“Parts of mythology are religious, parts of mythology are historical, parts of mythology are poetic, but mythology as a whole is neither religion, nor history, nor philosophy, nor poetry. It comprehends all these together under that peculiar form of expression which is natural and intelligible at a certain stage, or at certain recurring stages in the development of thought and speech, but which after becoming traditional, becomes frequently unnatural and unintelligible.” Max Mueller.

It is this multifaceted yet amorphous nature of myth that Rushdie exploits in *Midnight’s Children*. It is a novel about history that adopts the form of a mythological tale, that draws from four major myth systems -- Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Western. It uses myth and parodies it in order to show the relativity of truth and demonstrates our insufficient grasp of what we call reality, and history. *Midnight’s Children* can be seen as a thesis presented in fictional terms about the nature of history, myth, reality, our
sense of the past, present and future. While examining the nature of these things, Rushdie makes us aware of their inter-relatedness, their overlapping boundaries and the insufficiency of any definition of these terms. The indeterminacy principle seems to affect the language as well as the concept to be described.

The concept of the midnight's child is what gives the novel its mythological flavour. All the children born on the night of August 15th, 1947 are supposedly endowed with special powers. Two of them, Saleem and Shiva, are born at the stroke of midnight, when India obtained Independence. They are special, for Saleem is given the greatest talent of all, the ability to look into the hearts and minds of men, while Shiva has been bestowed with the gifts of war, for he had the strength of "Rama who could draw the undrawable bow, of Arjun and Bhima; the ancient prowess of the Kurus and Pandavas united unstoppably in him" (200). There is a hierarchy in the special abilities of these midnight's children for they decline dramatically the more distant their time of birth is from midnight. This being the Kali Yuga however, their brilliance is mixed with darkness, for they are always confused about being good. All this is based on belief in astrology, and the Hindu concept of cycles or yugas in cosmic time. If the time of birth of the nation coincides with the time of birth of two children, there has to be a congruence in their destinies. This is the premise when Saleem says that he is handcuffed to history. Astrology is closely linked to ritual and religion in India. Thus at the very outset, the text raises many questions. Is astrology a science or mere superstition? Is it faith or religion? Is it myth or
false belief? What is the relationship between the destiny of an individual and the destiny of a nation? How many influences “seep” or “leak” into an individual and how many forces are at play in shaping history? Discoursing on these matters to Padma, Saleem says, “How many things people notions we bring with us into the world, how many possibilities and also restrictions of possibility! - Because all of these were parents of the child born at midnight, and for every one of the midnight children there were many more. Among the parents of midnight: the failure of the Cabinet Mission scheme; the determination of M.A.Jinnah, who was dying and who wanted to see Pakistan formed in his lifetime, and would have done anything to ensure it - that same Jinnah whom my father, missing a turn as usual, refused to meet; and Mountbatten with his extraordinary haste...” (108-109). Saleem makes us see the complexity of relationships, and any attempt to interpret reality is superficial. The narrative makes the reader alert to the indeterminacy inherent in any situation and we see that both myth and history will be deconstructed.

The fundamental concept that is deconstructed is the idea of a nation. The whole novel turns around the idea of the identification of the hero Saleem with India, since both were born at midnight on the fifteenth of August 1947. Slowly we learn that Saleem is not who we think he is and India is not what we think it is. The novel makes us understand “the fabulous nature of this collective dream” called India. August is the season of festivals and a new festival was being added to the calendar, India’s birthday. Here was “a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had
never previously existed was about to win freedom, catapulting us into a world which although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by a phenomenal collective will -- except in a dream we all agreed to dream... India, the new myth -- a collective fiction in which anything was possible, a fable rivaled only by the two other mighty fantasies money and God” (112). Rushdie discusses this in his work *Imaginary Homelands* where he points out that in all its thousands of years of history, there was never a united country called India. No one managed to rule the whole subcontinent, not the mighty Mughals, not even the British; and then a thing that never existed suddenly became free (1991:27). If India did not exist, what about Pakistan and Bangladesh? This is the question he poses and *Midnight’s Children* is concerned with this irony. This tension between myth and reality pervades the novel.

It is interesting to note that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto voices the same opinion, though for a different purpose in his book titled *The Myth of Independence*. Bhutto reproduces a conversation between Jinnah and the British author Beverley Nichols where Jinnah asserts that a ‘United India’ only means a Hindu dominated India. “Any other meaning you try to impose on it is mythical. ‘India’ is a British creation... It is a paper creation, it has no basis in flesh and blood.” Rejecting the idea that Pakistan itself is a British creation, an example of the principle of divide and rule, Jinnah says, “The one thing that keeps the British in India is the false idea of a United
India as preached by Gandhi. A United India, I repeat, is a British creation -- a myth, and a very dangerous myth, which will cause endless strife. As long as that strife exists, the British have an excuse for remaining. For, once in a way, 'divide and rule' does not apply" (9:27:95) Rushdie's novel shows that Jinnah's thesis is itself a myth, for it was personal ambition and the lure of wealth that motivated many people to move to Pakistan. Where then does the truth of history lie?

Saleem is the mythical hero on his journey in the new mythical nation. The development of the mythical elements in the novel depends to a great extent on the use of patterns associated with myth, such as the prophecy of the hero's birth, the signs at his birth, his special destiny, his supernatural powers, his exile and return and so on. Although all these elements are developed carefully, Rushdie uses deconstructive strategies quite deliberately so that in the end what we have is a text that can be called an anti-myth, on an analogy with the term anti-novel.

"Soothsayers prophesied me," says Saleem quite often, as if he were an incarnation. Saleem's mother is taken to meet the astrologer Ram Ram Seth by Lifafa Das, who wanted to demonstrate his gratitude for being saved from the rioters by the lady, who was pregnant at the time. Barring the doorway, she had declared that she was with child, and challenged anyone in the crowd to lay hands on her. "From the moment of my conception, it seems, I have become public property," says Saleem grandly. The comic exaggeration, coupled with the fact that the 'levitating' Ram Ram Seth is really seated on a ledge projecting from the wall alert the reader to the deconstructive strategy
being adopted. The 'prophecy', expectedly, is full of enigmas and paradoxes. The readers' interest is captured by the fact that there will be two mothers, that newspapers will praise him and tyrants will try him, and that he will have sons without having sons, but there is comic incongruity when we are told that washing will hide him, which undoes any solemnity attached to the 'prophecy'. As the novel unfolds, however, the events explain the paradoxes and every aspect of the prophecy is fulfilled but we realize that the so-called prophecy is nothing more than the frame work for the narrative, reduced to a kind of code.

Saleem would have us believe that a special destiny awaits him. He is "purpose obsessed" throughout the novel, but he simply cannot discover his purpose. He has the feeling that a great destiny awaits him, but he is instead, afraid of his impending disintegration all the time. The 'prophecy' leads to nothing worthwhile for him or his people. We then realize that this mythical hero is no hero at all, for he achieves nothing and appears to be a failure at the end. This must, however, be read in conjunction with the fact that Saleem is "handcuffed to history", that his destiny is inextricably linked to the destiny of India. He tries to impress upon us that what he thinks, says or does has far reaching consequences for the nation. It is he who makes things happen. All this is done with a fine sense of comic irony that makes this novel a mock-epic. The description of the 'signs' that accompany his birth is an example. The very walls of the Narlikar Nursing Home where he is born, are suffused with the national colours, saffrou and green. Lamps are lit and jubilant crowds throng the streets and just as he is born at that midnight
hour, a wiry man in Delhi is saying, "Long years ago we made our tryst with destiny..." At the same time the police are looking for Joseph D'Costa, and trains are being burnt in Punjab like the biggest 'dia' or lamp in the world. The passage is suffused with comic irony tinged with tragedy. "The monster in the streets has already begun to celebrate; the new myth courses through its veins, replacing its blood with corpuscles of saffron and green" (115). Rushdie creates an expectation of something momentous in the life of Saleem and yet there is a sense of the ominous as well. In a way, Saleem is prophetic in this passage, for the colours saffron and green suggest the rise of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism that will cause disharmony in the country. By identifying Saleem with India through the ingenious juxtaposing of details Rushdie makes us see the fallacy in the cause-effect relationship, and the implied comment is that the historian who also seeks these cause-effect relationships might be equally deceived.

