to hold on to the culture of the past. He used to practice alchemy as a boy, but as he grew into manhood and took on responsibilities of a wife and family, he stopped. He begins this hobby again soon



after he retires, meeting with other men who are interested in the skill. No one has ever been successful although they enjoy exchanging stories of their pasts and continuing to try to turn basic items into gold and silver.

Stroke

The author uses a stroke as the method in which Mir Nihal faces his greatest challenge and change. As Mir Nihal prays one evening, he falls over and is unable to move or speak. Doctors are brought in to declare that he has had a paralytic stroke. This forces him to remain bedridden as he watches the rest of the world carry on without him. This is metaphoric for the helplessness that many Indians feel since the British have taken over and left them with very little of their past culture.

Twilight

The twilight at the end of the novel is metaphoric to the end of Mir Nihal's life. After a long life in which he was a successful and respected man in the community, Mir Nihal's life changes with the loss of the things he loved the most, the marriages of his children, and his retirement. This leads him to the ultimate change in which he is paralyzed and must spend the rest of his days laying hopelessly in a bed until he slips into a coma and dies. Twilight is also a metaphor for the end of Delhi as an Indian cultural icon as well. After the coronation of King George of Britain, Delhi undergoes a massive transformation as the culture, scenery, and lifestyles of the people in the city shifts under British domination.



Settings

Delhi

The city of Delhi is the main setting of the novel. It is a large city with a magnificent history of being raised from a warlike area to a cultural icon. By the start of the novel however, the city has fallen into decay again as recent violence between the British and the Indians has resulted in the removal of the Indian monarchy. The coronation of King George occurs here and the city experiences an influx of British people, especially the military. After the coronation, minor revolts occur continuously but are quickly quelled.

Bhopal

Bhopal is a city that is an undisclosed distance from Delhi. Begam Waheed lives in Bhopal with her deceased husband's family. Before the death of another of his sisters, Asghar also lived in Bhopal. When the marriage is arranged between Asghar and Bilqeece, Asghar follows Begam Waheed back to Bhopal to wait for a year until the wedding. Mehro also gets married and lives with her husband in Bhopal, although she is no longer allowed to visit her family in Delhi as her husband is always suspicious of her.

Chandni Chowk

Chandni Chowk is a large marketplace in Delhi. This is where Mir Nihal usually walks and is the main place he purchases his pigeons and meets with other esteemed men in the community. The area is demolished shortly after the coronation of King George to make way for British construction.

Mir Nihal's home

Mir Nihal's home is where most of the novel takes place. The home itself is on an older street and barely recognizable as it is behind a plain large wall. It is laid out in the customary Indian fashion, with a living section, dining area, and sections for the men and women separately. Mir Nihal's pigeons are kept in a separate section on top of the roof of the home.

Asghar's home

After the wedding of his sister Mehro, Asghar decides to purchase his own home. It is next door to Bilqeece's mother, enabling Asghar to install a door that connects the two homes. Unlike Mir Nihal's home, Asghar and Bilqeece's home is filled with an array of British furniture and decor. This shows that the stark comparison between father and son continues, but at this point, Mir Nihal no longer cares about Asghar's preferences.



Themes and Motifs

Marriage

The marriage motif is used by the author to create a dilemma for Asghar as his obsession with Bilqeece drives him to despair and threats of suicide. Marriage serves as a source of conflict between himself and Mir Nihal. Marriage is important in the Indian culture because it aids in the growth of the family and the rise in social status. For Asghar to want to marry beneath his social status is offensive to Mir Nihal, who wants Asghar to marry into a more prominent family. Asghar has other women in his life, but he finds that none of them are as good as Bilqeece. This is especially hurtful to his main mistress Mushtari Bai,

It is only through the intervention of Asghar's sister, Begam Waheed, that Asghar receives help from his family. At first reluctant, Begam Nihal is persuaded by Begam Waheed to intercede for Asghar. First Begam Nihal goes to Mir Nihal to calmly discuss the matter, but the conversation is abruptly cut short due to Mir Nihal's anger at this request. The conversation includes the fact that a bride has already been picked by Mir Nihal, someone of more fortunate means. Mir Nihal's sister in law over hears this conversation, which is a point of irony as she was once criticized for a seemingly badly matched marriage. It is unknown whether Begam Jamal married lower or above her social status when she married Mir Nihal's brother. This ironic point serves a purpose but not in the way that Begam Jamal wants. Instead of being able to successfully gloat over her sister in law's circumstance, she actually inspires Begam Nihal to take the initiative to arrange Asghar's marriage. The arrangement of a marriage is typically the responsibility of the father, but Begam Nihal is reminded that it is legal if the mother makes the match as well.

