

Research Paper

Construction of the Theme, the Form and the Mode of Narration through 'Pessoptimistic Divide': A Deconstruction of First Four Chapters of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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"O Ireland my first and only love / Where Christ and Caesar are hand and glove?" (48) – These are the lines, Sadik-J-Al-Azm quotes from an early poem of Joyce to express Salman Rushdie's position in the literary world. This is more so, as Rushdie employs 'pessoptimistic divide' (Ball 110) in his novels to embrace the polarities of post-colonial and postmodern era and celebrate them, without denying or transcending them. He uses it as an artistic method to construct it as the theme, the form and the mode of narration in his novels. This paper aims to analyse this artistic method through microcosmic deconstruction of the first four chapters of *Midnight's Children* under the limelight of the concepts expounded by deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida and Hillis Miller and also modern theologians and existentialists like Soren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich and Jean Paul Sartre. Sentences like 'the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement' (MC 3) to describe Saleem's birth and emergence of India as an independent country, that point towards intricate fissure of Hope and Despair, are taken for scrutiny to study the nature of the 'pessoptimistic' tone (Ball 110), their significations and the third spheres that pop up from the interplays of Hope and Despair.

Keywords: 'pessoptimistic divide'; 'absolute faith'; 'courage of despair'; 'creative despair'; 'free play'; 'strange opposition'; 'intimate kinship' 'hymeneal bonding'; and 'osmotic mixing'.

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INTRODUCTION

Hope is an amalgamation of expectations and desires, whereas Despair denotes the complete loss or absence of these two. Hope and Despair have been defined and delineated differently by different theologians and philosophers, but they share in common the fact that these two binary opposites constitute common human condition irrespective of age, race, culture, religion,

nation, etc. Though great theologians, philosophers and religious scriptures have elucidated the causes and effects of Hope and Despair, man has never succeeded to free himself from the clutches of the whirlpool of these binary elements. Even the clear-cut solutions to escape from the vortex of Hope and Despair given by theologians, philosophers and religious scriptures have

not freed mankind for ages. For instance, Existentialists have dealt with the concept of Despair and Hope in detail from various angles. While speaking about the design of Hope and Despair, Jean Paul Sartre says in "Commitment":

As for "despair", the meaning of this expression is extremely simple. It merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the sum of the probabilities which render our action feasible. Whenever one wills anything, there are always these elements of probability...Beyond the point at which the possibilities under consideration cease to affect my action, I ought to disinterest myself. For there is no God and no prevenient design, which can adapt the world and all its possibilities to my will. When Descartes said, "Conquer yourself rather than the world," what he meant was, at the bottom, the same - that we should act without hope. (853)

Here, action without hope does not mean that one should live without hope. It means that one should live with hope, but when it is time to act, it should be carried out without expecting results. In other words, actions, free of desire, are expected to avoid despair. This is what is expounded in *The Bhagavad Gita*, in the third chapter, which discusses about *Karma Yoga*. (Verse 19 158-59) This view of Sartre is reflected in Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* when Akbar discovers the cause of his despair after a series of retrospection:

It's true, he acknowledged silently, I hope for too much. I hope for eternity. An hour's not enough for me. I hope for greatness, which is more than men should desire. (That 'I' felt good when he said it to himself, it made him feel more intimate with himself, but it would remain a private matter, one that had been resolved.) I hope for long life, he thought, and for peace, for understanding, and a good meal in the afternoon. (EOF 72-73)

In this concern, Paul Tillich's philosophy of 'absolute faith', 'courage of despair' and 'creative despair' (944-48) and Soren Kierkegaard's definition of Hope in "Dread as Education toward Faith" cannot be disregarded. Tillich describes 'creative courage' as 'the courage to face things as they are to express the anxiety of meaninglessness' (945) and 'courage of despair' as 'the courage to take one's despair upon oneself and resist the radical threat of nonbeing by the courage to be oneself' (944), and this existential philosophy coincides with Salman Rushdie's concept too: "What can't be cured must be endured." (MC 192) Tillich's definition of 'absolute faith' (947) and Kierkegaard's account of Hope

as 'the inward certainty which anticipates infinity' (Dread as Education toward Faith 840) fall in the same line. These concepts about Faith, Hope and Despair are similar to Rushdie's philosophy of life which he puts it in a queer manner in *Midnight's Children*: "For every snake, there is a ladder; for every ladder, a snake." (425); and "Snake can lead to triumph, just as ladders can be descended." (MC 204) Another similar concept is seen in his *Shalimar the Clown*: "For every O' Dwyer, ... there is a Shaheed Udham Singh, and for every Trotsky a Mercader awaits." (30) This concept of Rushdie is also very evident in the words of the Anglo - Indian artist Vasco Miranda, himself doomed like Saleem Sinai: " 'A man's weakness is his strength, and vercy visa' ... 'Would Achilles have been a great warrior without his heel?' " (MLS 155) To sum up, the concepts about the essence of life expounded by Rushdie, Sartre, Descartes, Tillich, Kierkegaard and *The Bhagavad Gita* seem to be delinked at surface level, but their basic underlying principles are the same which find a comprehensible outlet in *Midnight's Children* where Rushdie equates life to the game of Snakes and Ladders, confirming the common condition of man irrespective of the external changes:

All games have morals; and the game of Snakes and Ladders captures, as no other activity can hope to do, the eternal truth that for every ladder you climb, a snake is waiting just around the corner; and for every snake, a ladder will compensate. But it's more than that; no mere carrot-and-stick affair; because implicit in the game is the unchanging twoness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil; the solid rationality of ladders balances the occult sinuosities of the serpent; in the oppositions of staircase and cobra we can see metaphorically, all conceivable oppositions, Alpha against Omega, father against mother ... (MC 194)

To illustrate this interplay of Hope and Despair in his fictional world, Rushdie uses a unique style and tone of narration which is aptly termed by John Clement Ball as 'pessoptimistic divide' (110). Using this style of narration, Rushdie, in his works, examines and analyses the aftermaths of colonization and the effects of colonial oppression by making his characters move through tunnels of despair and hope, disasters and triumphs, and love and hatred. Themes advanced by postcolonial critics such as double consciousness, exile, hybridity, disillusionment, cultural identity, 'unhomeliness' and alienation are also dealt with by Rushdie in a similar manner.

Snakes represent failures, disillusionment, disasters, despair, degeneration and degradation. Ladders indicate success, stoic endurance, triumphs, hope, up-gradation

and regeneration, but, this Snakes and Ladders concept receives a unique treatment in the hands of Rushdie. His characters in the post-independence era are seen climbing up the Ladders of worldly and materialistic success and at the same time, they slither down clinging to Snakes of despair, experiencing inner degradation and degeneration. The reverse of it is also handled with magical craftsmanship by Rushdie to depict the elements of fragmentation, quest for identity and rootlessness that prevailed during the post-independent era in India. Rushdie, in his works with India in a post-modern and postcolonial setting at the background, like a juggler, makes the Snakes and Ladders, Love and Hatred, and Hope and Despair interchange their roles as signifiers and signifieds continuously and thus, ensuring the 'freeplay' as expounded by Derrida:

... in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse ... The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (Structure, Sign and Play 354)