The mythical hero is usually given a special power and he earns it by performing some heroic act or passing a test of character. The gift helps him in his quest, helps him to overcome a crisis or save someone else. The special power that Saleem suddenly obtains is that he can function like a transmitter, sending and receiving messages. The manner in which he obtains it is far from heroic, and quite unbecoming of a mythical hero. Seated hidden in the washing chest (for he wants solitude and comfort), he watches his mother disrobe, and in the resulting confusion of mind, while desperately trying to stifle a sneeze for the pajama cord tickles his nose, he suddenly finds he can hear voices in his head. The explosive sneeze in the washing
chest startles and then shocks his mother and he is punished. In spite of the initial deflation of the hero, the narrative once again establishes links with patterns of myth when we see the child hero trying to come to terms with the unexpected gift. He finds that he can tune into the thoughts of his mother and that by using his will he can switch it on or off, raise or lower the volume or even select voices. In his state of agitated excitement, he feels a door had been opened, “and through it I could glimpse -- shadowy still, undefined, enigmatic -- my reason for having been born.” During that night of punishment his mind grapples with the significance of his new ability and naturally turns to similar feats performed by men of religion. “On Mount Sinai, the prophet Musa or Moses heard the disembodied commandments; on Mount Hera, the prophet Muhammad (also known as Mohammad, Mahomet, the Last-But-One, and Mahound) spoke to the Archangel (Gabriel or Jibreel, as you please)” (163). He also thinks of the play enacted in school where his friend Cyrus-the-Great played the part of St. Joan and heard voices speaking the sentences of Bernard Shaw. It is through such touches of humour created by incongruity that Rushdie deconstructs the narrative. Again Saleem’s thoughts turn to Muhammad and how Gabriel or Jibreel had commanded him to recite in the name of the Creator. In great excitement, he asks for a family gathering the next morning and in all innocence says, “I heard voices yesterday. Voices are speaking to me inside my head I think -- Ammi, Abbou, I really think -- that Archangels have started talking to me”; (164). To his amazement he is charged with blasphemy and made to wash his tongue with soap! The father’s denunciation makes him reconsider his “Prophet-aping position” and he realizes that it is not Michael or Gabriel or Cassiel talking to
him, but the voices are as profane and as multitudinous as dust, leading to a language problem! In a clever shift, the reader is tuned not to the mythical level but the historical, for Saleem is India and India has a language problem.

That he is an anti-hero is again seen in the fact that Saleem does not use his gift for solving a crisis or performing something heroic. All that the midnight’s child can do is to call a conference which is a non-starter, very much like the conferences and committees set up by the government in India. The two occasions where he uses the gift are banal. He tunes in to his mother’s thoughts, follows her, and finds out the nature of her guilt. Then, in the classroom, he is able to connect with the teacher’s mind, or the mind of a clever student and perform surprisingly well in a test. This amounts to copying. When he goes to Pakistan, he loses his special power altogether. In Bangladesh, he uses another extraordinary power, his sense of smell, to nose out the enemy. But the outcome is that he has to flee, and he gets lost in the jungle and it is Parvathi-the-witch who helps to smuggle him out of the country. Once he is back in India his powers are entirely dissipated. In the section titled ‘Kolynos Kid’, Saleem acknowledges the truth of his position. “From ayah to Widow, I’ve been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist”(237).

Exile is a period of trial and adversity or alienation, which helps the hero to gain a new perspective or summon and direct his inner strength to meet a challenge. (We can see the imprisonment of Matigari and Te Kooti as
a period as exile, and we also have the exile of the Pandavas in Tharoor's novel.) Saleem suffers exile twice. When his parents discover that he is not really their child, he is sent off to live with his uncle who has no child of his own. He practically loses his identity. When Saleem realizes that he is the child of Vanitha and Methwold and that Shiva is really Amina's child, his consternation is great. He is afraid that his rival Shiva may find out by merely invading his brain and then claim his rightful inheritance. He decides to exile Shiva from his mind and not call the midnight conference! His second exile occurs due to the chain of unfortunate deaths, the result of his anonymous letter to Commander Sabarmati. He is whisked off to Pakistan by his redoubtable grandmother. Somehow, the frontier jammed his thought-transmission powers and he is exiled from his truest birthright, the gift of the midnight's child. Besides this, he does not know if he should consider himself Indian or Pakistani, a further loss of identity. The question that haunts him is, "How am I to embark on my ambitious project of nation-saving?" As he gradually comes to think of Pakistan as his country, he is ironically 'involved' in the preparations for war against India and then is sent to East Pakistan (which loses its identity too) on a special mission. In the end he finds himself in a country that is no longer Pakistan, utterly lost, his life in danger. His special gifts are of no avail and his exile has not helped him to gain the status of the mythical hero.

The description of Saleem's initiation into purity is again bizarre. Saleem considers himself impure and unworthy to live in the 'pure' Islamic state like Pakistan, as he has fallen in love with his sister, and though he
explains that they are not related by blood, the relationship cannot be revised. On a fateful day, as he comes around Guru Mandir on his lambretta one part of the prophecy of Ram Ram Seth comes true. A sudden bomb explosion rips through Aunt Alia’s house destroying what is left of his family and home. Bits of masonry and miscellaneous objects fly up into the air and a silver spittoon comes hurtling down to land on Saleem’s head, knocking him unconscious.

Rushdie can combine the profound and the ridiculous with ease. The whole passage (343) taken literally reads like slapstick comedy. It can, however, be read metaphorically. The fact that all things that give him identity, a sense of ‘I’, like home, family, possessions, memory, are blanked out and destroyed in a sudden explosion, is like an overwhelming experience of eternity that accompanies the complete loss of the ego. Significantly, he is coming round Guru Mandir, and just before he becomes unconscious, he says he experiences “a tiny but infinite moment of utter clarity”, “a minuscule but endless instant of knowing” when he is stripped of the past, present, memory and identity. He can only acquiesce and say yes and feel the exhilaration of being utterly free, as “all the Saleems go pouring out” of him. Calling this bit of narration mere fantasy negates its true meaning. If we say that myth expresses great truths by hiding them in sacred tales in the form of symbols or allegory, then, in a modern society that is marked by the absence of religion and its associative symbols, in an age where the heroic or mythical quest has no appeal, a mystic can only clothe his experience in the mock-heroic or comic mode. Rushdie’s narrative underlines this irony. Yet, while
this level of meaning is hidden in the description, the reader is by now aware of the pretensions of Saleem, and is not willing to give him credit for the mystical experience.

Metamorphosis and transformations of various kinds are often found in myth. In *Midnight's Children* the transformations that Saleem undergoes are basic shifts in identity which lead to role transformations for others. "Transformations without end" says Saleem when he becomes nine-fingered Saleem for that is when he finds that his father is not his father and his mother is not his mother. Suddenly, Mary Pereira and aunt Pia are transformed into mother figures. Just as suddenly, he is thrown into the role of son to his uncle in Pakistan and his aunt becomes the new mother figure. Many such instances in his life make Saleem say that a "reverse fertility" principle seems to work in his life for he seems to give birth to parents wherever he goes. The novel has many instances of such inversion and subversion which add to the deconstructive strategy that is evident throughout.

Some of the other characters are also 'transformed'. The Brass Monkey becomes Jamila Singer, which earns for her the title of 'Pakistan's Angel' and 'Bulbul of the Faith'. The Reverend Mother is transformed by bereavement into a woman who is more interested in other people's lives than her own. Schaapsteker's transformation is an example of the typical 'chutneyfication' of meaning itself that happens so often in the novel. Age has failed to extract his teeth (and poison sacs) and he has come to believe in the superstitions of the locals. According to them, he is the last of the line which began when a
Many myths about the cobra are popular in India. It is Schaapstecker who teaches Saleem the ways of the snake, becoming for a time a father figure. Saleem says, "... it seems that all my life I've only had to turn a corner to tumble into yet another new and fabulously transmogrified world" (257). Underlying many of the 'transformations' are psychological insights that are disguised as fantasy.

Transformation often prepares the mythical hero for a sacred revelation. In this novel of inversions, it is not Saleem who is credited with this experience, but his friend Cyrus-the-great. Saleem cannot help feeling resentful. "It should have been me, I am the magic child; not only my primacy at home, but even my true innermost nature, has now been purloined" (269). The 'transformation' of Cyrus into the 'mahaguru' is the result of parental frustration. His father is a nuclear scientist and has a rationalist outlook whereas his mother is a religious fanatic, and feels severely repressed by her husband's anti-religious attitude. On his death, however, the mother takes charge of her son and endeavours to remake him in her own strange image. The result is that a few years later he is presented to the world as Lord Khusrovand, and becomes the "most successful holy child in history." The newspapers herald his sainthood and spiritual powers and at the end there is an appeal for donations to be sent to a particular address. The passage is an excellent example not only of Indian English, but also of the myth-making-money-making strategy so common in India. Rushdie's comic satire is both incisive and entertaining.
The death of Cyrus's father and the extraordinary influence of the fanatic mother that is accepted so uncritically is Rushdie's comment on the gradual change in the Indian attitude to life. The gradual acceptance of the rational scientific temper under the influence of the British was to give way to the unscientific temper that pretended to be going back to India's tradition and mythology. This change in temper is again illustrated in Mary Pereira's anxious outburst to Saleem during his exile in aunt Pia's house. She claims that the country is in the grip of a "supernatural invasion." An old lady in Kurukshetra had woken up one night to behold the ancient war between the Pandavas and the Kurus. It was said that the ghost of the Rani of Jhansi roamed the land. What frightened Mary's Christian sensibility was that a peasant woman in Kashmir had sworn that the two feet carved on a tombstone had started to bleed. It is interesting to see how Rushdie is able to draw together highly sensitive mythical symbols drawn from different religions and historical contexts in one short passage and imply so many meanings in it. Rushdie wants to show that what is happening is a kind of war in the racial sub-conscious, where the new myth of freedom and nationhood was in conflict with the older myth systems and both struggle to obtain primacy. After listening wide-eyed to Mary's stories, Saleem says, "I remain half convinced that in that time of accelerated events and diseased hours the past of India rose up to confound her present, the new born secular state was being given an awesome reminder of its fabulous antiquity, in which democracy and votes for women were irrelevant . . . so that people were seized by atavistic longings, and forgetting the new myth of freedom reverted to their old ways, their old regionalist loyalties and prejudices, and
the body politic began to crack. As I said: lop off just one finger-tip and you never know what fountains of confusion you will unleash"(245). The comment is explicit, and it cleverly links Saleem's personal history and the history of India, helping to keep the fictional identification of both in mind.

