

AMBASSADORS OF COMMUNITY: THE HISTORY AND COMPLICITY OF THE  
FAMILY COMMUNITY IN *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* AND  
*THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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## VITA

Victoria Caroline Hollis, daughter of Robert Andrew Hollis and Julie Ann (Kilness) Karem, was born April 2, 1985 in New York City, New York. She graduated from South Oldham High School in Crestwood, Kentucky as Valedictorian in 2003. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from Auburn University in the fall of 2006 and received a degree of Bachelor of the Arts in English and a degree of Bachelor of the Arts in Psychology. As an undergraduate, she had stories published in three consecutive issues of Auburn's student-run publication *The Circle*, and also completed a collection of short stories titled *The Amateurs*. As a graduate student, Victoria intensely studied multimodal composition theory and contemporary literature in English, focusing on postcolonial literature and identity formation in postcolonial cultures, such as India and Native America. She graduated again from Auburn University in May 2009 and received a degree of Master of the Arts in English.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks to explore the usefulness of the family as a theoretical construct that serves to provide stability to characters in postcolonial literature in the absence of a stable national community. Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" is used as the basis for analyzing the communities evidenced in certain postcolonial Indian texts. The *family-in-place-of-nation* model, an altered version of the *nation as family* model, is proposed as a way to analyze the relationship between national and familial community and identity in postcolonial literature. In this model, the family becomes a prominent focus in postcolonial texts in which the characters find themselves unable to situate themselves within the national community, either through situational isolation, or because there is a general lack of a stable national identity. *Midnight's Children* and *The God of Small Things* are presented as evidence and the subject of the analysis.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Family-in-Place-of-Nation Model.....	5
Chapter Two: <i>Midnight's Children</i> .....	11
Part I: Performing Family and Biological Complications .....	11
Part II: The Importance of Family .....	15
Part III: Isolation and Reintegration Through Incest.....	19
Part IV: Conclusion: The Life and Death of Saleem Sinai.....	25
Chapter Three: <i>The God of Small Things</i> .....	29
Part I: Isolation and the Complicity of the Family Community .....	29
Part II: Familial Self-Destruction and the Siamese Two-Egg Twins .....	36
Part III: Togetherness and the Rhetoric of Twin Incest.....	42
Part IV: Conclusion: Implications of the Love Laws .....	47
Conclusion .....	51
Works Cited .....	55

## Introduction

Perhaps Ammu, Estha and [Rahel] were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that made grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam and jelly jelly. It was a time when uncles became fathers, mothers lovers, and cousins died and had funerals. It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened (31).

“Chacko, do you love Sophie Mol Most in the World?” [Rahel asked.]

“She's my daughter,” Chacko said...

“Chacko, is it Necessary that people HAVE to love their own children Most in the World?”

“There are no rules,” Chacko said. “But most people do.”

“Chacko, for example,” Rahel said, “just for example, is it possible that Ammu can love Sophie Mol more than me and Estha? Or for you to love me more than Sophie Mol?”

“Anything's possible in Human Nature,” Chacko said...“Love. Madness. Happiness. Infinite Joy” (112).

– Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

A likely result of Frederic Jameson's controversial 1986 essay, “Third World Literature and the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” there is a tendency in literary criticism to focus on the extent to which Third World texts function as national allegories. Jameson notoriously argued, “All third world texts are necessarily...national allegories” (69). Jameson's claim has been widely criticized because it is so limiting, and Aijaz Ahmad has acutely summed up such criticism with two questions: one, does Jameson

mean to say that every text that comes out of the third world is a national allegory, or, two, that “only those texts which give us national allegories can be admitted as authentic texts of Third World Literature?” (82). It should be said that many novels that come out of the postcolonial third world hold embedded in their pages the scent of national allegory, however vague, but the importance and validation of third world texts should not necessarily be judged on whether or not they fit within the neat casing of Jameson’s definition.