The term 'pessoptimistic' used by John Clement Ball to comment about the imagery of 'drainage' in *Midnight's Children* aptly fits in to describe the interplay of Hope and Despair in the episode which jointly delineates the birth of Saleem Sinai and the emergence of India as an independent country on 15th August, 1947. Clement Ball views that Rushdie, in this novel, has celebrated the Nehruvian vision with which independent India was born - as secular, pluralistic democracy - and has scoured the historical assaults on that vision that culminated in virtual 'death' during Indira Gandhi's Emergency (110). In this regard too, the term, 'pessoptimistic', befits well. The first four chapters of this novel exemplify the term 'pessoptimistic divide' (Ball 110) with regard to the interplay of Hope and Despair and thus, set the tone for the rest of the novel. This paper examines these first four chapters in microcosm to feel and incarcerate the essence of the macrocosm of the narrative technique employed in the novel on the whole. It also makes a telescopic analysis of the events, characters and the tone of narration in these chapters to illustrate Rushdie's craftsmanship in deploying the interplay of Hope and Despair in the form of 'pessoptimistic divide' to construct it as the theme, the form and the method of narration, altogether in the novel. The events in these chapters are meticulously chosen and placed in alternate succession in order to evoke Hope and Despair alternatively and sometimes unexpectedly, in tandem too. This is more, as some events evoke both Hope and Despair at the same time. The characters are also made to hop between Hope and Despair alternatively and at times surprisingly, to harbour both of these binary opposite elements concurrently too. Rushdie's artistry is further exemplified

in his choice of words to evoke Hope and Despair in succession and sometimes, simultaneously too as typically exemplified in these statements: The sentence, "For every ladder, there is a snake." (MC 197) shows the presence of pessimism amidst optimism; the statement, "But for every snake, there is a ladder." (MC 197) shows the presence of optimism amidst pessimism; the statement about Kashmir valley amidst war and violence, "Even in its time of darkness it was still a place of light." (SC 361) evokes Hope amidst Despair; the description of Saleem's birth and emergence of India as an independent country as 'the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement' (MC 3) point towards intricate fissure of Hope and Despair; and the words of Yuvraj at the arrival of Kashmir soon after his father's death, "Only now that he has sadly departed but you have gladly come." (SC 358) typifies 'pessoptimistic divide' aptly. This unique treatment of the interplay bizarrely, yet amicably coincides with Derrida's concept about the infinite play of signification and Hillis Miller's concept about binaries that both word and counter-word subdivide and reveal themselves to be already fissured within themselves and that uncanny antithetical relation exists not only between pairs of words but within each word itself. As such, this paper also focuses on the study of 'pessoptimistic divide' employed by Rushdie in the first four chapters of *Midnight's Children* under the limelight of the concepts expounded by deconstructionists like Derrida and Hillis Miller and also modern theologians and existentialists like Soren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich and Jean Paul Sartre.

The first chapter titled, "The Perforated Sheet" of *Midnight's Children* ushers in Hope as the clock-hands welcome the birth of Saleem and India's arrival at independence with their joined palms in respectful greeting, but the very first page of the novel ends with the words - "But I have no hope of..." (MC 3) The birth of Saleem is recorded as - "I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps." (MC 3) - which accords Despair to his birth, making it look as if his birth is being dabbed on him forcefully, but, the fireworks outside bring in rays of Hope and joy, marking the celebration of the birth of the new nation, India, on 15th August, 1947. A few seconds later, Saleem's father is reported to have broken his toe, marking the celebration with a tinge of sorrow, which is discarded immediately as a mere trifling issue when set beside Saleem's befallen state. Saleem's ironic expression of his gratitude towards 'the blandly saluting clocks' as they place him 'mysteriously handcuffed to history' (MC 3) to the destinies of newly born country, India, sets a tone of Despair to the narration: "For the next three decades, there was to be no escape." (MC 3) A list of nicknames to be bestowed on Saleem in future - Snatnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon - is paraded as 'heavily embroiled in Fate' (MC 3) and this is preceded by prophesies of the soothsayers, reports of celebrations in the newspapers

and events where politicians ratify Saleem's authenticity. Here, it is quite obvious that Hope and Despair are meticulously placed in unerring alternate positions. These two counterparts do not just remain in stagnant watertight compartments. They fuse, defuse and overlap in concord to Miller's concept of 'hymeneal bonding' and 'osmotic mixing', subverting and nullifying 'the apparently unequivocal relation of polarity which' (Miller 443). The way each word in itself gets separated by the strange logic of 'para' and makes 'the strangers friends, the distant near, the dissimilar similar, the *Unheimlich heimlich*, the homely homey, without, for all its closeness and similarity, ceasing to be strange, distant, dissimilar' (Miller 443), the interplay of Hope and Despair leads to a state of despaired-hope, hopeful-despair, and a state of doubt, meaninglessness, faithlessness and uncertainty.

The dawn of India as an independent country and Saleem tumbling forth herald the beginning of a new era where incidents like breaking of Ahmad's toe soon after Saleem's birth and Saleem's birth, labelled as his befallen state without any escape, are to be viewed as casual happenings. This befallen state without any escape echoes Tillich's analysis of the man's existence in a state of doubt in the present era: "...man still is aware of what he has lost or is continuously losing. He is still man enough to experience his dehumanization as despair. He does not know a way out but he tries to save his humanity by expressing the situation as without an "exit"." (Tillich 944) A list of nicknames for Saleem to be bestowed later on him, preceded with high sounding prophecies, foretells the life of Saleem. The readers get to know that, Saleem's life is to be a tragic one in spite of his inborn possibilities. In other words, he is to be the victim and master of his new era. The interplay of Hope and Despair, where both counterparts accommodate themselves in continuous alternate positions, sets the tone and tune for the whole narrative. The essence and the motto of the narration is fixed at the very beginning of the novel – 'at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement' (MC 3). Saleem's reference to his present situation as 'clock -ridden, crime-stained birth' (MC 4) sets a contrasting background for the narration of Aadam Aziz's love-affair with Naseem, which commences with a promising prologue as a tribute to the abundant gifts of spring bestowed on the valley: "One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915..." (MC 4)

The tone of Despair is set, once again, with Saleem's declaration of fear of absurdity. A kind of pleasure twined with suspense is introduced as the readers are informed that the story, which Saleem is about to narrate, is an amalgamation of too many stories, a mixture of the improbable and the mundane, and a dense commingling of excess of intertwined lives, events, miracles, places and rumours. This is followed by a stunning reference to Saleem's present situation as 'clock -ridden, crime-stained birth' (MC 4). Making this shocking reference, a

momentary fix between two shimmering layers of Hope, which consists of the preparations for the commencement of Aadam Aziz's love-affair with Naseem, on one hand and a promising prologue about the commencement of spring on the other, Rushdie camouflages his narrative style with that of the structured worlds of the post-colonial and the post-modern era. This is preceded by a recitation from The Holy Quran about the creation of Man from clots of blood, propagating a wave of optimism and faith. Next comes Aziz's decision not to pray, leading to formation of a vacuum or a hole in him, an outcome of the hymeneal bonding and 'osmotic mixing' (Miller 443) of Hope and its counterpart, Despair. This decision is related to the causal-effects of Aziz's hitting his nose against a frost-hardened ground while attempting to pray after his return from Germany. His survey of the Kashmir valley through clear, 'diamond-free eyes', (MC 5) after his crucial resolution 'never again to kiss earth for any god or man' (MC 4), offers a striking contrast to his eyes solidified with diamond tears when drops of blood plop out from his left nostril during his attempt to pray, once again, after his return from Germany. Soon, Aziz's contempt is replaced by a feeling of newness gushing into him: "The world was new again." (MC 5) His befallen state with a hole is immediately garbed with paraphernalia of gifts offered by spring to the valley, which had shrunk under the ice during winter. Aziz's decision not to pray and its consequence – "This decision, however, made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history." (MC 4) – is placed juxtaposed to spring's bided miracles – "After a winter's gestation in its eggshell of ice, the valley had beaked its way out into the open, moist and yellow. The new grass bided its time underground; the mountains were retreating to their hill-stations for the warm season." (MC 5) This feeling of freshness is immediately contrasted to the shrinking of the valley under the ice and snarling of the mountains under the angry jaws of the winter.