The chapter on Bhagwan Khusro is titled 'Revelation'. Besides the supposed revelation experienced by Khusro, there are two other 'revelations'. One is the 'revelation' made by Mary Pereira about the true identity of Saleem and the fallout of this. The second is that experienced by old Aadam Aziz. Shaken by the suicide of his son, he takes up issue with God in whom he has not believed all his life. Rushdie describes it with characteristic comic irony. One night he had felt a presence in his room and cried out, "Jesus Christ Almighty" and laughed apologetically for uttering the infidel name. He had apparently seen a figure with perforated hands and feet. The apparition was equally startled and cried out "God, God . . . I didn't think you could see me." The next day he said that Jesus had asked him if it was he who had lost a son and with pain in his chest he had asked why. "God has his reasons, old man; life's like that, right?"(276). Everyone thinks the old man is senile and even the children are asked not to believe in his stories. The Reverend Mother, of course, thinks it is blasphemy. The next day the old man disappears and then we have that delightful little tale about his being seen in Kashmir and how the Prophet's hair gets stolen and how an old man collapses in front of the Shankaracharya temple raising his stick against the idol. Rushdie has a fascination for this relic, the Prophet's hair and the
myths surrounding it, religious and political. He has a short story on the same theme.

Every religion has a special respect for relics, and there are many myths associated with them. We can see this in Islam, Christianity and Buddhism while Hinduism reveres holy places. Saleem protests that he is not trying to establish relics of his own, but the newspaper cuttings about the midnight's child, the umbilical cord preserved in the jar and carried even to Pakistan and ceremoniously placed in the foundation dug for the new house, certainly make it appear that Saleem would like the reader to consider them as such. Hindus perform special rituals when the foundation is dug, called 'bhoomi pooja', when precious metals and precious stones are placed in a particular part of the foundation and covered over with brick work.

The very deliberate use of mythological names for characters in the novel is an important narrative strategy. The list is rather long: Shiva, Parvathi, Buddha, Ravana, Hanuman, Arjun, Durga, Padma, the Flap-eared-son (Ganesha), Mary, Joseph. Other names used for a similar effect are Sinai, Aadam Aziz, Methwold, Buckingham Villa, Lila, Sabarmati, Tai and Tai Bibi. As an overall strategy, it helps Rushdie to integrate myth with history. Some of the mythological elements have a continuous significance whereas others have a minor role. The novel being a post-modern pastiche, some of the events where the mythological name is introduced have a limited significance. It only helps to create the overall ambiance of the mythological tale, at times contributing to the satire, at times participating in the deconstructive game played in the novel.
The opening of the novel takes us back to Saleem’s grandfather Aadam Aziz in Kashmir. The name has obvious associations with Adam and the beautiful valley of Kashmir is his Eden. Like the biblical Adam he leaves his Eden along with his wife and thereafter is never sure of his identity. If eating the fruit of knowledge changed Adam’s life and his perceptions of the world, an education at Heidelberg alters Aadam Aziz’s vision, for as he prays to the Compassionate and Merciful One, Heidelberg and his friend Ingrid invade his mind. He is “caught in a strange middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief”(12). In this state of mind, when he bows down to worship, “the valley, gloved in a prayer mat, punched him on the nose”(11). “At one and the same time a rebuke from Ilse-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God, it smote him upon the point of his nose”(12). From that time he could never recall or relive the childhood springs of Paradise. In one sense, Aadam Aziz’s predicament is that of every man. In another sense, it is the predicament of the Kashmiri. As a broader metaphor, it speaks of the troubled relationship between India and Kashmir. Rushdie’s style is very economical in that all the time, whatever the episode, he is able to suggest multiple levels of meaning.

Rushdie himself has worked out the associations and interplay of meaning that arise from the use of names.

“Our names contain our fates; living as we do in a place where names have not acquired the meaninglessness of the West, and are still more then mere sounds, we are also the victims of our titles. Sinai contains Ibn Sina, master magician, Sufi adept; and also Sin the moon, the
ancient god of Hadhramaut, with his own mode of connection, his powers of action-at-a-distance upon the tides of the world. But Sin is also the letter S, as sinuous as a snake; serpents lie coiled within the name. And there is also the accident of transliteration — Sinai, in the Roman script, though not in Nastaliq, is also the name of the place of revelation, of put-off-thy-shoes, of commandments and golden calves; but when all that is said and done; when Ibn Sina is forgotten and the moon has set; when snakes lie hidden and revelations end, it is the name of the desert—of barrenness, infertility, dust, the name of the end.

"In Arabia—Arabia Deserta—at the time of the prophet Muhammad, other prophets also preached: Maslama of the tribe of the Banu Hanifa in the Yamama, the very heart of Arabia; and Ilanzala ibn Sagwan; and Khalid ibn Sinan. Maslama’s God was ar-Rahman, ‘the Merciful’; today Muslims pray to Allah, ar-rahman. Khalid ibn Sinan was sent to the tribe of ‘Abs; for a time he was followed, but then he was lost. Prophets are not always false simply because they were overtaken, and swallowed up, by history. Men of worth have always roamed the desert"(304-305).

Rushdie (Saleem) has demonstrated the richness of mythological associations, but one cannot help feeling that he is laughing at the reader, especially the research scholar, for none of the associations help us to understand Ahmad Sinai of the novel. Yet the explanation is itself part of the narrative technique. It makes significant remarks about the nature of
religion especially among desert tribes. And then, one must not forget that Saleem's birth is prophesied, and he himself thought for a while the angels were speaking to him. At the end of the novel Saleem attempts to prophesy the future of the nation.

That the world of the *Midnight's Children* is a type of mythical world is suggested by the name Methwold (myth world). Methwold Estate is the "kingdom" of Saleem's childhood. Saleem gives us mythical-historical roots for the name. He goes back to the origin of Bombay. The Portuguese were the first invaders who took advantage of the harbour and called it Bom Bahia. But there was always the presiding deity Mumbadevi whose name may well have become the city's name. (And indeed the name of the city is Mumbai today.) But then, there came an officer of the East India Company, Methwold was his name. One day in 1633 he saw a vision, and in that vision he saw British Bombay, fortified against all invaders. Methwold died, and in time Charles II was betrothed to Catherine of the Portuguese House of Braganza and it was her marriage dowry which brought Bombay into British hands. Methwold's vision was taking shape in reality. Though Methwold's vision is really a fiction, Rushdie's purpose is to show how imagination can shape reality. In addition, we see how reality can be mythicized to suit a perspective.

It so happens that Saleem's parents enter into a sale agreement with an Englishman called Methwold and that is how they come to live in Methwold Estate: "four identical houses built in a style befitting their original residents (conqueror's houses! Roman mansions; three storey houses
of gods standing on a two-storey Olympus, a stunted Kailash!.." (94). This complex sentence makes us think about 'conquer', 'Roman' and 'English'. At one point of time, the Roman was the conqueror, but now the English conqueror had built Roman mansions. Olympus is dwarfed and juxtaposed with the stunted Kailash, and both are important myth symbols. The language plays around with metaphor, myth and history in a fictional world. It is in fact an extended metaphor. One of the houses was called Buckingham Villa. Methwold sells the properties cheap, but insists on some conditions. The actual transfer of property is linked to the transfer of power, on the midnight of August 15th. "My notion." Mr. Methwold explains, staring at the setting sun, "is to stage my own transfer of assets. Leave behind everything you see? Select suitable persons -- such as yourself, Mr. Sinai -- hand everything over absolutely in tact: in tip top working order .."(97). The irony is evident. It is one more instance of the way in which the family history of the Sinais is linked to the history of India. The comic description of how the new residents come to terms with the Englishman's collection of possessions (Lila Sabarmati preserves the pianola, Ibrahim who is afraid of the fans is reconciled to them, the old clothes are thrown out, the gold fish die and the dogs run wild) also works metaphorically. It describes the process of hybridization of culture. This is more specific when we come to know that Methwold had fathered a son on Vanitha, and her husband Winkie knew nothing about it, nor did Vanitha invite his advances. This is in fact Saleem, the hybrid child, who is convinced that his destiny and the destiny of India are inexorably linked. The fact that we do not want to acknowledge our hybridity is seen in the reaction of the parents when they come to know his
true identity. Amina’s child, who is really Shiva, (the irony in the name is not lost), and Saleem are born at the midnight hour on August 15th, 1947. “So there were knees and a nose, a nose and knees. In fact, all over new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents -- the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream” (118).

The central idea in the novel in that, as countries, both India and Pakistan are myths and therefore our automatic assumption of identity of belonging to either of these countries is equally a myth. To complicate matters we have the Kashmiri. The Indians would consider him as belonging to their nation while the Pakistani would bitterly oppose it. This contradiction is seen in the description of the baby Saleem: “The eyes were too blue: Kashmiri blue, changeling blue, blue with the weight of unspilled tears, too blue to blink” (125). The political statement is implicit. Both Mary Pereira and Amina are unnerved by the baby’s unblinking gaze and decide that perhaps he would learn by imitation. So the two women take turns to sit by his side and blink! Saleem comes out with a piece of wisdom. “I learned: the first lesson of my life: nobody can face the world with his eyes open all the time.” One is reminded of T.S.Eliot’s line, “Human kind cannot bear very much reality.” Rushdie can turn a political statement to a comic situation and then transform it into a philosophical one.