The marriage ceremony itself is an elaborate ritual taking place over the course of days. Certain items like wedding clothes and gifts are described by the author in great detail to enthrall the reader with the opulence of these items. The rituals itself are a jumble of partying and prayer, the chapters containing the entire process are short yet chaotic and slightly confusing as there is a massive amount of people doing varied things all at the same time. These parties last well into the middle of the night and are attended by almost the entire community.

This is a stark contrast to Mehro's wedding. The bride has no control over the circumstances such as the groom. She is mainly left to sit in a room all alone while the celebration goes on without her. As Mehro sits alone, a family member comes to her and tells her that her new husband is hideous. This heightens the fears that Mehro already has about marrying a stranger. When Mir Nihal finds out about this, he is upset. He does not want to give Mehro away to someone who looks so terrible. Unfortunately, his hands are tied as he has already given permission for the marriage. To back out at this point would spell certain doom for his family's social standing, which is something Mir Nihal holds in the highest regard. Mir Nihal continues onward with Mehro's marriage,



and she is unable to stop it. This contrast shows how the roles of the bride and groom are so severely separated that a bride has no say in her future or happiness.

As Asghar gets his wish, the narrative changes in tone as the marriage is not what Asghar hopes it would be. Asghar's dreams are of a passionate and intense love between him and Bilqeece. This is not the case as at the start of the marriage, Bilqeece is still reserved due to her strict Muslim upbringing. She is quiet even when Asghar tries to show her affection. Asghar is somewhat deflated by this, wondering if this great love affair had only been a dream. The relationship improves after Bilqeece is comfortable enough with Asghar to suggest that he get a job to cure his restless spirit. This brings about a new hope for Asghar that Bilqeece truly is the girl of his dreams.

The marriage evolves again with the birth of Jehan Ara and the death of Bilqeece's father. These circumstances are important as they establish Bilqeece's mindset as she devotes most of her time to her daughter and her mother. This sets up a dilemma between Asghar and Bilqeece as there is jealousy and resentment on Asghar's part. In turn, Asghar treats Bilqeece badly, constantly complaining and arguing with her. Finally he tells her that he is miserable living with her. He spends more time away from home with mistresses, causing Bilqeece to become so depressed that she is near death. The cold and callous ways in which Asghar treats Bilqeece is noticed by everyone around them, adding to Asghar's frustrations as there are confrontations with his mother in law.

The marriage takes on another turn once the root of Bilqeece's illness is determined to be tuberculosis. Asghar actually makes an attempt to keep his wife happy, but it is noticeable that the great love he had for her is still gone. Bilqeece also makes an attempt to get better so that the marriage can improve, which happens only for a short while. She passes away, leaving Asghar sad and lonely. He does mourn for her for some time as he realizes only too late that he was very mean to her.

Marriage to Asghar is the means to fulfill his obsessions and dreams. His first obsession was Bilqeece. However, after her death, he shifts his focus to her younger sister Zohra. The twist in this marriage set up is that the bride is willing, but the family is not, given the fact that they have all watched Asghar's behavior towards Bilqeece and they fear that the same thing will happen to Zohra. To them, Bilqeece's death is too recent for Asghar to even think of replacing her. Instead, as a way to keep Zohra away from Asghar, they decide to marry her to someone else immediately, once again showing that the bride has no control over her own happiness. This is also a way to punish Asghar not only for his treatment of Bilqeece but for his foolish obsession with marriage.