The interplay of Hope and Despair, as seen in Saleem's declaration of fear of absurdity, camouflaged with the suspense and expectations attached with the Saleem's story, 'the hole' in Aziz and his attempts to view the world anew, the freshness of spring and the erstwhile shrinking of the valley under the icy jaws of winter, the past glory and beauty of the valley and its loss in the present era, etc. connect the readers to the nearly impossible-probabilities and the possible-improbabilities of the post-colonial and the post-modern era. Here, the role of interplay is to connect the miraculous optimistic and pessimistic probabilities which the Science and Technology are expected to usher in. The resultant 'hole' in Aziz, as he oscillates between Hope and Despair, depicts the inner-barrenness, bafflement and disillusionment in the modern era amidst progress in various fields such as Medical Science, Engineering,

Satellite Communication, etc. This interplay, at the very outset, speaks about the meaninglessness and impermanence of human life. The interplay of Hope and Despair at the time of Saleem's birth and Aziz's attempts to pray highlight the state of doubt as analyzed by the modern theologians like Paul Tillich, according to whom, man in the present era has 'lost a meaningful world and a self which lives in meanings out of a spiritual centre'(944).

The exuberant alternate sprinkle of Hope and Despair, in the elaborate description of Aziz's attempts to pray, exhibits Rushdie's unique technique of narration which serves the purpose of mirroring the uncertainty, doubts, transitions and the chaotic regeneration of the new, combined with degeneration of the old, in the postcolonial era through fusion, fission, encounter and parallel propagations of the binaries. The double-consciousness and unhomeliness experienced by the migrants are exemplified in Aziz's attempts to pray after his return from Germany through interplay of Hope and Despair. This episode begins with the usual preparations by Aziz, such as washing himself in the prescribed fashion, putting on his father's astrakhan cap, etc. Fragrance of Hope is evoked whenever the holy message is recited from The Holy Quran in the background, and each and every step taken by Aziz to pray and to believe ushers in a chain of Hope and Despair in alternate position: 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful ...' (MC 6) is followed by a feeling of comfort in him and a kind of uneasiness too; the Hope evoked by '... Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Creation ...' (MC 6) is replaced by his recollection of memories of Heidelberg and he has a vision of his friends, Oskar and Ilse Lubin mocking at him with their anti-ideologies; the absolute faith originating from '... The Compassionate, the Merciful, King of the Last Judgment! ...' (MC 6) is evacuated by a kind of inferiority complex in Aziz due to the colonial oppression of the Europeans over India; the certitude in '... You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help ...' (MC 6) is juxtaposed to his hopeless attempts to re-unite himself with an earlier self; the optimism in 'Guide us to the straight path, The path of those whom You have favoured ...' (MC 7) is engulfed by his inescapable imprisonment in ambiguity, a trap between belief and disbelief; the infinite insurance in '... Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, Nor of those who have gone astray.' (MC 7) is put off by a punch on his nose from the tussock as he bends down to pray which results in bleeding and staining of the prayer mat. This punch is symbolically described as a rebuke from 'Ilse-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God' (MC 7), resulting in utter hopelessness, faithlessness and ambiguity. His altered vision through travelled eyes, on the whole, locates him in a 'middle place' (MC 7) with a feeling of alienation, unable to worship God and at the same time, disbelieve Him, wholly. As a result, Aziz decides not to pray throughout

his life, leaving a vacuum / a hollow space in him: "Permanent alteration: a hole."(MC 7) Here, Hope and Despair overlap, fuse, defuse and interact to finally create a permanent hole in Aziz, and the relation between Hope and Despair is identical to 'the uncanny, "undecidable," or "alogical" relation of host and parasite' resulting in 'heterogeneity within homogeneity, enemy within the home, re-form itself within each separate entity which had seemed, on the larger scale, to be one or the other' (Miller 447). The interplay of Hope and Despair, here, draws attention to man's predicament in the present era as discussed by Tillich: "The man-created world of objects has drawn into itself him who created it and who now loses his subjectivity in it. He has sacrificed himself to his own productions. But man still is aware of what he has lost or is continuously losing." (944)

Aziz's mother getting into small gemstone business brings in a wave of Hope and his father dropped over a wooden chair due to a stroke leads to Despair. His father's tragic predicament is sprayed with perfumes of Hope as he is shown happily feeding and conversing with birds which echoes Miller's concept that word and counterword subdivide and reveal themselves to be already fissured within themselves. This undaunted faith, Hope and stoic endurance of Aziz's parents offer a sigh of relief to their young, newly-qualified, Doctor-son, facing the springtime lake and analyzing the changes within and outside him, known and unknown to him. The words in Saleem's narration - " ... And already I can see the repetitions beginning" – followed by - " ... the curse begins already ..." (MC 8) - in the same sentence, constitute the authentic pattern of the interplay of Hope and Despair in the hands of Rushdie. As the thaw comes, the oldest but the first craft of the old Tai, amidst other napping shikaras, moving across the unfrozen lake, though customary and usual, bestows a scintillating effect amidst inaction and hopelessness: "How his oar, ... drives jerkily through the weeds! ... he's considered very odd because he rows standing up ... is about to set history in motion." (MC 8) In spite of his feelings of alienation, Aziz's clear blue eyes, possessing the 'astonishing blue of mountain sky' (MC 8), a characteristic features of Kashmiri men, do not allow the grip of Hope slip away altogether: " His German years, which have blurred so much else, haven't deprived him of the gift of seeing. Tai's gift." (MC 8)

A chain of hopeful and despaired events, 'without beginning or end in which no commanding element (origin, goal, or underlying principle) may be identified, but in which there is always something earlier or something later to which any part of the chain on which one focuses refers and which keeps the chain open, undecidable' (Miller 444), are invoked to settle in alternate positions to flash the secret that neither Hope nor Despair is permanent. This message is flashed in the very fabrication of the interplay of Hope and Despair:

Aziz's mother starts with her active participation in the gemstone business with the decline of her husband due to a stroke; Aziz's father dies as he does not find any birds to converse and feed with the change in the political, economical, social, environmental and global settings; Aziz is shown to be a free man as well as an orphan after the death of his parents and so on.

The 'strikingly impressive' personality of Aziz, with his six-foot height, strong structure, thick and red beard, dark hair and 'sky-eyes', drapes around him a sort of brightness and optimism which gets blurred with the description of his nose and the dynasties waiting inside it, but, all these hostile and gloomy elements get discarded at the sight of the approaching of Tai's shikara with curtains flying and announcing the dawn of spring, though he is labelled as the living antithesis of Oskar-Ilse-Ingrid's belief in the inevitability of change. This 'quirky enduring familiar spirit of the valley', approaching Aziz, with a message 'which will catapult him into his future' (MC 10), detaches the gloomy and hostile world to the background.

Tai's jerky oars 'about to set history in motion' (MC 8) and Aziz's clear blue Kashmiri eyes in spite of his altered and blurred vision, brought into effect due to his five-years' stay in Germany, bring to focus the accelerations and de-accelerations caused due to globalization. It brings one closer to Oskar-Ilse-Ingrid's belief in the inevitability of changes where living antithesises like Tai raise their voices against changes.

The despaired interludes about the future such as the possession of Saleem's father by djinns, intrusion of a baldy foreigner, pie-dogs, etc., pop in as alien invaders to counterbalance Tai's accounts of his associations with Christ and Emperor Jehangir, his booming laughter, his acquaintance with all the secrets of the valley and the lake, and his strange inferences about noses - "Follow your nose and you'll go far." (MC 15)

Filling the narrative with despaired and merry intermissions such as the possession of Saleem's father by djinns, intrusion of a baldy foreigner and pie-dogs, Tai's booming laughter and his strange inferences about noses, Tai's funny accounts of his associations with Christ and Emperor Jehangir and his acquaintances with all the secrets of the Kashmir valley, make it all the more interesting and immersive, and at the same time proving that Hope has no meaning without its counterpart, Despair. This further conforms Miller's words that there is 'no parasite without its host' (Miller 441)

Aziz's entry into Ghani's house to treat his daughter, Naseem, is thickly blotted with the interplay of Hope and Despair to accommodate his altered vision after his return from Germany to his homeland within the landscape of novel's narrative. His feelings of alienation pave room for Despair and his determined efforts to rewind them to feel at home, once again, in his native land revoke Hope. Here, the natural temperament of

Hope and Despair to be fissured within themselves stands proved once again. His desire to turn away and run, while waiting at Ghani's house, is soon overcome by him: " Doctor Aziz stopped feeling dizzy ... found that his feet were no longer trying to escape ..." (MC 21) But, soon, his feet begin to twitch towards the door, once again, when he encounters the ill-lit 'surpassing strangeness' (MC 22) of Naseem's bedchamber. This is soon replaced by Aziz getting ready to treat Naseem through the hole, cut in the center of a white sheet held by two women at the corners. The hole in Aziz offers a striking contrast to this hole in the sheet. The hole in Aziz indicates Despair, loss of faith, hopelessness, a vacuum and a sign of ambiguity, whereas the hole in the sheet is a harbinger of Hope, a talisman / a open-sesame which could catapult him into his future. The former makes him a 'half-and-halfer' (MC 15), leaving him vulnerable to women and history. The latter lets him fall in love with his future bride in fragments.