The paradoxes of identity can be seen in Rushdie’s handling of the other midnight’s child, Shiva. Saleem sees him as a rival in every way, and
et calls him his alter ego. Between them, they represent many binary oppositions: Muslim-Hindu, rich-poor, constructive-destructive, passive-violent, impotent-libidinous, and in the final section Saleem is by default a Pakistani and Shiva a Hindu. Their attitudes to life are also opposed. Saleem thinks of himself as the hero who can shape the history of the nation whereas Shiva is one for whom history is as the continuous struggle of one’s-self-against-the-crowd. While Shiva fights Pakistan in the Bangladesh war (unaware that he is Muslim by birth), Saleem fights for Pakistan though his heart is in India. Shiva loses his mother when he is born and then loses his father too; Saleem has the peculiar habit of “giving birth” to parents. The mediator between them is Parvathi-the-witch, married to both, bearing Shiva’s son, but making Saleem the foster father.

Rushdie makes deliberate use of the mythical associations of the name Shiva. Winkie’s son is named Shiva after the god of procreation and destruction. Rushdie’s manner of building upon these associations is based on psychology rather than the puranic stories. Saleem tells us how Shiva silently bore the burden of guilt of being the cause of his mother’s death and his father’s slow decline thereafter. There was an anger about the condition that could not be spoken aloud. He would close his fist on a pebble and hurl it into the surrounding emptiness, ineffectively at first, and more deliberately and dangerously as he grew up. “Shiva, the god of destruction, who is also most potent of deities; Shiva, greatest of dancers; who rides on a bull; whom no force can resist . . . the boy Shiva, he told us he had to fight for survival from his earliest days” (221). In what is like a strange parody of Abraham’s
Hindus are guilty of. All this contributes to the deconstructive strategy in the novel.

"There is nothing like a war for the re-invention of lives," says Saleem when he comes back to India after the Bangladesh war. It is Saleem who dwells in the slum and Major Shiva has ascended the social ladder. His performance in the war has made him a legend. Wherever he went, women swooned over him, "they touched him through the magical film of myth" (407). Major Shiva had become a notorious seducer, a cuckolded of the rich and "he sired around the capital an army of street urchins to mirror the regiment of bastards he had fathered on the begums of the chandeliered salons" (411). This again is a debasement, if not defilement, of the principle of fecundity and fertility that the god Shiva is supposed to symbolize. The desacralization of myth is seen in the naming of Shiva's consort too, for here the epithet 'witch' is added to her name. She is depicted as a lonely woman who performs magic.

The Shiva-Parvathi liaison is expected -- "fated to meet by the divine destiny of their names" (389). After Major Shiva comes back to Delhi, he is seized by a desire to see the "saucer-eyed beauty" whom he had encountered in the midnight's children conference, and who had asked for a lock of his hair in Bangladesh. His status as a war hero allows him to import a woman into the military quarters. "Parvathi-the-witch turned those simple Army quarters into a palace, a Kailasa fit for Shiva-the-god" (411) and he is under her spell for four months. But when she lets him know she is carrying his child, he becomes violent and turns her out. Saleem and Shiva share three
things, the moment of their birth and the consequences, the guilt of treachery, and the son born to Parvathi. If Saleem and Shiva are the children of Independence, the child is Emergency-born and the family's link to history continues. "Shiva and Saleem, victor and victim; understand our rivalry and you will gain an understanding of the age in which you live." (432).

Significantly, the son born to Parvathi is "flap-eared" and his eyes are "ice-blue, the blue of recurrence, the fateful blue of the Kashmiri sky." While the blue eyes keeps the political allegory alive, the flap-ears link him to Hindu mythology for the reference to Lord Ganesha is obvious. Parvathi, the goddess, is seen as Shakthi, the feminine energy principle, the impetus to creation. She fashions a child out of the sandal paste on her body and asks him to guard the gate while she has a bath. The child refuses entry to Shiva himself, who enraged, chops off his head. Parvathi is angry and distraught and challenges her husband to bring him back to life. The head of the first live creature to come that way is chopped off and placed on the body, and Shiva gives it life. Though the symbolic-mystical meaning of Ganesha may be different, it is enough to see the parallel to the myth, as the child in the novel is called the flap-eared son. In a sense, Ganesha is Shiva’s son and not his son. In the novel, he is Saleem’s son and not his son, Shiva’s son and not his son. "He was the child of a father who was not his father; but also the child of a time which damaged reality so badly that nobody ever managed to put it together again... He was the true great-grandson of his great-grandfather, but elephantiasis attacked him in the ears instead of the nose --
because he was also the true son of Shiva-and-Parvathi; he was elephant-headed Ganesh"(420).

The flap-eared son then comes to represent the new generation of India. Significantly, he is a child plagued by diseases. If there were dialamps and fire-works when Saleem was born, there were gasps, silences and fears at the stroke of midnight when he was born. The "occult tyrannies" seem to handcuff the child to history. He is afflicted with tuberculosis when the country suffers Emergency. "I suspected, from the first, something darkly metaphorical in this illness--believing that, in those midnight months when the age of my connection-to-history overlapped with his, our private emergency was not unconnected with the larger, macrocosmic disease, under whose influence the sun had become as pallid and diseased as our son"(422). The disease vanished with the fall of the Widow. This maintains the connection between myth, history and fiction.

The situation is used to introduce another mythological figure, Durga. Though Saleem would like to link his son's disease to the condition of the nation, Picture Singh believes that the credit for the improvement in his health should go to Durga, a dhoban or washerwoman who wet-nurses him through his sickness. She is one of those who lives in the magicians' ghetto. Durga is a common enough name. Yet it is the name of the mother-goddess in her fierce aspect, a symbol of the awesome energy that can annihilate evil. Rushdie's description cleverly fuses the dhoban with the devi. "She was a woman whose biceps bulged; whose preternatural breasts unleashed a torrent of milk capable of nourishing regiments, and who, it was rumoured
darkly (although I suspect the rumour of being started by herself) had two wombs. She was full of gossip and tittle-tattle as she was of milk: every day a dozen new stories gushed from her lips. She possessed the boundless energy common to all practitioners of the trade; as she thrashed the life out of shirts and sarees on her stone, she seemed to grow in power, as if she were sucking the vigour out of the clothes . . . She was a monster who forgot each day the moment it ended . . . Durga the washerwoman was a succubus!"(445)

Though an unseemly distortion of the mythological Durga, what comes through is the enormous energy, vitality and sustaining power that the woman symbolizes. Like the mythological Durga, the woman bearing her name, represents the energy and will for survival that is inherent in the Indian people. By making Saleem’s son suckle at her breasts, Rushdie is hoping that the Emergency-born generation will derive strength to fight the evil in the system just as Durga the goddess fought and slayed the demon Mahisha. Some of the myth traditions see Uma, Parvathi, Durga and Kali as aspects of the mother-goddess who is a protector and nourisher. She protects because she can take on the fierce aspect and destroy enemies. She assumes various forms in response to the prayer of her devotees. The narration shows the continuation of the deconstructive strategy.

The other character who bears the name associated with a goddess of the Hindu pantheon is Padma. In the novel, Padma is the housekeeper-companion-listener-critic to Saleem. The word in Sanskrit means ‘lotus’ and is a widely used symbol. The goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is depicted as standing on a lotus, often with a lotus in her hand. Many other deities are
also depicted as standing or sitting on the lotus. The highest attainment in yoga is described as the opening of the thousand petalled lotus of the mind. Yet in the novel, Padma is the down to earth woman, listening to his stories, but more interested in persuading Saleem to marry her. Saleem is not unaware of the associations of the name. “Born and raised in the Muslim tradition, I find myself overwhelmed all of a sudden by an older learning: while here beside me is my Padma... The Lotus Goddess; the One Who Possesses Dung; Who is Honey-Like and Made of Gold... who along with the yaksha geneii represent the sacred treasures of the earth, and the sacred rivers...beguiling and comforting men while they pass through the dream-web of Maya... Padma, the lotus calyx, which grew out of Vishnu’s navel, and from which Brahma himself was born, Padma the source, the Mother of Time!” (194-195). There is nothing devi-like about Padma in the novel except that she has a sustaining role. It is only in the closing description of Saleem and Padma that there seems to be a symbolic role for Padma. In this last passage, written in the future tense, as if Saleem is journeying into the future in his mind, Saleem tells us how Padma’s palms and soles will be filigreed with henna patterns like a bride. It will be Independence day and the crowds will fill the streets and fireworks fill the air. They will go in a taxi to the station, for Padma’s hopes of a honeymoon in Kashmir will be fulfilled, but the taxi cannot move in the dense crowd, where people are throwing balloons of paint at each other as in the Holi festival and as the crowd surges, Saleem and Padma will be separated and she will extend her hand unavailingly; the multitudes looking like the turbulent sea drowning Padma. Saleem is alone, his body already cracked, battered by the crowd, pieces
alling off, and he will see the dead ancestors and a mythological apparition approaching him, which takes on the form of the Black Angel and then turns into his rival Shiva and then the Widow and the body continues to crack and fissure. The significance of this passage lies in that Saleem corresponds to India and if Padma reminds us of the goddess of wealth, then their separation bodes ill for the country. This happens just when they have set off for their honeymoon. The surging crowds could refer to the overpopulation of the country which more than neutralizes any growth in wealth. The apparitions at the end could signify the wrong kind of emphasis placed on religion or tradition, which is negative, destructive and unproductive. The cracks in his body refer to the ever present threat of divisive forces in the country. Saleem’s attempt at prophecy for the nation is gloomy indeed. It must however be taken as a warning, and Indians must take action to contain and eliminate the negative forces at work.