Culture

The author uses the motif culture as a source of dilemma in various points of the plot development. This includes not only Mir Nihal's own narrative as he tries to hold on to the traditions of an upper class, conservative, Muslim/Indian family but also in the relationship between Mir Nihal and his son Asghar as the rest of the citizens of Delhi transition from a centuries old society to being a part of the British empire.



To gain insight into the depth of the contrasts between Indian and British culture, the author begins the novel with a brief history of the magnificence of Delhi as the city grew in prominence but due to wars and other conflicts, the city has become old and decayed. Having grown out of violence and chaos, the author describes the rise of the city with a poetic flair to further add to the dramatic splendor, but he also uses it to describe the declination of the city as well.

Poetry is of great importance in the Indian culture, as seen through the author's extensive use of poems throughout parts of the novel. This brings the reader a small sense of the lyrical beauty of the culture while giving insight into the narrative. Mir Nihal is obsessed with the poetry of ancient writers as they remind him of India's glory days when Delhi was an icon of Indian civilization. Others like Mir Nihal also recite and create poetry as a way to conserve this past. Even after the British have desecrated their monuments and influenza is destroying the population, they continue with this practice as a way to record their history.

The dilemma of this motif is personified best as the conflict between Mir Nihal and Asghar as two equally opposite men. Mir Nihal relishes the past, preferring to only think about Delhi in its glory days. Asghar is more progressive, preferring to model himself after the British. The way in which Asghar does this is offensive to Mir Nihal and others who are proud and loyal Indians. For Asghar to prefer the British is akin to turning his back on their heritage and supporting the people who have taken over the country and are oppressing them.

The first example of culture as a dilemma occurs with the first interaction between father and son as Mir Nihal notices that Asghar is wearing English boots. As Mir Nihal begins to berate Asghar for this, Asghar leaves in hopes of stopping a potential argument that he knows is getting ready to happen. There is a further example of this when Bilqeece is wearing British shoes at Mehro's wedding, she is openly criticized by other wedding guests for wearing them. This scene is effective as it is meant to demoralize Bilqeece and to show reactions of people other than Mir Nihal so there is a broader perspective of the dilemma. When Asghar finally buys his own home, He fills it with British furniture. This suggests that Asghar has made a full conversion to British culture, which saddens a family friend who stops by for a visit. The parable he tells Asghar is intended to show Asghar that their culture is being lost as much as they are trying to hold on to it.

As Mir Nihal is a devout Muslim, the traditions of a typical Muslim lifestyle is projected throughout the novel. In every event, Islamic traditions are recognized to show the importance of Mir Nihal's faith and how it affects his daily life. The author pays particular attention to Asghar's wedding, giving a full account of the entire almost week long ritual. Daily prayers are important throughout most of the novel, except towards the end as Mir Nihal is paralyzed and can no longer perform them. Social status is also a key to the cultural theme as Mir Nihal finds it just as important as his faith, even going to the lengths of continuing Mehro's wedding to a deranged man in order to keep his place in society.



The coronation of King George is the signature event that spells the doom of the Indian monarchy as the British empire has seized control of India. The culture of the Indian people is dying as the British bring in their own traditions, destroy public areas for their own construction, and invoke rules meant to keep the people subdued. The beginning of Part 4 of the novel showcases the downward spiral of Delhi nicknaming it the "city of death" as the people are miserable and dying of influenza, lack of resources, and the final annihilation of their former glory.

Loss

The way in which loss affects each character reveals their personal strengths and weaknesses as they face the dilemmas that loss brings with it. For Mir Nihal, loss is felt on a variety of platforms, each building up to create a devastating change in his life. The first loss he experiences is the loss of his pigeons. For Mir Nihal, the pigeons represent a time of prosperity and a sense of happiness in his life. When they die due to Mir Nihal's carelessness, he no longer can find the joy in having a hobby that once allowed him a feeling of freedom and peace. This brings about the change of giving up his remaining pigeons with the intention of never flying them again. He is saddened to do this but he no longer sees the point in the practice.