Aziz's entrapment between Hope and Despair in Ghani's house while waiting to treat his new invisible patient, Naseem, is obviously due to his altered / blurred vision with which he returns from Germany, his double-consciousness that develops because of his encounter with East-West cultures, and his alienated feelings, arising from the revolting comments of the residents of his homeland (as from Tai). His oscillations between Hope and Despair highlight the pathetic human predicament caused due to mass / forced migrations, hybriditation, culture-encounters, globalization, etc. in the present era.

Tai-Aziz antagonism, Aziz's 'sudden interior gloom' (MC 16) combined with 'a most unhyppocratic excitement' (MC 16) as a reaction to the good news of a landowner's daughter falling ill, pains and boils of Aziz's mother as a result of her establishing trust in the gemstone business, Aziz's uneasiness under Ghani's 'famous poisonous smiles' (MC 16), Tai's bitter monologues exhaled at Aziz's becoming a 'big shot' and his 'big bag' (MC 18), Aziz's hesitant questions darted towards Tai, Aziz's determination to establish a successful practice with a 'vinegary force' (MC 17) so that his mother need not return to the gemstone business, intruding appearance of the narrator, Saleem, as 'an empty pickle jar' (MC 17), Aziz's attempts to remake his old friendship with Tai in spite of his incomprehensible rage at his bag and his profession, Aziz's guilt and confession to his mother's image (who rebukes him in Tai's voice and turns into a lizard) about his hole in Ghani's gloomy spidery corridors, Aziz's determination to fight against sadness and Tai's anger, and his initial uncontrollable desire to turn and run while waiting in Ghani's house and his final triumph over it, depict Hope and Despair so intricately woven so as to confirm Saleem's inference drawn about the uncertainty that prevails in the postcolonial and post-modern eras: " I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the

one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me ..." (MC 4) The strange chain of Hope and Despair, depicted here, mirrors Miller's views that the relation between any two contagious elements in a chain is 'that strange opposition which is of intimate kinship and at the same time of enmity' and that it is therefore 'not able to be encompassed in the ordinary logic of polar opposition, nor is it open to dialectical synthesis' (Miller 444).

The second chapter, "Mercurochrome", begins with Padma's cajoling and snorting, followed by Aadam Aziz's fall under the sorcerer's spell of the perforated sheet. The invisible patient's quite extraordinary number of 'never repeated' (MC 26) illnesses paves way for a glimpse, each time, through the mutilated sheet, of a different seven-inch circle of the young woman's body. Each visit ushers in a new Hope for a next visit. A badly-fitting collage of Naseem's inspected parts in Aziz's mind neutralizes the Hope that each of his visits ushers in, evoking anxiety and disappointment at his not being able to see her face. The disclosure of Ghani's schemes to trap Aziz through Aziz's mother brings a new twist in the story. Aziz's regular trips across the lake to Ghani's house for three long years results in withdrawal of certain barriers between Aziz and Naseem. This further intensifies his eagerness as he begins to Hope with an 'illicit desperation' (MC 28) for Naseem to develop a migraine so that they could look at each other. The hole in Aziz, which had been created due to his inability to pray as usual and Tai's insults after his return from Germany, gets healed as he falls in love with his 'invisible patient' (MC 25) through the 'sacred and magical' (MC 28) perforated sheet. The historical coincidences of the end of World War and Naseem's 'longed-for' (MC 28) headache swipe all inhibitions of progress. A glimpse of Naseem's beautiful soft face, cushioned with her glittering gemstone eyes – 'tiger's-eyes' (MC 28) – ushers Hope for further progress of Aziz-Naseem love story and yet, makes Aziz's fall complete: "Such historical coincidences have littered, and perhaps befouled, my family's existence in the world." (MC 28) Here, these despaired tones, due to the words such as 'littered', 'befouled' and 'Doctor Aziz's fall was complete' are compensated by the secret smiles of Ghani and the women who hold the perforated sheet.

Tai's decision to give up washing to end up as a 'human cesspit' (MC 29) and his loss of his career, consequently darkens the erstwhile brightness of the commencement of the lyrical love-story of Aziz and Naseem. As the Aziz-Naseem relationship flourishes, Aziz-Tai bond is left to diminish in the background. Tai's gesture of 'unchangingness' in defiance of the invasion of the 'doctori-attache from Heidelberg' brings the old to encounter the new, ending with bitterness: "Once Aziz asked the ancient, straight out, what it was all for; but Tai only breathed on him and rowed away. The breath nearly

felled Aziz; it was sharp as an axe." (MC 29)

The death of Aziz's father is placed beside Aziz's mother giving up her gemstone business in the Hope that Aziz would establish his practice successfully. This Hope stays as a momentary fix as Aziz is left as 'a free man' and 'an orphan' (MC 30) with the sudden death of his mother exploding on him and defusing the Hope even before his father's mourning period comes to an end. The description of Aziz as a free man as well as an orphan exemplifies Miller's concept about the inert nature of binary opposites to be in the fissured state, engulfing each other within. Tai's attempt to chase Aziz out of the valley, the distrust that befalls Aziz as a result of Tai's attempts to brand him as an alien, Aziz's embarrassment when the story of the perforated sheet is let out and the arrival of Ilse Lubin with the sad news of Oskar's death are counterbalanced with the flourish of intimacy between Aziz and Naseem, Aziz's career take-off at Agra University, Aziz's open declaration of his love for Naseem to Ilse Lubin, the dropping down of the perforated sheet so that Aziz and Naseem see each other as wholes at last, wedding of Aziz and Naseem with 'an A-1 fine dowry' (MC 32), and the newly wedded couple shifting to Agra to start their life afresh. This is followed by a snapshot of Aziz's return to Kashmir valley as an old man, the news of Ilse Lubin's death and Tai's illness. At this juncture, the completion of Aziz's fall is announced as Aziz and Naseem are driven down south. The Despair, Aziz's fall evokes, is compensated by a comic description of the utility and importance of cow-dung by Saleem at the request of Padma and a glimpse of a family reunion where Aziz and Naseem head the gathering as grandparents. This chain of Hope and Despair resembles the chain explained by Miller to mark the polar opposition and dialectical synthesis established by the univocal and deconstructive readings of a poem. Here too, Hope and Despair like any two contagious elements exhibit 'strange opposition' as their very existence relies on their 'intimate kinship' and at the same time their 'enmity' (Miller 445-46).

The description of the holy city of Amritsar with its hustle-bustle, dirt and disorder, 'fresh and (worse) redundant' dung, cows patrolling their territories and stacking their claims in excrement, flies buzzing, celebrating and cross-pollinating the freely-given offerings, etc. is brought to contrast with the serene and clean atmosphere of Kashmir valley: "... On April 6th, 1919, the holy city of Amritsar smelled (gloriously, Padma, celestially!) of excrement." (MC 36) This leaves Aziz to inhale the city like 'a Jain in a face-mask' and Naseem in acute headache. Only the spire of the Golden Temple gleaming in the sun amidst this chaos offers a sigh of relief and Hope. This sigh is also momentary as Aziz's nose itches to foretell that something was not right there. A Hartal is called for to peacefully mourn the continuing presence of the British, obstructing the newly

wedded couple's journey to Agra.