Some critics have seen Saleem in the role of Brahma the Creator, or Vishnu the Sustainer. If that perspective is adopted, then Lakshmi (Padma) is his consort. This interpretation is summed up by Mujeebuddin Syed in his article titled ‘Midnight’s Children’ and Its Indian Con-Texts’ when he says,:

“He casts himself as omniscient and omnipotent, not only as Brahma the creator, as Timothy Brennan would have it, but more importantly as Vishnu, the preserver. Empowering himself thus in myth and mythology, the all-knowing, all-seeing and all-wise narrator ‘chutnifies’ his own version of post-colonial India, in the humble pickle factory. Though he playfully identifies himself with the elephant-
headed god Ganesh--because of his nose, his love of writing and his insider position--he actually dons the role of Vishnu all through the novel, as he sees himself as the agent of everything that happens in it and presents his characters as being so much a part of him that they appear, like Vishnu's various avatars, to be avatars of himself. If the Bhagavad Gita makes creativity obligatory for Vishnu, the Supreme Being ('for if he did not act, the world would fall into ruins and there would be chaos'), for the narrator himself the creative act of writing becomes the paradigmatic karmic act' (994: 99)

This whole interpretation rests on the fact that Saleem has the special faculty that enables him to enter the consciousness of others, but this power fails when he goes to Pakistan. It has already been shown that Saleem is really an anti-hero and therefore, if the parallel to Vishnu has to be considered it must be shown to be inverted or deconstructed. Syed fails to see this. It is therefore illogical to say that he is the avatar of Vishnu and that the other characters he presents are avatars too. It must also be noted that it is not Saleem but Parvathi's son who is identified with Ganesha. Saleem does say that he is engaged in the work of preserving, "And my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings--by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving. Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks"(38). It is important to note that he has not created anything new, neither has he preserved or sustained life which is the role of Vishnu. What he is preserving is memory, written down, and his nocturnal
scribblings purport to be the history of his life and the history of India. The role of memory and its significance to the historian is elaborated later in the chapter. At one point he likens it to the large-scale preparation of condiments.

The other references to Hindu mythological figures are minor. They serve, to use the cooking metaphor that Rushdie is so fond of, as garnishing. There is the reference to the Ravana gang during the freedom struggle. The inappropriateness is deliberate. No fanatical Hindu would name his group after Ravana, the enemy of Rama. Again, the group is supposed to be patriotic and anti-Muslim, but the motive is to make money, using threat and blackmail. Rushdie shows us time and again the prime motivation is not patriotism or even love of one's religion but love of money. Another minor mythological reference is in the naming of one of the midnight's children. He is called Narada-Markandeya. They are two separate characters in Hindu mythology, the only common element lies in that both have been granted eternal life, and are supposed to inhabit the astral world. Amina's ayah is called Mary, and the one she loves is Joseph. Because she loves him, and he is a champion of the poor, she switches the babies, giving the child born to the poor Vanitha a better future in Amina's home. The 'ghost' of Joseph seems to haunt Mary, and it is more like an externalization of her guilt.

The myth that Christ came to Kashmir is alluded to by Tai the boatman. A postcolonial twist is given to the Christ story. Joseph is involved in the politics of the time and he once rebukes Mary by saying, "You and your Christ. You can't get it into your head that that's the white people's religion?"
Leaves white gods for white men. Just now our own people are dying” (105).

This troubles Mary a great deal, and she seeks an answer from the priest at St. Thomas’s Cathedral. To her consternation, he tells her that the colour of God is blue. Her bewilderment then turns to anger and she says that the Pope should set things right for no man can be blue. The hapless priest is merely following the instructions of the Bishop, who knows the problems with new converts. Anticipating such a question, he explains to the priest, “God is love; and the Hindu love-god Krishna, is always depicted with blue skin. Tell them blue; it will be a sort of bridge between the faiths” (103).

While this kind of expediency looks more like duplicity, one must also be aware of recent interpretations that speak of “Christ consciousness” and “Krishna consciousness” as being one and the same. However, this is far from the intention of the Bishop. The postcolonial situation makes the whole passage satirical.

There are mythological elements taken from the Western tradition -- perhaps intended to show that India has been influenced by the west, and India has a pluralistic culture. One example is the introduction of a Tiresias like figure, the boatman in Kashmir whose name is significantly Tai. Though a typical boatman of the Dal Lake, Tai is given a timeless quality. It is as if he has lived through the centuries and in his grandiloquent and ceaseless chatter, he laid claims to antiquity. When Aadam made bold to ask how old he is he says, “I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen emperors die . . . I saw that Isa, that Christ, when he came to Kashmir. Smile, smile, it is your history I am keeping in my head. Once it was set
down in old lost books. Once I knew where there was a grave with pierced feet carved on the tombstone, which bled once a year..." and he goes on to describe how this Isa, with the long beard and bald head, could eat a whole kid! Tai again claims that he knew an officer in Iskandar's army whose nose itched so badly that he went mad. Tai even speaks of the Moghul emperors who travelled in his boat. In a quaint and comic distortion of the prophecy of Tiresias in the Oedipus myth, Tai prophesies a dynasty, for Aadam's nose indicates this. There is a purpose behind all this seeming nonsense. Tai makes us understand the strategic importance of Kashmir in the history of India. It is through Kashmir that the invading hordes had to come to the plains. Kashmir is still the focal point of dispute between Pakistan and India. India claims that the integrity of the nation depends on Kashmir.

Another Sybil-Tiresias like figure is Taibibi, the timeless whose Saleem visits in Pakistan. She claims to be five hundred years old and this "mythological old harridan" has the extraordinary power of bewitching any man by changing her smell. Saleem, now endowed with the super sensitive nose is aghast and enthralled when she makes him confront his unspeakable love for Jamila Singer. The narrative shows that Saleem is identified with India and Jamila with Pakistan. Perhaps, the historical comment implicit in the Jamila Singer affair, is the fact that though many people in India and Pakistan would like to live in peace, politics prevents them. It becomes a political taboo, just as the social and moral taboos prevent the union of Saleem and Jamila Singer. The prospect of the unity of the two countries is just as bleak. It is only after the experience of invisibility in Parvathi's
that Saleem understands the metaphor in his life. There is a moment of self-knowledge when he perceives that his obsessive love for his sister is not for the trollop he left behind in Pakistan, but for his real twin sister, India herself.

The Oedipus myth has a strong presence in the novel, though there is no explicit reference to it. Saleem is agonized by the fact that his mother loves another man. It is this anger that is transferred to the Lila Sabarmati-Catrack affair, leading to many disastrous consequences. Saleem has many women in his life who play the role of mother, and one of the surrogate mothers is his aunt Pia, with whom he lives during the first exile. The distraught aunt plays the tragedienne when she loses her admirer Homi Catrack. Saleem the hero cannot resist playing his part, by trying to make amends in the bedroom. Saleem acknowledges that the feelings of revenge for his perfidious mother turn to lust and it is also responsible for his feelings of hatred for Catrack. The outcome of all this is that Commander Sabarmati shoots Lila and Catrack (Rushdie makes it comic) and then surrenders to the police. It is in the context of this episode that Rushdie (Saleem) raises a pertinent question. When the Sabarmati case comes to the President in an appeal for pardon, the President has a grave problem indeed. Saleem asks, "Is India to give her approval to the rule of law, or to the ancient principle of the overriding primacy of heroes? If Rama himself were alive, would we send him to prison for slaying the abductor of Sita? Great matters; my vengeful irruption into the history of my age was certainly no trivial affair" (264). The President decides not to pardon Sabarmati. This seemingly innocuous
cussion brings to the surface a contradiction in India’s consciousness. While he mythical consciousness would look up to Rama as an ideal king, upright and just, and worship him as an avatar of Vishnu, even fight and shed blood over the temple/mosque structure at Ayodhya, Rama’s birthplace, no Indian would hesitate to call Sabarmati a murderer. Of course, the moral code of vengeance in the Ramayana era does not apply in the modern world and this is understood and accepted. Rama could not have issued a court notice to Ravana. Rama as king of the time, gave Ravana a chance to surrender and when he did not, had to wage war and kill him. Another important difference is that Sita was an unwilling victim but Lila was a willing accomplice. Rushdie’s question however demonstrates how the mythic consciousness of a race works. In this episode, a veiled attack is also made on Gandhi as the name Sabarmati suggests the ashram of Gandhi. The story of his experiments with truth shows how Gandhi tested his self-control in matters of sex.