This is especially hard for him because it also comes at the time of the loss of his mistress, Babban Jan. It is due to news that Babban Jan is dying that Mir Nihal is so careless with the lock on the pigeon's cage, allowing a cat to come in and eat a majority of the pigeons. For Mir Nihal, Babban Jan was the true love of his life. Everything he did, was for her, not for his wife. The money he earns from his job usually never went to Begam Nihal, instead, he always gave it to Babban Jan and he provided her with her own house as well. When Babban Jan falls ill and dies, Mir Nihal is heartbroken. The loss hardens Mir Nihal's heart and causes him to become indifferent to the rest of the world. He no longer cares what is happening with his family or the state of the country's affairs. Instead, Mir Nihal immediately enters retirement as he feels he has no one to take care of. There is a certain amount of offense shown when a friend asks him about replacing his mistress. Babban Jan's loss is so significant that it is here that Mir Nihal starts to lose his feeling that he is a strong and virile man. Instead, he begins to think that he is too old to enjoy the things in life he once did, and so he vows never to have another mistress in his life.

The loss of the culture in Delhi is also a factor in Mir Nihal's change. Mir Nihal spends a great deal reminiscing about the greatness of the past. With the coronation of King George, memories come back to Mir Nihal of the pride of Delhi before the British invaded. For Mir Nihal, the loss of this once great civilization is hard to accept, especially as he remembers those who were killed trying to defeat the British before Delhi was conquered. Mir Nihal is an extreme loyalist, the loss of the culture weighs heavily on him especially as he sees how British culture is pushing the last remnants of the Indian civilization into a soon to be forgotten oblivion. The loss of India's culture sends Delhi into a tailspin of revolution and death as prices on necessary items go up beyond what anyone can afford and there is a constant threat of violence anywhere one



goes. For this loss, Mir Nihal no longer wishes to deal with the outside world. Instead, he is comfortable studying alchemy at home, surrounded by friends and taking care of his grandsons.

The ultimate loss comes to Mir Nihal in the form of a stroke that causes him paralysis. This is a metaphoric parallel to the paralysis that Delhi is experiencing due to the wave of new laws enacted by the British meant to subdue the native citizens. In Delhi's case, this loss of freedom is met with resentment and soon violence breaks out as the people wish to free themselves from this imposed loss of their culture. For Mir Nihal, the paralysis causes him to be weak, no longer the proud and strong man he once was. The paralysis makes him lose his hope and gives him a sense of helplessness from which he knows he will never escape from.

For Asghar, the loss of love is a heavy factor as he feels that he cannot live without love. At the beginning of the novel, he constantly threatens suicide if he cannot be allowed to marry the alleged love of his life, Bilqeece. When he is able to marry her, she does not show the affection that he had been hoping for. This causes a loss of the dream Asghar had established in having a perfect life for himself. In turn, the loss of this dream triggers the loss of his feelings for Bilqeece, causing him to become cold and indifferent towards her. This outward showing of uncaring towards her causes Bilqeece to slip into depression and over time it gives way to tuberculosis.

The loss of Asghar's love is something that Bilqeece does not intend. However, once it happens it is irreversible until she is close to death. Asghar regains his feelings for her, but unfortunately, they come too late as Bilqeece passes away. The loss of his wife is for a short time extremely hard on Asghar. He feels responsible for the emotional damage that caused her decline and death.

Gender

Gender encases roles that differentiate between men and women. The author also chooses to sub-categorize women as he uses different characters to personify certain stereotypical traits of a woman. Gender plays heavily in the Indian culture, with the man being the dominant gender and the women serving in a subordinate capacity. Both genders have defining roles that they must stick to according to conventional Indian/Islamic standards. Even within these roles, there are other sub roles to be considered as different characters serve different functions within the novel.

Mir Nihal himself is the strong, powerful, and successful man. He is the patriarch of his family and all decisions about life in the house must be approved of by him. This includes the consent for his son Asghar to marry Bilqeece, a girl from a lower social class. His reaction at the first request is complete rage and quickly denies this request because he feels superior to Bilqeece's family and does not like the thought of his family mixing with theirs. When she does marry Asghar, he speaks to her very little, causing her to question if he likes her. His mood softens towards her when she cooks one of his favorite dishes, presenting her with green sateen as a symbol of his acceptance.