Aziz's attempts to tame and transform Naseem into 'a modern Indian woman' (MC 39) shatters all the hopes their wedding had ushered in. The fire accident which results from Aziz's attempts to burn all his wife's purdahs (veils) flings Despair into Aziz-Naseem relationship and Rushdie soon prepares the readers to witness another approaching disaster: "... While in the Cantonment area, at British Army H.Q., one Brigadier R.E. Dyer is waxing his moustache." (MC 39) The distortion of Hope engraved in Mahatma's grand design of non-violence by the British is somewhat compensated by Aziz's treatment of the trampled bodies with Mercurochrome.

Freezing of Naseem with Despair and disappointment, followed by her false assumption of Mercurochrome for blood stains on Aziz and preceded by her presumption of real blood stains as that of Mercurochrome, brings a new twist in the interplay of Hope and Despair. Mistaking the stains of Mercurochrome as real blood stains initially brings Despair and a sigh of relief and Hope, later, when the truth about stains is revealed. Stains of Mercurochrome on Aziz's clothes make her collapse with disillusionment and assume that her husband has been wounded in fighting with ruffians: " 'Allah what a man I've married, who goes into gullies to fight with goondas!' "(MC 39) Her sigh of relief, on knowing the truth, is also short-lived since she comes to a conclusion immediately that her husband had purposefully dabbed on him stains of Mercurochrome to fool her. Here, her Despair takes the shape of rage which is poured down on her husband to the extent of humiliating him. This rage is replaced with bafflement and Despair when Aziz returns with real blood stains from Jallianwala Bhag massacre spot a few days later. Her bafflement and Despair are momentarily preceded by a comic relief for she mistakes the real blood stains on Aziz for Mercurochrome. She faints with utter bewilderment when the truth is revealed to her. Their reunion after their recovery from a series of shocks ushers Hope which again is not to be seen with the traits of certainty as Aziz is shown trembling in Naseem's arms. This fear and ambiguity of Aziz are immediately placed beside his grandson's (Saleem's) wobbly hands and cracking body, and the Despair they invoke is discarded with an air of a philosophical sigh of consolation by Saleem: " ... No matter. We all owe death a life." (MC 42) The news of Tai being shot dead, after his recovery from scrofulous infection, for his slogan, 'Kashmir for Kashmiris', ushers grief, but, it is reported in a comical vein: "Naturally, they shot him. Oskar Lubin would probably have approved of his rhetorical gesture; R. E. Dyer might have commended his murderers' rifle skills." (MC 42) This situation of utter hopelessness is transformed into a bland sigh of Hope as the chapter ends with Saleem going to bed with expectations of getting warmth from Padma.

In the second chapter, "Mercurochrome", the interplay

of Hope and Despair gets a unique treatment for its role played in the novel. Each visit of Aziz to Ghani's house to treat his invisible patient ushers Hope for it gives Aziz a glimpse of Naseem's body parts through the perforated sheet and makes him love her body in fragments. Each visit of Aziz paves way for his consequent visits. His inability to see Naseem's face and converse with her causes anxiety and Despair. Thus, each visit of Aziz to Ghani's house for treatment functions as a 'boundary itself' and a 'permeable membrane' (Miller 441) permitting the interaction between Hope and Despair. It also performs the dual task of 'gift- or food-giving and gift- or food-receiving', fulfilling the 'strange relation of reciprocal obligation' as 'the third element' (Miller 445) in the triangle (Hope, Despair and Aziz's visits). Dropping out and clearance of barriers and strict invigilations, one by one, pave way for their love-affair to progress. At the end of the third year, when the perforated sheet is, finally, cleared forever and when the pair gets ready to know each other, their marriage is fixed, heralding the completion of Aziz's fall.

The interplay of Hope and Despair, induced by the perforated sheet in Aziz-Naseem relationship, before their marriage, serves the purpose of highlighting the fact that a woman's experience of embodiment is separated from her transcendence and that a woman is rewarded for alienating or reducing her transcendent subjectivity to her physicality in a patriarchal society. Aziz's falling in love with Naseem's body parts, one by one, through the perforated sheet and his Hope to have a smooth married life serve the purpose of highlighting the evils of the patriarchal society which, in traditionally promoting woman's 'objectivification' (Tidd 58), incurs a series of devastations on itself. The collage of Naseem's body parts in Aziz's mind leads him to a chaotic state where he assumes to have fallen in love with Naseem whereas he had only fallen in love with her body parts, confirming Beauvoir's main argument about woman's biology: Women have been obliged to experience their body as 'facticity' rather than 'contingency' (Tidd 56); women do not choose how they 'exist' their bodies because their embodiment has been pre-defined by patriarchal society; and woman's relationship to her body is, therefore, culturally produced. (Tidd 56-58) On the whole, interplay of Hope and Despair induced by the perforated sheet, in this chapter, originates from the oppression imposed by the traditions of the patriarchal society, especially in India and its role is very much to bring to focus this oppression.

Tai's attempt to chase Aziz out of the valley and the flourish of intimacy between Aziz and Naseem, the distrust that befalls Aziz as a result of Tai's attempts to brand him as an alien and Aziz's career take-off at Agra University, Aziz's embarrassment when the story of the perforated sheet is let out and Aziz's open declaration of his love for Naseem to Ise Lubin, the arrival of Ise Lubin with the sad news of Oskar's death and the dropping

down of the perforated sheet so that Aziz and Naseem see each other as wholes, at last, exhibit the harmonious accommodation of the most unexpected events in place of the most expected with Hope and Despair hopping on them in alternation and contributing to the narrative vivacity.

The interplay of Hope and Despair in the description of the holy city of Amritsar appends to the narrative style a realistic touch instead of idealization, glorification and exaggeration of facts about India and its nationalism. The interplay, in Mercurochrome episode, of Hope and Despair, brings to limelight the false assumptions Naseem and Aziz have about each other. It brings for analysis the misunderstandings the perforated sheet had created in their lives. Though the perforated sheet has been physically lifted, its continued presence in psychological sense is confirmed as the couple harbour many apprehensions about each other, hidden behind the invisible perforated sheet. The opaqueness of the invisible perforated sheet amplifies as the years roll on, making them aliens to each other. The alternation of Hope and Despair in this episode is due to the false assumptions and expectations that the couple develops, standing behind the perforated sheet for three years. Had the perforated sheet not been flung between them by Ghani, they would have understood and known each other better in three long years and that would have liberated them of doubts and misconceptions. They would have either fallen in love head over heels or drifted apart knowing each others' differences. In other words, the causes and the side-effects of arranged marriages in India are brought to limelight for analysis and discussion through the interplay of Hope and Despair in this episode. The origin of Hope and Despair, here, is the couple's false assumptions and unconvincing expectations. The cause for this disharmony lies in Aziz's education in Germany and Naseem's illiteracy, Aziz's exposure to the Western culture and Naseem's lack of it, Aziz's authoritative position in the patriarchal society and Naseem's lack of it, and Aziz's constant connectivity with the external world and its ways through his professional requirements and Naseem's lack of it. On the whole, their inability to see through the situation in which they are placed and see through each other to account for their differences, become the causes of their Hopes and Despairs. The role of this interplay, as it is obvious from its causes, is to highlight the presence in minimal quantity of trust, harmony, unconditional love, co-ordination, tolerance, acceptance, commitment, mutual respect, mutual interest and other essentials required for harmonious co-existence in relationships in the modern era due to the changes and uncertainties prevailing in the situations.