Another important inversion of religion and myth in the novel has to do with Buddhism. As Saleem himself explains, it is a fortunate ambiguity of transliteration that he exploits. The word buddha in Urdu, where the “d” is hard plosive, means old man. The word Buddha, where the “d” is soft, means the enlightened one. The narrative deliberately identifies one with the other. Saleem, brained by the spittoon, orphaned and ‘purified’, suffers a “partial erasure” or amnesia. Though memory is lost, another power is gained, an extraordinary sense of smell that a sniffer-dog would envy. Saleem is like a senile old man, a buddha, and since he is ‘purified’ he is (in an inverted way
of course) like Buddha. Anyway, this sniffer-dog ability wins him an important assignment in the Pakistani army and he is sent to East Pakistan on a special mission—to sniff out the enemy and eliminate him. Saleem is viewed with a mixture of awe and suspicion by the other soldiers. "Within twenty-four hours, in the course of the mess-hall conversations with other CUTIA units, the man-dog had been fully mythologized." (349). They knew he had the backing of the VIPs, but they were puzzled by his lack of interest in people and his strange refusal to talk and even stranger ability to smell. Much of the time he was alone. "Cross-legged, blue-eyed, staring into space, he sits beneath a tree. Bodhi trees do not grow at this altitude; he makes do with a chinar." (348). With a sentence like that Rushdie establishes the connection between the buddhas and yet manages to sever it. In a series of language games, Rushdie goes through several stages of inversion, much like the somersaults of a gymnast. "In ancient India, Gautama Buddha sat enlightened under a tree at Gaya; in the deer park at Sarnath, he taught others to abstract themselves from worldly sorrows and achieve inner peace; and centuries later, Saleem the buddha sat under a different tree, unable to remember grief, numb as ice, wiped clean as a slate. . . . With some embarrassment I am forced to admit that amnesia is the kind of gimmick regularly used by our lurid film-makers. Bowing slightly, I accept that my life has taken, yet again, the tone of a Bombay talkie." So abstracted is he from the reality that he can refer to himself in the third person. (The Buddha, who had vanquished the ego or the false sense of 'I' referred to himself in the third person as the Thathagatha.) "I (or he) accepted the fate which was my repayment for love, and sat under a chinar tree; that emptied of history, the
buddha learned the arts of submission, and did only what was required of him. To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan" (350). This innocuous looking statement holds the sharpest satire. While 'surrender' or 'submission' to the divine might lead to the freedom we call nirvana, the submission effected in political terms is the loss of freedom itself, the loss of the freedom of thought, speech and action, a blanking out of the mind, the mind becoming a clean slate for political leaders to write on Rushdie's ironic humour can be devastating, and within the space of a paragraph, we move from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the poetic to the political.

A little further, Saleem says that what had happened to him was like "abandoning consciousness, seceding from history." To withdraw from the world of sorrow, as Buddha did, is in a way seceding from history, and reaching a state of samadhi is, in Saleem's perspective, a giving up of consciousness. The comic is ever present in Rushdie's work. While the Buddha was an exemplar of the highest kind, Saleem was setting the worst of examples, "and the example was followed by no less a personage than Sheik Mujib, when he led the East Wing into secession and declared it independent as 'Bangaldesh'! Yes, Ayooba Shaheed Farooq were right to feel ill-at-ease -- because even in those depths of my withdrawal from responsibility, I remained responsible, through the working of the metaphorical modes of connection, for the belligerent events of 1971" (351). Metaphor is the most important mode of narration in Midnight's Children yet it is made entirely new. Saleem insists on the metaphoric connection
between himself and history which is entirely illogical and in the process of parody, there is the inversion and subversion of the metaphor itself.

This inversion is seen throughout the section called 'The buddha' in Book Three. When the soldier friends pester him with questions about his past, the buddha replied gently, "Don't try and fill my head with that history. I am who I am, that's all there is." The mystical reverberations of that statement are obvious. The comic-ironical-satirical doings of the buddha, the man-dog, culminate in an act that can be described as the very opposite of apotheosis. The buddha helps to track down Mujib and he is arrested. "But how convenient this amnesia is, how much it excuses! So permit me to criticize myself: the philosophy of acceptance to which the buddha adhered had consequences no more and no less unfortunate than his previous lust-for-centrality; and here in Dacca, those consequences were being revealed"(356). The amnesia is such that he remembers no fathers or mothers, no singing voices, and not even the midnight hour has a special meaning. He now becomes someone who "simply submits to the life in which he finds himself, and does his duty; who follows orders; who lives both in-the-world and not-in-the-world; . . ." Once again, the difference between political submission and philosophic or religious submission is highlighted, by deliberately confounding one with the other. An important inversion is that Saleem gets involved in the mindless violence of war whereas the Buddha taught nonviolence and compassion. The second part of the quoted sentence has relevance to Buddhism. When Siddhartha decided to give up the princely life and become a wandering ascetic, he traveled south to the Maghada kingdom
in search of teachers who could instruct him in the way of truth. He studied under two teachers. One of them taught him to reach the state of “no-thing” and the second taught him to attain the sphere of “neither-perception-nor-non-perception” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Micropædia Vol. II: 342). Ironically, Saleem also travels south, not in search of enlightenment but in order to escape the war. The inversion makes the Buddha’s renunciation seem like the ultimate escape from the world of sorrow, disease and death.

Saleem and his three companions go “south south south to the sea” in a boat, down the serpentine river Padma, which is really the Ganges, the mother-water, the goddess, streaming down to earth through Shiva’s hair. The metaphor is again implicit. One branch of Buddhism is called Hinayana or the lesser vehicle, which actually means a small boat that helps to cross the sea of samsara or worldly life of sorrow. The experiences on the boat journey and in the jungles of the Sunderbans can be compared to a period of spiritual testing and learning. The jungle, supposed to be a refuge from the war, turns out to be something else. The riverine maze seems endless and timeless, and the whole experience has the quality of an absurd fantasy. They can do nothing but surrender themselves to the “terrible phantasms of the dream-forest.” Every night the forest sends them new punishments and one of Ayooba’s experiences reads like a parallel to the Tantalus story. The boy-soldiers have to go through the period of initiation in the “forest of illusions” in order to acquire a “jungle-learned sense of responsibility”. It must be noted that with each experience they pass through different states of mind, something akin to Buddhist mind-training. “It seemed that the
magical jungle, having tormented them with their misdeeds, was leading them by the hand toward a new adulthood" (364). Yet, after all this, they do not emerge enlightened, but chastened men.

In the Sunderbans time follows unknown laws and it also has the power of playing tricks on their perceptions. One is reminded of the experiences of the Buddhist saint Milarepa's experiences in the sorcerer's den. After being persecuted with the cries of lamentation of the war victims, they suddenly hear sweet melody and following it, they come upon a large temple of Kali, "fecund and awful". Wearily they lie down at her feet, thankful for some respite from the rain. They dreamt that four beautiful identical houris came to minister to them and they spends many days in delight. Ironically, this experience in the temple of the Hindu goddess reminds us of the Islamic heaven. Then a day comes when they realize they are becoming transparent. "In their alarm they understood that this was the last and worst of the jungle's tricks, that by giving them their heart's desire it was fooling them into using up their dreams, so that as their dream-life seeped out of them they became as hollow and translucent as glass"(367). The whole depiction can be interpreted in psychological terms and Tibetan-Buddhist techniques of mind control have a psychological base. There is also the irony of four Muslim soldiers waging a holy war being caught up in the magic of the Kali temple. If we want to link the episode to the life of Buddha, one is reminded of the temptations of the demon Mara. When he sat in meditation under the bodhi tree, the daughters of Mara tried to tempt him and then the army of demons tried to frighten him. Buddha's strength of
mind vanquished them all. Saleem and his companions on the other hand, become the jungle's victims.

There is another significant subversion of the Buddha story. Saleem has taken to sitting cross-legged under a sundri-tree, his mind empty, his body numb. His horrified companions see a translucent serpent approach and bite his heel, pouring its venom into him. The buddha who has his eyes closed hardly noticed. While his friends expect him to die, he sits rigid for two days. "At last he relaxed, and the look of milky abstraction was no longer in his eyes. I was rejoined to the past, jolted into unity by snake-poison, and it began to pour out through the buddha's lips"(364). The friends listen in amazement to the stories that pour out, in an unstoppable downpour like the monsoon. He is reclaiming his lost history, all the myriad complex processes that go to make a man.

This is an obvious parallel to the Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree. The grand unity that is perceived and expressed on enlightenment, now becomes for Saleem a remembering of his past. While Siddhartha became the enlightened One, Saleem gets back his status as man. Indian mystics explain the process of enlightenment as the upward surging of the 'kundalini' or serpent power. It is an energy flow from the base of the spine to the head. It is often experienced as a shock. Ironically, the shock of the snake poison rising from his heel helps him to recover from his amnesia. The Buddha's revelation happens in three stages during the three watches of the night, and one of the powers given to him is the ability to see his past lives, and those of others as well. The past and the future are like an
open book to him for he has transcended Time. The stories about the Buddha's past lives are the Jataka tales. Saleem on the other hand is firmly back in linear time, and he tells the stories of his remembered past to his friends. His friend Farook has this sardonic remark, "So much, yaar, inside one person; so many bad things, no wonder he kept his mouth shut!" One important memory fails to return, his name.

"How the buddha regained his name" is again a reversal of the original. Prince Siddhartha earns the title of the Buddha on obtaining enlightenment. Saleem obtains the nickname buddha when he suffers amnesia and he has to "regain" his old name. Saleem and the two remaining friends fear the Mukthi Bahini and at the same time fear the Pakistani army for they are sure they will be put to death as deserters. When they are in this predicament, Parvathi-the-witch spies Saleem. She has come along with a group of performers from Delhi to celebrate the freedom of Bangladesh and is delighted to see a midnight's child and calls out Saleem’s name and that is how he "regains" his name.