As the archetype of a man, the author does not over expose his flaws but writes them in a way that makes the reader empathize with him. This is best exemplified by his preference for his mistress, Babban Jan over his wife Begam Nihal. When she passes away due to an illness, Mir Nihal's grief is palpable as he decides that he no longer cares about anything or anyone and retires from his job. Combined with the grief over Babban Jan and the grief over the loss of his pigeons, he withdraws into his old hobby of alchemy and memories of India before the British invaded.

His son Asghar is the opposite. Asghar is a dreamer and a lover type of man. He is somewhat of a womanizer until he meets Bilqeece, then becomes obsessed solely with her. He is oblivious to all his past mistresses after this, including Mushtari Bai, his favorite mistress. As a dreamer, Asghar can only envision the pleasantries of marriage and of the possible intensely passionate romance he hopes to have with Bilqeece. His dreams are dashed as Bilqeece is not as affectionate as he had hoped. He realizes that this is due to being raised in a strict household, but the disillusionment has left him feeling indifferent and callous towards her. Like Mir Nihal, Asghar takes on the mantle of responsibility in terms of providing for the family and home but his mannerisms towards Bilqeece indicate that he is extremely unhappy. His womanizing ways return shortly after Bilqeece's death when he sets his sights on her younger sister Zohra.

The ladies in the novel also have their definitive gender roles. Begam Nihal, Begam Waheed and Bilqeece are the stereotypical submissive Indian wife. Their first priority is to care for the husband and the family. They do not make large decisions themselves, only when it is absolutely necessary, such as is the case when Begam Nihal goes ahead with Asghar's wedding plans behind Mir Nihal's back. The author suggests that she has the legal ability to do so, but it is a highly unusual circumstance. The inclusion of Begam Waheed indicates that when a woman marries she is no longer a part of her own family. After the death of her husband before the start of the novel, Begam Waheed remains with her parents in law as custom dictates that she is part of their family. The same is the case for Bilqeece. Even her wedding rituals are determined by gender as she does not have a great part in the celebration. The author suggests that the wedding is more for the man rather than the woman as the bride waits alone in a room while the groom attends feasts and interacts with the guests.

Another side of the gender role in women is the young, seductive, and passionate mistress as personified by Mushtari Bai and Babban Jan. Both women are the more sensual and lively women in Asghar's and Mir Nihal's lives. They dance, sing, and care for the men in ways that their wives do not. The unfortunate thing about them is that they are expendable to Mir Nihal and Asghar. The women are not allowed to have open feelings for their lover. Instead, they are to fulfill the lover's needs with no thought or question about their own. This is mostly seen in Mushtari Bai's comments when Asghar's friend announces Asghar's intention to marry Bilqeece. Mushtari Bai is crushed by this revelation, but she is not able to do anything but smile through her pain.



Indifference

Indifference in the novel has a resounding effect on Mir Nihal and Asghar. Those effects are felt by the people around them who have to bear the consequences. Indifference is doled out by the men in the novel, while the women are forced to bear it.

Indifference is sometimes unintentional. However, for the most part, it comes after a loss is experienced, causing this emotion to come out. Mir Nihal's indifference can be seen towards his wife as he prefers his mistress Babban Jan over her. He does not go to work to sustain his wife or his own home. He admits that he works to support Babban Jan in the home that he has bought for her. This indifference does not cause a rift between Mir Nihal and his wife, but it is clear that Mir Nihal does not care for Begam Nihal as much as he does Babban Jan.

This indifference intensifies shortly after Babban Jan's death and the death of his pigeons. Mir Nihal is in such grief that he gives up both his job and his favorite hobby. He no longer cares about being the successful businessman he was nor does he care about engaging in his long time hobby. This indifference is vocalized in a conversation between Mir Nihal and a friend when the friend tells him that he can always get another mistress. Mir Nihal's response is an admission that he has become old and tired and is no longer the man he used to be. This statement shows that he has become indifferent to the things that used to bring him joy.