The third chapter, 'Hit-the-Spitoon', begins with Saleem's despaired description of his cracking body and ends with Rashid and Nadir Khan 'hooting in terrified

unison' (MC 61) in the cornfield and finally, the entry of Nadir Khan into the safe territories of Aziz's stone house in the hope of getting refuge, which is preceded by Abdullah's murder for his anti-partition sentiments. The last line of the chapter ends with a puzzle about Nadir Khan to be hopefully solved in the next chapter, "Under the Carpet": " 'Is that him?' Padma asks, in some confusion. 'That fat soft cowardly plumpie? Is he going to be your father?' " (MC 62) The first paragraph of this chapter is totally darkened with despaired tones, brewing with Saleem's disintegration. The rest of the chapter brims with Aziz's contraction of 'a highly dangerous form of optimism' (MC 45) and this 'virulent disease' breaking out all over the country. The reference to optimism as dangerous or a virulent disease by Rushdie itself braids Hope and Despair in an intricate fashion. This chapter marches ahead with interplay of Hope and Despair in Aziz-Naseem relationship and in the socio-political scenario of India during the pre-independence era. The riddle about Nadir Khan towards the end of the chapter offers a striking contrast to the utterly despaired tone of Saleem with which the chapter begins: "Please believe that I am falling apart." (MC 43)

The chapter begins with Saleem's lament over his cracking body. His reference to his body as 'an old jug', 'poor body', 'singular', and 'unlovely', makes Despair brew its essence. The list of accidents his body had undergone – 'buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons' (MC 43) – further intensify the brews of Despair. Saleem's prediction about his future that he is going to crumble into six hundred and thirty million particles of 'anonymous, and necessarily oblivious dust' (MC 43) bombards Despair profusely, giving birth to multitude analogous despaired elements. His words – "In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration." (MC 43) – fill the cauldron of Despair to the brim. This Despair is eroded when Saleem boasts about his possibilities and blessings. His possession and acknowledgement of 'the most delicately-gifted olfactory organ in history' (MC 44), mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and the art of writing amidst his accelerated disintegration of his body offer a queer touch to his personality. The Despair caused due to his poor body falling apart is negated by his optimistic self-applauses – "... such mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and language is rare indeed; yet I possess it ... I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks." (MC 44) Here, Saleem, with all his possibilities, blessings, drainages and defects, encompasses the relation of a parasite and a host within himself which proves Miller's statement – "...each "single element," far from being unequivocally what it is, subdivides within itself to recapitulate the relation of parasite and host of which, on the larger scale, it appears

to be one or the other pole.” (Miller 444)

The whiffs of Despair in Saleem’s narration, invoked by the words – “There are moments of terror...” – are kicked off by the words that follow – “... but they go away.” (MC 43) A similar effect is seen in – “Panic like a bubbling sea-beast comes up for air, boils on the surface, but eventually returns to the deep.” (MC 43) Saleem’s resolve to remain calm amidst these tides of Hope and Despair and chew betel-nuts to renew the playing of the ancient game of hit-the-spittoon, inaugurated by Nadir Khan, which he had learned from the old men in Agra, completely bleaches the erstwhile deep grief with which the chapter begins. The descriptions of ‘rocket paans’ and ‘the unmistakable whiffs of chutney’ (MC 43) act as catalysts in this queer interplay of Hope and Despair. The third sphere that pops out from this interplay of counterparts is the ‘creative courage’ that comes from ‘the creative expressions of despair’ (Tillich 945). This third sphere, here, confirms Miller’s concept: “The relation is a triangle, not a polar opposition. There is always a third to whom the two are related, something before them or between them, which they divide, consume, or exchange, across which they meet.” (Miller 444)

Padma’s complaints, nagging and her bullying Saleem into the world of linear narrative, combined with her varied gifts and ministrations, add vinegary effects to the interplay of Hope and Despair. This is followed by the sight of Aziz whistling ‘piercingly, badly, but very happily’, (MC 45) in the year 1942, who is reported to have contracted the highly dangerous disease of optimism along with his countrymen despite efforts to stamp it out. His cheerful whistling sounds amidst severe drought are reported to be rare and ‘the devil’s work’ (MC 46). Aziz’s cheerfulness when the earth is cracking due to failure of rain is referred to as a ‘resilient virus’ (MC 46). The betel-chewers at paan-shops have serious discussions about omens and are then seen calming themselves with the continuation of their game of hit-the-spittoon and speculation upon ‘the numberless nameless God knows what’s that might now issue from the fissuring earth’ (MC 46). The intensity of the World War and drought in India in the year 1942 usher in utter hopelessness, whereas, comic descriptions of a Sikh’s hair standing on end due to the hot weather, the inability of the milkmen to adulterate the milk due to water shortage and consideration of Aziz’s cheerful whistling amidst this catastrophe in poor taste by the old men at the paan-shop offer a comic relief to the inexhaustible dosage of Despair prescribed by the World War and the failure of rains in 1942.

Aziz’s cheerful whistling of a German tune, ‘Tannenbaun’; rising of Mian Abdullah with his anti-partition sentiment from the famous magicians’ ghetto in Delhi ‘to become the hope of India’s hundred million Muslims’ (MC 47) as the founder, chairman, unifier and moving spirit of the Free Islam Convocation in 1942; Aziz’s declaration to his friend, the Rani Cooch Naheen,

that he is more an Indian in spite of his being a Kashmiri and a Muslim; his retention of his blue eyes as that of the Kashmiri sky and a glimmer of contentment; transmutation of Naseem into a unified and formidable figure with the curious title of Reverend Mother; Naseem’s declaration of her victory in spite of her disappointment on Aziz’s visits to Rani of Cooch Naheen; her absolute control over her twin hearts of her kingdom, namely her kitchen and pantry; her tactical retreat after her war of starvation on her husband under the pretence of a killing pain; extension of an olive branch by Alia to her father and her supply of food to him in the absence of Naseem in the kitchen; and resumption of power by Naseem with a shrug of acquiescence in Alia’s decision to supply food to Aziz, obfuscate the Despair caused by irritations in Aziz’s nose indicating turbulence; a bruise on his chest; his abrupt ceasefire of whistling on reaching the courtyard of his house; disapproving features of Naseem; her premature aging with two enormous moles like witch’s nipples on her face; her confinement within an invisible fortress of her own making which was an iron clad citadel of traditions and certainties; her unwavering iron grip upon the household; her impregnable domestic rules as a system of self-defense; Aziz’s fruitless attempts to storm her domestic rules; Naseem’s denial of her entry into political matters and of Aziz’s entry into her declared territory, namely her kitchen and pantry; Aziz’s visits to Rani of Cooch Naheen to discuss political matters to the disappointment of Naseem; Naseem’s imperious rule at the dining table; Aziz’s control over the children’s education to the dismay of Naseem; Naseem’s insistence and Aziz’s resistance (for the tutor taught to hate other religions) of religious instructions for their children resulting in Naseem’s war of silence and war of starvation; and Naseem’s fear and unwillingness to be widowed. Naseem’s rebel when her turn to be photographed arrives and her attack on the cameraman offer a comic relief amidst the tides of Hope and Despair.