Parvathi helps Saleem to escape to India, by putting him in a basket and making him invisible with her magic incantations. We are once again amidst the paradoxes of religion. Those who have obtained the higher planes of consciousness can become invisible. The theory of karma also teaches us that our desires and tendencies called vasanās bind us to the cycle of birth and death. Saleem tells us that when he was in that basket of invisibility he would have passed into nothingness had it not been for the glint of his favourite spittoon and an upsurge of passion, anger at the inevitability of his
destiny. "Why alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?" Saleem feels responsible for all the riots, bombs and pepper-pot revolutions. In the basket, Saleem suffers another transformation. He says it is like being born again. "I was taught, harshly, once-for-all, the lesson of No Escape; now, seated hunched over paper in a pool of Anglepoised light, I no longer want to be anything except what I am. Who what am I? My answer: I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I've gone which would not have happened if I had not come." This passage can be placed alongside the teaching of the Buddha: "Is not this individuality of mine a combination, material as well as mental? Is it not made up of qualities that sprang into being by gradual evolution? The five roots of sense perception in this organism have come from ancestors who performed these functions. The ideas which I think, came to me partly from others who thought them, and partly they rise from combinations of the ideas in my own mind. Those who have used the same sense organs, and have thought the same ideas before I was composed into this individuality of mine are my previous existences, they are my ancestors as much as the I of yesterday is the father of I of today, and the karma of my past deeds conditions the fate of my present existence" (The Gospel of Buddha, IX:16, 29). The Encyclopaedia Britannica says, "The pratitya-samutpada is the law of interdependence or reciprocal conditioning of
phenomena within the totality of physical, psychic, and psychosomatic existence." (Macropaedia Vol. III, 376).

There is another correspondence between the basket episode and Buddhism. The Theravadin scriptures are written in Pali and are divided into three sections or "baskets". It is Tipitaka in Pali and Tripitaka in Sanskrit. The sections are called 'sutta' or Discourses, 'Vinaya' or Rules of Conduct, and 'Abidhamma' or Analysis of Doctrine. (Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Vol. I & II:419). Saleem, no doubt has found his philosophy of No-escape in the basket.

In the development of the narrative in Book Three there is a curious subversion of incident that often keeps the philosophical perspective hidden in it. In a sense, it is philosophy fictionalized and mythicized. Saleem is a type of mythical hero who is also a fictional hero, an anti-hero, not a cult figure or religious leader. He simply desacralizes all. This distortion and subversion of Buddhism and Hinduism is a reflection of the diseased state of the mythic consciousness. If all that Saleem thinks, does or suffers has a significance for the nation -- that is the premise in the novel -- then the comment is relevant.

Saleem is keenly aware of the problems of causality and Buddhism also deals with it. Historians are forever discussing it. This is the way in which Rushdie is able to inter-weave all three. Here is an extract from the Diamond Sutra, in the chapter called 'The Message of the Buddha': "The whole universe is but the manifold and variegated application of a single, supreme Life Principle. This Life Principle works through various forms under a universal law of causation. Things are related to each other in a
cause-effect-cause sequence, every effect having within itself the possibility of leading to other causes, other effects, just as it is itself the result of prior cause" (Diamond Sutra:85).

There are several passages in Midnight's Children where Saleem endeavours to work out such a cause-effect relationship, quite often placing himself in the position of prime-cause. His desire to become a hero is the prime cause, leading to a chain of events that include the loss of his hair and finger, his exile, the murder of Catrack, the death of his uncle Hanif and that of his grandfather and finally the death of Nehru (278-279) Again, in the chapter called 'Movements performed by pepperpots' Saleem suddenly finds himself in the position of son to his uncle General Zulfikar and he is asked to help demonstrate the manoeuvre on the table. “Proving my manhood, my fitness for sonship, I assisted my uncle as he made the revolution . . . How we made the revolution: General Zulfikar described troop movements; I moved pepperpots symbolically while he spoke. In the clutches of the active-metaphorical mode of connection, I shifted salt-cellars and bowls of chutney . . . That night, I sat with a naked man as my uncle drove him to a military airfield; I stood and watched as the waiting aircraft taxied, accelerated, flew. What began, active-metaphorically, with pepper-pots, ended then; not only did I overthrow a government -- I also consigned a president to exile (290-291). There is also the passage where he tells us how the Widow's hairstyle influenced history (420). While all this is obviously illogical, it nevertheless has the purpose of making us think about the limitations of the historian's
method. It also completely inverts the law of causation that Buddhism explains.

The hero of the mythological tale often does things that are beyond the scope of reason and logic. Saleem, however, applies reason and the principle of causation to events in history in a manner that defies logic. Rushdie's reasons are many. Firstly, he overturns the principles governing the organic plot or the well-made-plot in fiction in post-modernist fashion. Secondly, he usurps the function of the critic and helps to deconstruct the text within the text. Thirdly, he links the theory of causation in fiction to the theory of causation in history. The record of facts in history will have a meaning only if the connections between them are established in a cause-effect sequence. The historian claims objectivity. Yet his method is governed by a perspective, and is essentially logocentric, and if that is so, it can be deconstructed just like any literary text. Saleem claims to be not only the cause of events in history, but also sets himself up as a historian. His statements can neither be objective nor completely true. Is any historian completely free of a similar constraint? Does he not have an allegiance, at least to a value system if not an ideology or a nation? By the simple tactic of drawing attention to himself, Saleem makes us see that such questions apply to all historians.

The theory of causation as we find it explained in Buddhism, implies a ripple effect, or a ceaseless sequence of events. Saleem admits that what he thought of as effect has a multiplying effect that he failed to foresee. For example, the anonymous letter to Commander Sabarmati was meant to be a warning or at best an expose and he did not expect that four people would
die because of it. Again, Saleem as buddha, did his duty as the man-dog, and is aghast at the ravages of the war that resulted. If we link this to the fact that Saleem claims responsibility because he causes things to happen, we recognize another truth of history. The leaders and politicians of any country, good and bad, perform actions, formulate policies, or start conflicts that affect millions in a manner that is often difficult to foresee. In fact, the consequences are difficult to estimate even after the event.

Rushdie helps us to see another connection between literature and history. When Saleem experiments with his gift of tuning into the thoughts of various people, he enters the consciousness of several people right across the country. At one moment he is in the mind of a chief minister, then a school teacher, a peasant, a Congress party worker and even Nehru himself. Saleem is overcome by the feeling that he is causing things to happen, "which is to say, I had entered into the illusion of the artist, and the thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift" (174). Two things emerge from this statement. If the multitudinous realities of the land are the raw material of the historian, some of which he knows and much of which he does not, then, like the literary artist he has to make a selection, give cohesion, direction, meaning to the chaos of meaning around him. Is then history really a fictionalizing of reality? By making one believe that it is a systematic representation of the past, is the historian creating a myth that is believed to be history? The 'truths' of history, fiction and even myth are arrived at in similar ways, using similar structuring principles involving selection. Rushdie time and again reflects on the
relationship between things. The second thing that emerges is that multitudinous facts permit multiple perspectives. Many histories are hidden in that complex reality. Saleem's "mind-hopping" abilities help us to see that it is people who really matter and not just the politicians at the top. Rushdie's narrative technique which fuses family history with the national history also reinforces this point. Saleem has a way of inserting sombre truths amidst his humorous ramblings. When talking about the significance that some numbers have come to have for us, he says that 1001 is the "number of night, of magic, of alternative realities -- a number beloved of poets and detested by politicians, for whom all alternative versions of the world are threats" (217) and we realize that some of these alternative realities never get recorded, subaltern or otherwise.

Rushdie's serious concern beneath the comic irony is to see the relationship between history, memory, reality and truth. The other authors studied here show a similar concern. History is nothing but memory organized from one perspective. Saleem has to be content with his own "miracle laden omniscience" that is kept in check by the earthiness of his companion Padma. "I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin-deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present . . . but I must now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line" (150). Our understanding of history is the point of intersection between memory and the present. Our understanding is again determined by the perspective adopted and inevitably it is one-dimensional, limited and tentative. Then, is there any validity in
asserting that history records truth? "Matter of fact description of the outre' and bizarre, and their reverse, namely heighten, stylized versions of the everyday--these techniques, which are also attitudes of mind, I have lifted--or perhaps absorbed--from the most formidable of the midnight children, my rival, . . . Shiva-of-the-knees"(218-219).

What Saleem would like to impress upon us is that everything starts with memory, even morality, judgement and character. And yet the paradox is that memory is most unreliable. "I told you the truth," he says to Padma, "Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own"(211). If one admits the truth about the nature of memory and that at the very foundation of life, we find that memory works as a structuring device, then we place ourselves in all kinds of difficulties when we attempt to superimpose what we have been taught to believe as historical or religious truths on this unsteady foundation of memory. Greatly exercised over this fact, Saleem waxes eloquent and asks rhetorical questions: What is truth? What is sanity? Did Jesus rise from the grave? Is life maya or illusion, as the Hindus say? "If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma's dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right? Have some more chutney . . ."(211). Chutney is one of the most important metaphors in the novel.
Rushdie uses the analogy of making chutney and pickles and preserving them in jars to explain how memory works and history is created. Memory somehow loses value in time, and slowly its statements are set down as undeniable facts of history. The past that is not pickled in books is lost forever. This is brought home to Saleem when he visits Bombay and finds the place changed and the names of places changed. The various chapters in the novel are likened to rows of pickle jars, neatly labeled. Therefore history is "made" just like pickles are made, or history is as much a creative process as fiction writing is. Saleem's story is India's story and he intends that we take it as his version of the history of the nation.