As the novel progresses with the coronation of King George, Mir Nihal becomes indifferent toward his community. As a loyalist to the Indian Empire, memories of the bloodshed between British troops and Muslim forces come back to Mir Nihal during the coronation. His resentment turns to indifference as he does not care about the current society and the changes that are coming with it. Instead, he stays mostly at home. This is a reflection on his aging years and the indifference he shows for the outside as well. This retreat into his own surroundings allows him to occupy himself and several of his friends with his old hobby of alchemy.

There is one point in the narrative that shows where Mir Nihal's indifference is subtle, yet it has a great impact on his family's lives. Mehro is about to be married. Until that day, the groom is not seen. When it turns out that the groom is mentally challenged and horribly disfigured due to a hunting accident, Mir Nihal is upset at the thought of allowing his daughter to marry this man. He wants to stop the wedding, but his son Habibuddin tells him that the wedding must go on in order to keep their social status. Due to Mir Nihal's indifference toward Mehro's happiness and, perhaps, safety and in order to save their position in the community, Mir Nihal agrees. The consequence of this indifference is that Mehro is not allowed to see her family. She may only write letters to them until Habibuddin is close to death.

When Mir Nihal himself is close to death, he gives thought to all of these matters. There is a realization that his own sad outcome may have been induced because of his indifference to things that should have had more importance. The consequences of Mir



Nihal's indifference culminated together show that he is not the strong and successful man he thinks he is.

As for Asghar's experience with indifference, it is seen in three different ways, but two are connected to his obsession with love, showing that his obsession makes him selfish and childish. His indifference towards Mushtari Bai is not actually shown, but his attitude towards her during a visit relates that he is indifferent towards her as he is only thinking of Bilqeece. This is especially the case when Mushtari Bai is shocked when it is revealed that she is not the object of his affections, a sign that he merely thinks of her as someone for his amusement. She is deeply in love with Asghar, but like all of his other lovers, he does not truly care for them. This shows his disregard towards any woman who is not Bilqeece.

After the marriage to Bilqeece, Asghar's indifference comes from Bilqeece spending more time with Jehan Ara and her mother than she does with Asghar. Showing an incredible amount of selfishness, Asghar becomes resentful and jealous. The result of this is that he no longer loves Bilqeece. Instead, he goes back to his mistresses and spends as much time away from home as possible.

Asghar's behavior does not go unnoticed by the people around him and confrontations occur, mainly between Asghar and his mother-in-law. Bilqeece does not provoke any arguments, but it is clear that Asghar takes his anger out on her because he feels that she is the cause of his misery. Asghar's indifference causes Bilqeece to become depressed, creating a downward spiral ultimately leading to her death.

At first, Asghar deals with his indifference in this situation by being extremely remorseful. He is aware that his indifference has caused Bilqeece pain and misery until she could no longer withstand it. Unfortunately, the indifference evolves to where he has forgotten all about Bilqeece once he begins to notice her younger sister Zohra.

The complete twist of emotions is not lost on Zohra's family members, especially after a visit from Begam Jamal who gossips about Asghar's intentions to marry Zohra. Zohra's family still bears a grudge against Asghar for his treatment of Bilqeece. In order to stop this from happening again, Zohra's family plans to have her married to someone else, not even giving Zohra a chance to say goodbye in person to Asghar. Through Asghar's indifference, he has not only lost his first love, but has managed to ruin any possibility of having Zohra as his second love.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the third person, omniscient point of view. The protagonist is the patriarch of the family, Mir Nihal, a conservative Muslim in Delhi. Mir Nihal is watching his family and the world around him change as he grows older. Although Mir Nihal is the main focus of the novel, the subplot involves his son Asghar and Asghar's romantic woes.

Asghar's narrative is also told in the third person. This allows the reader to see contrasting points of view as the conservative father and the more progressive son live with life's constant changes.

Language and Meaning

The novel is rich with descriptive language that prompts the reader to visualize the main story lines, as well as the vibrant settings. To further enhance the imagery, the author relies heavily on the use of metaphors and similes,

Usage of various Indian, Hindu, and Muslim words for various objects, pieces of clothing, and other items further enhance the experience. Context clues surrounding these words allow the reader to understand the meanings of the cultural jargon that is used.