Hope / Despair like “Parasite”, as elucidated by Miller, calls up its counterpart “opposite” (Miller 441) in *Midnight’s Children*. Hope and Despair have no meaning without each other. There is no Hope without Despair as ‘there is no parasite without its host’ (Miller 441). Both Hope and Despair subdivide as is seen in the case of Aziz’s relationship with Naseem. He is seen whistling in 1942 merrily in spite of his tensed relation with his wife that wars of starvation and silence had caused ten years back in 1932. The contest of hitting the spittoon with betel-juice with ‘unerring accuracy’ (MC 52) by the old men at the paan-shop, making the town fade into ‘desultory evening pastimes’ (MC 53), and children playing hoop, kabbadi and drawing beards on posters of Mian Abdullah amidst the retreating power of the British exemplify the subdivision of Hope and Despair and revelation of themselves as fissured already within themselves to be a ‘double antithetical word’ (Miller 441)

– 'courage of despair' or 'creative despair' (Tillich 945-46). When Brigadier Dodson's (the town's Military Commander) car knocks over the spittoon, a red hand in the dust of the street pointing accusingly at the retreating power of the British is congealed as the red fluid in the spittoon rolls out. The news about the retreat of the British rule ushers Hope, but, the red clots of betel-nuts taking the shape of an accusing hand pointed towards the British rule ushers Despair over the loss and havoc of devastations caused by the colonial rule. Next placed to this incorrigible Despair is the conversation of the optimists – Mian Abdullah, Aadam Aziz, Rani of Cooch Naheen and Nadir Khan – within the framework of the photograph hung in Aziz's house, hoping to make the history meet with ancestry. Their conversation with their 'photographed lips' (MC 53) marks the amalgamation of Aziz's optimism, Rani's spirit of internationalism, Abdullah's impatience and Nadir's hopes about modern poetry in a rather humorous vein. The shared sentiments of optimism by Nadir and Aziz in a chaotic circle where there was 'Quit India' resolution in the air, on one hand, ushering Hope and on the other, the resolution to partition India, scorching the then freshly ushered Hope into fumes of Despair, confirm the 'intimate kinship' and 'enmity' (Miller 444) between the two contiguous elements of Hope and Despair. The strange trait of humming which Mian Abdullah possessed is also not spared to pop out of the vicinity of Hope and Despair oppositions: it is heard without pause; it is strange as it is neither musical nor unmusical; it is 'somehow mechanical' (MC 55) like the hum of an engine or dynamo; it is described to rise and fall in direct relationship to his work rate; it is said to be destructive at low pitch so as to cause a toothache, and it is curative and constructive when it rose to its highest feverish pitch.

The demand for a partitioned India against the wish of Mian Abdullah, the Hummingbird, who had created the League single-handedly, ushers Despair, paving way for something that none of the Hummingbird's optimists were prepared: "They played hit-the-spittoon, and ignored the cracks in the earth." (MC 57) The ambiguity bobs up amidst the throes of optimism epidemic and Rani of Cooch Naheen's unpredictable political moves hued with rumours is let out for its expression through Naseem's thought provoking question: " 'If God meant people to speak many tongues, ' she argued, 'why did he put only one in our heads?' " Abdullah's favorite anti-partition slogan on the poster of his office wall - "Where can we find a land that is foreign to God?" - ushers Hope against Nadir Khan's warning about bad luck. Abdullah's assassination and Nadir Khan's escape once again exemplify the interplay of Hope and Despair in the melodrama of human life: "The swollen events of the night of the crescent knives reminded Nadir Khan of his room-mate, because life had once again, perversely, refused to remain life-sized. It had turned melodramatic

and that embarrassed him ..." (MC 59)

Nadir's emergence as 'a born survivor' fills him with mixed feelings. A sigh of relief, his escape gave him, is replaced by his despaired inner-degradation: "As he ran, there was a self-consciousness about him, his body appearing to apologize for behaving as if it were in a cheap thriller..." (MC 59) Nadir's plunge into the cornfield for safety puts an optimistic fence to the horrified event of Abdullah's assassination, and this horror of Despair is blotted out by Rashid's fancy riding tricks which he had seen in the film, *Gai-Wellah*. Rashid's attempts to enact Gai-Wellah's trick to steal up on a gang of cattlemen end up scaring Rashid and also Nadir who was hiding in the cornfield. Their hooting in terrified unison releases the horror and Despair out of them and the readers too. The chapter, thus, ends with Rashid, who is filled with high spirit and Hope of Gai-Wellah in the movie, coming to the rescue of Nadir and thus, restoring satisfaction and inner peace in Rashid: "To have actually saved the Hummingbird's right-hand man! ... Well, real life was better than the pictures, sometimes." (MC 62) This inner-peace of Rashid and Nadir's entry into the safe-zone of Aziz's territory hush the Despair and terror of Abdullah's death for a while.

The chapter, "Under the Carpet", begins with a declaration, tinged with a punctured Hope caused by the death of Mian Abdullah, in the previous chapter: "That was the end of optimism epidemic." (MC 63) This chapter ends with disappointment and shattered Hopes of Alia on losing her lover to her sister, Amina / Mumtaz. Towards the end, there is a declaration about the 'false start' (MC 81) of the optimism epidemic and the reasons for it are sarcastically attached to the drought to lift the veil of Despair from it: "But those were the years of the drought; many crops planted at that time ended up by coming to nothing." (MC 81) Along with it comes the disclosure of the secret of Saleem's parentage, quenching the prolonged anxiety of Padma as expressed at the end of the previous chapter. Even the 'false start' of the relationship of Amina / Mumtaz with Nadir Khan is sarcastically attributed to the bad weather of those years and Mian Abdullah's 'false start'. These false attributions lift the veil of Despair wrapped around the characters due to the death of Mian Abdullah and the end of Mumtaz's first love-affair with Nadir, with a light vein of humour. This chapter too ends with Padma's query to be resolved in the following chapters: " 'What happened to the plumpie?' Padma asks, crossly, ' You don't mean you aren't going to tell?' " (MC 81)

The announcement of the end of 'optimism epidemic', at the outset of the chapter, prepares the readers to witness despaired events, but, to their surprise, Emerald's wedding with Major Zulfikar and Mumtaz's with Ahmed Sinai, a leather-cloth merchant, usher Hope and joy into Aziz's family. The discovery of the murder of Mian Abdullah, the next morning, is followed by Rani's lifetime

illness. The tents for the second Convocation of the Free Islam League are pulled down 'like punctured hopes' (MC 63) on one hand. On the other hand, the wave of optimism is shown to enwrap Aziz's old stone house on Cornwallis Road in its whirlpool where, as Saleem records, 'the days were full of potential mothers and possible fathers' (MC 63-64). On one hand, the Muslim League secretly rejoices the death of India's 'humming hope' (MC 64), Mian Abdullah, and on the other, Aadam Aziz is seen mourning with tears, seated on his 'Thunder box' (MC 64) every day. But, these tears too are discarded with sarcasm: "... these are not tears of grief; Aadam Aziz has simply paid the price of being Indianized." (MC 64) While Aziz is shown to suffer terribly from constipation, Saleem, the narrator, wiffs odours that are mixed with unease, burgeoning romance and the sharp stink of his grandmother's curiosity and strength.

After the death of Mian Abdullah, Hope once again sets its feet firm as Aziz buries himself in his work, taking care of the sick by the railway tracks. While continuing to fulfill his duties as a physician, the loss of Naseem's love is compensated by Mumtaz, the second daughter. Mumtaz's gentleness, care and fragility, in spite of her dark skin, come as a harbinger of Hope and love to Aziz. Aziz's inner torments are healed by Mumtaz's 'unquestioning tenderness' (MC 64). This is followed by Aziz's discovery of Nadir hiding in the washing-chest and his decision to provide refuge to Nadir, in spite of Naseem's protests with her war of silence. The reference to the three daughters of Aziz and Naseem – Alia, Mumtaz and Emerald – as 'Teen Batti' (the three bright lights), brings in Hope tagged with high expectations, which is muted absolutely by Naseem's oath to remain silent:

But Reverend Mother's lips were sealed, and silence descended. The smell of silence, like a rotting goose-egg, fills my nostrils; overpowering everything else, it possesses the earth ... While Nadir Khan hid in his half-lit underworld, his hostess hid, too, behind a deafening wall of soundlessness ... and the silence filled the house, from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, so that the flies seemed to give up buzzing, and mosquitoes refrained from humming before they bit; silence stilling the hissing of geese in the courtyard. (MC 66)

Into this bog of muted atmosphere, where Despair momentarily has its upper hand, entry of Major Zulfikar comes as a ray of Hope for Aziz and his family. He decides to marry Emerald, the youngest of Aziz's daughters on his very first visit. The description of Major Zulfikar's appearance in minute details fills Padma as well as readers with due curiosity that Emerald and Zulfikar are Saleem's parents. The interplay of Hope and Despair

is obvious in Major Zulfikar's character too. His short-sightedness obliges him to take one step at a time and this gains him a reputation 'for thoroughness and dullness' (MC 67). This quality endears him to his superiors as it enables them to feel well served without feeling threatened. Despite his appearance of a character out of a puppet-show, he seems to be a man of unmistakable success and 'a man of future' (MC 67).