The logic that Saleem forces on us is that history is a narrative just as much as fiction or myth, and 'truth' and 'fact' become relative terms. "Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems -- but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible" (165). In this context it is interesting to note what Rushdie has to say about Gunter Grass whose influence he acknowledges in Imaginary Homelands. Grass, a migrant like Rushdie himself, helped him to realize that three things go to make a human being—roots, language and social norms. Migrants nearly lose all three. "This is what the triple disruption of reality teaches migrants: that reality is an artefact, that it does not exist until it is made, and that like any other artefact, it can be made well or badly, and that it can also of course, be unmade . . . A writer who understands the artificial nature of reality is more or less obliged to enter the process of making it . . ."
argue about reality is to be at once creative and political..." (280). What Rushdie says about Grass is what Midnight's Children also demonstrates.

Quite often the official version of history is a myth in the sense that it is falsehood and this is illustrated in the passage that describes the Bangladesh war. "Shaheed and I saw many things which were not true, which were not possible, because our boys could not have behaved so badly"(375). They saw old men being dragged and shot, they saw the intelligentsia of the city being massacred, but it was not true. They watched soldiers scurrying away from what they had not done. Their eyes were playing tricks on them. What had got into their eyes? And Saleem wisely tells Shaheeda that a person must sometimes choose what he will see and what he will not. The point is, that the historian is also "wise".

It is not just this choice that results in the distortion of history. Politicians and the media literally “make” history, create a myth, that is actually divorced from reality. At the time of war this becomes a fine art. The Voice of Pakistan announced the destruction of more aircraft than India had ever possessed and India claimed Pakistani casualties that far outnumbered the Pakistani army. “Aircraft, real or fictional, dropped actual or mythical bombs”(341). The chapter is punctuated with statements like, “reality took another terrible beating" and “nothing was real; nothing certain.” The distortions are practised even in peace time. “Divorce between news and reality, newspapers quoted foreign economists --PAKISTAN A MODEL FOR EMERGING NATIONS -- while peasants (unreported) cursed the so-called ‘green revolution’, claiming that most of the newly-drilled water-wells had
been useless . . ." Another paper proclaimed that good Indo-Pakistan relations were just round the corner (334). Yet again, Saleem shows us how the killing and smuggling were going on all the time in the Rann of Kutch, with the connivance of the politician and the general, and such incidents were projected as border skirmishes. Saleem can only say that "everything lies concealed beneath the doubly hazy air of unreality and make-believe."

A narrative strategy that is adopted to reinforce the "falseness" of things believed, is that of the fairy tale. Saleem uses the typical 'once upon a time' and 'we all lived happily' to tell the tale of how the Nawab of Kif arranged for his daughter to be married to General Zulfikar's son. "I have been the humblest of jugglers-with-facts; and that, in a country where truth is what it is instructed to be, reality quite literally ceases to exist, so that everything becomes possible except what we are told is the case; and maybe this was the difference between my Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence -- that in the first I was beset by an infinity of alternative realities, while in the second I was adrift, disoriented, amid an equally infinite number of falsenesses, unrealities and lies"(326). Rushdie's satire is no doubt double-edged, and mixed with philosophy. It is this kind of double-speak that Ngugi also attacks in Matigari.

Saleem admits that he has made mistakes with dates and sequences of events. For example, the assassination of Gandhi occurs on the wrong date. Rushdie himself lists out Saleem's many errors in Imaginary Homelands and says that they show that Saleem is an unreliable narrator. (One irate reader had asked him why he had made such a bad mistake in saying that Ganesha
took down Vyasa's dictation of the *Ramayana*). If we remember that Saleem fancies himself as the director of the nation's destiny and a recorder of its history, then the implications are obvious. "History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish, and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge. The reading of Saleem's unreliable narration might be, I believed, a useful analogy for the way in which we all, everyday, attempt to 'read' the world" (1991:25).

The myth of history is exposed by Saleem / Rushdie when it comes to the analysis of motivation. The historians would have us believe that the splitting of the sub-continent into two nations was the inevitable outcome of the historical tension that existed between the two religious groups Hindus and Muslims. Several leaders on both sides have made assertions to this effect. But Rushdie / Saleem would have us look at the reality, which as has already been pointed out, some choose not to see. There is the factor of the personal ambition of the leaders. Besides this, for many people it becomes a business opportunity, an opportunity to make wealth, a faith called Businessism which has adherents on both sides of the conflict. First Aadam Aziz leaves Kashmir in search of a better livelihood. Ahmad Sinai moves to Bombay because his friend Narlikar tells him property is going cheap. Major Zulfikar advises Sinai to move to Pakistan for he can introduce him to Jinnah. "You must decide for Pakistan when it comes, as it surely will. It's certain to be a goldmine for men like us"(83). On the other side, Saleem tells us that the Ravana gang was motivated by profit though the arson and loot
was described as communal riots. It was "a brilliantly conceived commercial enterprise."

*Midnight's Children* makes another significant statement about history. However comprehensive we may try to be, no history can ever hope to be a complete record. Saleem says that he has so many stories to tell and not all of them are told. No one can hope to see all the causal factors. For example, Mary's act of switching the babies is claimed to be "the last and most important contribution to twentieth century India." This is the truth of Saleem's fictional world. What it says about the real world is that there may be many hidden and unrecognized factors that shape the destiny of a nation and no historian is omniscient enough to know them all. Our vision is necessarily fragmented. This is reinforced by the two important images in the novel -- the perforated sheet and Lifafa's peep-show. "Come see the world" Lifafa cried out, and children crowded around to see the pictures which included the Taj Mahal, the Meenakshi temple, the Ganges, a European actress, educated men sleeping on railway tracks, Cripps leaving Nehru's residence and other historical events. "Is this an Indian disease, this urge to encapsulate the whole of reality?" Saleem wonders. Later, when Saleem gets his "mind-hopping" ability, he says it was like having his own Dilli Deko machine.

Rushdie uses two techniques to show that there are rhythms in history. The rise and fall in the destinies of Saleem and Shiva imitates the rhythm of history. The use of repetition as a narrative device in telling the family history shows that there is a cyclic pattern in history. When Parvathi
weds Saleem, she has to change her name and this reminds him of a similar event in his mother's life. Saleem gives her the name Laylah and "she too was caught up in the repetitive cycles of my history..." (There is a strange irony in Saleem's choice of name Laylah, for it reminds us of the love story of Laylah-Majnu. A popular folk tale, it is also interpreted as an allegorical tale in Sufi mysticism and the fusion of Parvathi and Lylah is really the coming together of similar ideas from two traditions.)

"What's real and what's true aren't necessarily the same" says Saleem early in the novel (79). He shows us how we judge, infer or organize according to our capacity and mistake this for the truth "As a people we are obsessed with correspondences. Similarities between this and that, between apparently unconnected things, make us clap our hands delightedly when we find them out. It is a sort of national longing for form -- or perhaps an expression of our deep belief that forms lie hidden within reality; that meaning reveals itself only in flashes"(300). This is as much a comment on the literary critic as the historian and the novelist himself. This indefatigable urge to formalize and theorize is parodied in Saleem's 'general theory of smell'.

Rushdie uses the cinematic technique of narration and frequently refers to the power of the film medium. Its method of giving shape to reality resembles our own attempts to define reality. Uncle Hanif provides the ironical counterpart in the novel. He felt that India had been in a deep slumber for five thousand years and that, instead of dealing with gods and demons, Indian films should deal with reality. Saleem says, "... in the
temple of illusions, he had become the high priest of reality; while I, conscious of my miraculous nature, which involved me beyond all mitigation in the (Hanif despised) myth-life of India, bit my lip and didn't know where to look" (244).

One can say a great deal about the identification of Saleem with India. The most important point of analogy is the cracks that appear on Saleem's body. His fear of disintegration is India's fear, and the fissiparous tendencies seem to be a constant threat. Besides militancy in states like Kashmir, Punjab and Assam, the persistent communal tension in India is a matter of concern. Yet India has a resilience that is remarkable but this may not be enough unless we tackle problems like population growth. This is made clear in the closing pages of the novel.

The concept of the midnight's child is linked to his childhood experience. It was a family joke that within eight weeks of his being born, the British were asked to leave India. Rushdie tells us in *Imaginary Homelands*, that he tried to meet some of the "class of '47" when both he and India turned forty (29). This led him to people like Harbans Lal, a Hindu tailor who lived in one of the alleys near Chandni Chowk in Delhi. He was a gentle and mild mannered man yet when it came to Ramjanmabhoomi, he firmly believed that the spot in Ayodhya should be handed over to the Hindus. Rushdie also met Abdul Ghani, a Delhi Muslim who worked in a saree shop, and his views on the matter made clear the communal divide. Yet India has a resilience that is remarkable and one hopes that these "cracks" will be mended by secularism. Since Saleem has identified himself with India so explicitly
throughout the novel Syed's interpretation that the cracks in his body refer to the sacrifice of the Cosmic Purusha seems inappropriate.

In *Midnight's Children* the subversion of the theories of myth and history is far more interesting than the plot itself, for Saleem achieves little and is really an anti-hero. Though not actual history, the novel "plays with historical shapes" as Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands* (25). Similarly, one can say that it plays with mythological shapes. It subverts, distorts and deconstructs the traditional concepts and theories of myth and history, an overall discussion of which will be done in the concluding chapter.