Poetry is often mixed in with the narrative as the author's way of giving a lyrical testament to the emotional aspect of the narrative.

Dialogue is mainly used to advance the story line. The dialogue rarely deviates into topics that are considered unessential.

Structure

The story is broken into four parts, with each beginning years apart. At the beginning of each part, a small piece of various Indian poetry appears before the part begins. This is in some way to give the reader an allusion to the narrative that follows.

The first section introduces Mir Nihal and his family. It establishes the family dynamic, character traits, and the key plot of Asghar's desire to marry Bilqeece.

The second section is more devoted to Mir Nihal and his reactions to major changes in his life. This is also where the Coronation occurs, giving the British Empire total control of the country, highlighting a massive cultural change.

The third section is the marriage of Asghar and Bilqeece and how the marriage evolves from shy and quiet to pleasantly romantic. Then, the marriage becomes unhappy for both of them.

The fourth and final section deals with major and tragic changes that occur to both Asghar and Mir Nihal. These changes bring about the conclusions to the main parts of the narrative and provides closure for the novel itself.



Quotes

To be loved is sweet, he thought, whereas to love is full of sorrow and grief and pain.
-- Narrator (Part 1 Chapter 4 paragraph 6)

Importance: Asghar is used to being beloved by many people. He is mainly focused on marrying Bilqeece, but the marriage cannot take place as his parents have not approved of the match. This is causing Asghar a great deal of pain and depression, from which he does not feel that he can recover. Asghar goes on to threaten to commit suicide unless he is allowed to marry her.

For though women hold a subordinate position in Indian life yet in certain matters they can take the law into their own hands, and marriage is one of them.
-- Narrator (Part 1 Chapter 10 paragraph 15)

Importance: This quote shows that in most things Indian woman are to be subservient to their husbands and not make decisions of their own. Because of Asghar's threat to commit suicide, Begam Nihal has agreed to speak to Mir Nihal about Asghar marrying Bilqeece. After Mir Nihal becomes enraged at this suggestion, Begam Jamal reminds Begam Nihal that she has the ability to arrange this marriage herself. With this information, Begam Nihal begins to plan Asghar's marriage.

The road of Life grew dim in the hazy distance, but he got ready to continue the journey all alone.
-- Narrator (Part 2 Chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: This showcases the grief that Mir Nihal feels after the loss of his mistress Babban Jan and his pigeons. Because both are gone, Mir Nihal has decided that he no longer cares about much of anything. He has no desire to fly pigeons any longer nor does he want another mistress. He also no longer wishes to work, thinking that his sons can provide for him in his retirement. With this, he also no longer cares about Asghar's decision to marry Bilqeece and gives his son permission to marry her.

Right on the road, lining it on either side, and in the procession, were English soldiers, to show, as it seemed to Mir Nihal, that India had been conquered with the force of arms, and at that point she will be retained.
-- Narrator (Part 2 Chapter 8 paragraph 8)

Importance: Mir Nihal goes with his sons to see the coronation of King George. He sees all of the military lined up and in the parade and he is reminded about the bloodshed that led to this point. When Mir Nihal sees the large military presence, he knows that the British intend to make sure that any kinds of revolts will result in great consequences.

Women are born and brought up by their parents only to be given away to strangers, people who have never known them before, never felt any love or affection for them Yet



the girl is, as it were, in trust with the parents for them. And when the time had come to know her charms, to see her do things for the parents and lend them a helping hand, she is given away to others. She will serve them now, and they will call her their own, for to them she now belongs. She is brought up just to be banished from her home, her parents, and her kith and kin.

-- Narrator (Part 3 Chapter 2 paragraph 34)

Importance: As Asghar and Bilqeece get married, Bilqeece and her family are especially sad as they know that Bilqeece will no longer be a part of their family. This quote shows the true role of a female. Her parents are merely caretakers as they raise her and educate her so that she may be a wife and a member of another family.