Frequent meetings of Ahmed Sinai, a young leather cloth merchant, and Alia create a feeling of distrust and Despair in Naseem. Aziz's insistence that his daughters should be allowed to have male friends and his approval for Alia's marriage with Ahmed ushers Hope. The idea of Alia's marriage appeals Naseem despite everything. Ahmed and Alia's silent conversations push the Hope to the threshold where Ahmed is expected to propose Alia, but, to everyone's surprise, this Hope is hushed with silence prevailing around them, resulting in Alia's 'weightiness' and 'a jowly pessimistic quality which she was never entirely to lose' (MC 68). Alia's inherited tendency from her mother to put on fat, receives a counterbalance of Hope from Mumtaz, to be Amina later, who is good, dutiful and caring though she is never brilliant like Alia or as beautiful as Emerald. Her sense of responsibility in fortifying her father, Aziz, and shouldering the duties of caring for the needs of Nadir Khan brew up as a sigh of Hope in the gloomy atmosphere darted by her sisters and her mother.

Naseem's acts of eavesdropping on her daughter's dreams to know what they were up to is also endorsed with the interplay of Hope and Despair: It consists of her anxiety and fear about the safety of her daughters. It is neither devoid of her Hope to get them married and see them well settled in life. Her entry into her husband's dreams where she has a vision of him walking mournfully up a mountain in Kashmir with a 'hole' and of his death leads her to guess helplessly that 'he was falling out of love with her' (MC 69). Naseem's visits into Emerald's dreams and her entry into Major Zulfikar's private fantasy, through Emerald, of owning a large modern house with a bath beside his bed, trigger her hopes whereas she smells trouble when she comes to know Mumtaz's love-affair with Nadir, under the carpet, while visiting her dreams. Considering it as a serious business to accuse Mumtaz for getting up to hanky-panky under her father's roof, she resolves to do nothing. Apart from this, 'something steely' (MC 70) enters her and she decides to keep silent to let her husband discover how his modern ideas are ruining their children and thus, lets Despair take over her and her family. Further, Hanif's (youngest son) dream to get into the world of cinema horrifies Naseem for she believes the cinema to be an extension of the brothel business.

The secret marriage of Mumtaz and Nadir has a dual role of being 'a friendly visitor' and 'an alien presence' as it brings disappointment to Naseem, Hope for Nadir and

Mumtaz and an oath of silence on the other members of the family, confirming Miller's concept that a 'host in the sense of a guest, moreover, is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time, an alien presence who turns the home into a hotel, a neutral territory' (Miller 443). Mumtaz's double-life – she is a single girl and a student studying mediocreatly at the university during the day time and Nadir's wife at night – ushers momentary Hope and peace which is set against the turbulence caused by Naseem's war of silence. Naseem's Despair and rage reach the zenith when the years of drought force her to dig deeply into her pantry:

Hairs began to grow out of the moles on her face ... was swelling, month by month. The unspoken words inside her were blowing her up ... Mumtaz had the impression that her mother's skin was becoming dangerously stretched. (MC 74)

Under the hopeless situation of Aziz-Naseem relationship, all the family members drift apart, making the situation even worse. Doctor Aziz starts spending days out of the house to escape the deadening silence at home; Mumtaz starts spending most of her time underground with Nadir, ignoring her father whom she loved; Emerald continues her secret meetings with Major Zulfikar; Mustafa and Hanif along with Rashid, the rickshaw boy, get infected with the listlessness of times: "... finally the house on Cornwallis Road drifted as far as August 9th, 1945, and things changed." (MC 74) Here, the words, 'and things changed', bring rays of Hope and expectations for a positive change. This Hope is chucked out immediately by the intruding comments of the narrator, Saleem. Saleem's resolution, not to let 'the blood escape from the body of the tale' and his declaration that he has arrived 'at the unspeakable part' (MC 74) of his tale, rolls down grief, fear, anxiety and Despair.

The death of Rani of Cooch Nahin in August 1945 is followed by the prompt arrival of monsoons without fail. The news about Orde Wingate and his Chindits in action in the Burmese jungle, the army of Subhash Chandra Bose fighting on the Japanese side, and Satyagraha demonstrators in Jullundur are reported in a vein of optimism: "The cracks in the long-parched earth began to close." (MC 75) At this juncture, Mumtaz's falling ill and the discovery of her being a virgin after two years of marriage drop bombshells of Despair on the family. Under these clouds of Despair, the reunion of Aziz's family members is restored. Three years of silence is broken by Naseem with her series of accusations on her husband and Emerald breaks her oath as she lets out the secret hiding of Nadir in her house to Major Zulfikar. Nadir's escape, leaving behind a note of divorce, puts a thunderclap despaired end to Mumtaz's relationship with him forever. At this juncture, Major Zulfy's anger at

Nadir's escape is quickly replaced with regeneration of Hope. Emerald's marriage with Zulfikar takes place without providing sufficient interval to brood over the break-up between Nadir and Mumtaz: "The old ones retrieved their brutalized receptacle and began to knock it back into shape." (MC 79) Mumtaz's assiduity, nobility, forbearance and her love for children makes Ahmed Sinai prefer her rather than the brainy Alia. Mumtaz's remarriage with Ahmed restores peace and Hope in the family, giving her a new identity and a new name, Amina, but, it leaves a permanent bruise of revenge and Despair in Alia. However, Alia's feelings recorded in her diary – "... who wants to get landed with this marrying business? Not me; never; no." (MC 81) bring this chapter to an end with a kind of 'Despaired-Hope' or 'courage of despair' (Tillich 945), confirming that both Hope and Despair subdivide and reveal themselves each to be fissured already within themselves, and to be double antithetical words according to Miller's concept.

Rushdie's tone in these first four chapters of *Midnight's Children* is obviously satiric, sardonic, marred by aesthetic of despair and marked by peculiar ability to enunciate altogether antithetic ideas in one breath. The tone of narration in these chapters, especially while describing the Jallianwala Bhag massacre, and Aziz's cheerfulness and the continuation of the game of hit-the-spittoon by betel-chewers at paan-shops amidst severe drought, also raise questions as Samir Dayal does: "The question is whether such optimism would be justified, whether it would not amount to what he has called the "optimism disease"..." (58) On the other hand, the 'pessoptimistic' tone used, especially to narrate Salim's birth and India's independence, makes one nod convincingly as Dayal does: "But, against Ahmad, I would suggest that this is an appropriate position for a postcolonial novel ..." (58) The tone of despair and ambivalence in these four chapters can be attributed, as J.Josna Rege says, to Rushdie's 'continued emotional investment in a unitary idea of India, the India of lost innocence, and his own inability, despite everything, to conceive constructive possibilities in its demise' (359) The dejections and delights in the narration, as Mariam Pirbhai comments about *The Moor's Last Sigh*, breathe with the possibility of change: it sighs with the self-conscious and critical acceptance of loss in order to remain open for 'newness [to] come into the world' in the 'hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time'. (47) The events in these chapters, as says Rukmini Bhaya Nair, are often seen as 'taking place in the middle ages, the hope shining in the migrant's eyes' leading to a conclusion that 'a leap forward into a more enlightened era is always possible. (998) The interplay of Hope and Despair in these chapters reminiscences Sadik-J-Al-Azm's quotation of a line from an early poem of Joyce to express Rushdie's position in the literary world: "O Ireland my first and only love / Where Christ and Caesar

are hand and glove?" (48) His further comments place Rushdie in the realm of optimism, beyond doubt:

This is why, when I think through to their logical consequences the kind of positions, criticisms and politics implicit in Rushdie's explosive intervention, I inevitably conclude that what these societies desperately need are the two great R's of the modern world; Reason and Revolution, rather than mere good old Submission. For, ultimately, there is nothing either absolute or predestined about their frustrated and depressed modern condition. (49)

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