He thought of Mushtari Bai and other sweethearts. He remembered their warmth of their passion and their loving ways. By contrast Bilqeece looked so dull and insipid. But she was young and beautiful: and Asghar had built most beautiful castles around her lovely frame. He ascribed her coldness to shyness and to the atmosphere of restraint which prevails in Indian homes, and went on loving her with an intensity which she did not understand. Yet he was not so much in love with her as with his own self, his own dreams and illusions which she had created in his mind.

-- Narrator (Part 3 Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

Importance: Bilqeece is extremely quiet and reserved when she first marries Asghar. She does not allow him to show her any affection. This is annoying to Asghar, as he wants a romance that is intense and reminiscent of the relationships he has had with Mushtari Bai and other women. As Bilqeece does not openly show affection for Asghar, he begins to wonder if his love is only an illusion.

But don't you see, if they go away without the marriage taking place, no one will blame them. They will all say that there is some defect in the girl. We shall then have no face to show to anyone...

-- Habibuddin (Part 3 Chapter 4 paragraph 15)

Importance: No one knows that the intended groom for Mehro is deformed and mentally challenged until the day of the wedding. Mir Nihal is angry at this and does not want to give his last daughter to someone who seems like a lunatic. Unfortunately, Habibuddin knows that if Mir Nihal cancels the wedding then people will not look at the groom as being at fault. They will blame the bride, causing severe damage to Mir Nihal's social status. Unwilling to forsake that for his daughter, Mir Nihal agrees to the marriage, and the wedding commences.

The old culture, which had been preserved within the walls of the ancient town, was in danger of annihilation. Her language, on which Delhi had prided herself, would become adulterated and impure, and would lose its beauty and uniqueness of idiom. She would become the city of the dead, inhabited by people who would have no love for her nor any associations with her history and ancient splendour. What who could cry against the ravages of Time which has destroyed Nineveh, Babylon, Carthage as well as Rome?

-- Narrator (Part 3 Chapter 6 paragraph 10)



Importance: Since the coronation, Delhi has been undergoing a whirlwind of change that will eliminate the Indian/Muslim culture and bring in the British way of life. Many places and monuments have been destroyed to make way for new construction. The people fear that with the incoming of new people from all over the world, their way of life will take over the Indian culture and there will be nothing of it left.

That is wonderful! The daughter says she said nothing. The mother complains and shouts at me. And my life has become a living hell between you two. It is better to commit suicide than live such a miserable life...

-- Asghar (Part 3 Chapter 7 paragraph 51)

Importance: After a considerable time of acting coldly toward Bilqeece, Asghar is confronted by his mother in law who accuses him of withholding affection from Bilqeece. Enraged, Asghar confronts Bilqeece who insists that she has said anything to her mother. Asghar says this because he no longer feels any love towards Bilqeece, causing her to go into a deep depression as she realizes their happy marriage is over.

Delhi became a city of the dead. But the people of Delhi, true to the traditions of the past, did not miss an opportunity of having a few digs at Fortune.

-- Narrator (Part 4 Chapter 1 paragraph 15)

Importance: Influenza breaks out in 1918, claiming the lives of hundreds in Delhi. This is a new woe that is added to the changes and devastation already seen in the city due to British rule. The people try in vain to cheer themselves up by writing new songs and poetry. But, they are not successful.

Zohra was young and beautiful, and under the shadow of Love's tapering flame Asghar seemed to find happiness at last. Hardly six months had passed since Bilqeece's death. Yet, he was thinking of marrying again. How cruel is the heart of man!

-- Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 39)

Importance: A short while after Bilqeece's death, her sister Zohra helps take care of Jehan Ara. Asghar begins falling in love with her. In a sudden moment, Zohra inadvertently reveals her feelings for him. This shows that Asghar has no concern for the death of Bilqeece and the extent of his selfishness.

But life remained over which men had no command and must go on. He was weary and tired, limp like a shaken hand. His world had fallen to pieces all around him, smothered by indifference and death.

-- Narrator (Part 4 Chapter 10 paragraph 33)

Importance: After the funeral of Habibuddin, Mir Nihal is left alone to lie in his room and grieve by himself. This is the culmination of Mir Nihal's life as it had steadily declined throughout the novel, ultimately leading up to his own death.