Salman Rushdie’s widely-acclaimed novel of Indian independence, *Midnight’s Children*, creates an obvious connection between the life of the narrator, Saleem Sinai, and the life of newly-independent India. It is interesting, then, to consider the ways in which the national allegory functions in the novel: it is at once both an expression of national identity and of the individual identity of Saleem himself. In the course of the novel, readers become aware that while Saleem believes that India relies on him to reach its full potential as a country, Saleem himself also relies on India and his preordained “connection” to the country’s history to evaluate his own self worth. In *Midnight’s Children*, language and religion stand as the major obstacles to nationalist unity, and the national allegory of the novel and of Saleem’s life becomes the foundation on which the new nation can be built. At the novel’s end, however, Saleem’s life seems to end in a regurgitation of all of his past experiences, a recycling that prevents the nation from moving forward. For readers, Rushdie has left India in a stunted state: he has posed for us the question, “how do you put a nation back together?” but he has not provided us with the answer.

On the other hand, in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* (hereinafter referred to as *Small Things*), the family becomes the focus of the allegorical representation of the nation, although it is slightly altered. Roy presents a cast of characters that attempts to navigate through the history of their family in the wake of a disaster and its repercussions decades later. While the characters themselves are related in the usual sense of the word, they are distinctly separate from one another, and work against each other in the pursuit of their own satisfaction. Twins Estha and Rahel are, at once, the embodiment of this characteristic of their familial relations, but they also contradict it in certain distinct ways. They are twins, that is to say most frankly that they originated in the same womb and inhabited that womb at the same time, but they are dizygotic, so they are inherently different in terms of molecular structure, and consequently in physical appearance and gender. Throughout much of the narrative, however, Estha and Rahel are viewed as a single being, referred to as one, until their forced separation when Estha is returned to his father. This action results in the ultimate unification of their bodies in the act of incest, an act that is both tragic and redemptive - even if that redemption is false or fleeting - and may be the answer to Rushdie's question.

Although the family at the heart of the novel's tragic narrative slowly self-destructs through anger and forced separation - much like the nation of India - the incest that takes place between the now grown "two-egg twins" (4), Estha and Rahel, at the novel's conclusion represents both the unification of two separate parts of a whole, and ultimately illustrates the possibility of redemption in connectivity. Furthermore, in this novel, rather than simply presenting the family as a microcosmic representation of India,

the family actually becomes the focal point for connections with others because of the lack of stable national and community relationships. This is partly attributed to the fact that family, unlike nationhood, has a biological component. In other words, while nationhood, as Benedict Anderson has examined, is largely constructed in the minds of the people that consider themselves to be members of a nation, family can be defined in much more concrete terms. Similarly, while citizens of a national community will never know most of the members of their community, in family communities, because they are of a much smaller scale, the members can be in personal contact, thus reinforcing the boundaries of the community itself. While family can be constructed in much the same way that nationhood can as illustrated in *Midnight's Children*, the Ipe family in *Small Things* has the benefit of biology to fall back on, and when Estha and Rahel find themselves isolated from any greater-scale community, they fold in on themselves in an attempt to escape their isolation.

## Chapter 1: Family-in-Place-of-Nation Model and

### The Evolution of the Family in Postcolonial Indian Literature

Jameson based his theory of third world texts on the distinction between the First and Third World and the ways in which each negotiates the differences between and points of intersection of the public and private spheres, the First World, of course, being the one in which there “is a radical split between the private and the public” (69), while such a distinction is not afforded to the Third World. As Mark Mossman explains, in the Third World “the spheres of the public and the private are melted together, are intimately connected, are profoundly the same; social awareness, an awareness of a group or ‘collectivity,’ overtly and completely conditions the ‘individual,’ subjective experience” (69). There is room for the application of this theory within the context of both *Midnight’s Children* and *Small Things*. In *Midnight’s Children*, the spheres of the public and the private not only intersect, they overlap; in certain cases, the public sphere of India has a direct effect on Saleem as an individual, and according to Saleem, his private life also often effects the public sphere. In *Small Things*, these spheres can also be said to overlap, most specifically because it is the prejudices of Baby Kochamma and Mammachi regarding Velutha’s caste, fueled by their long-fostered anger and hatred for their own conditions, that results in his death and, ultimately, Ammu’s insanity and Estha’s

“Quietness” (13). It is here that we see the intersection of the public (the caste system) and the private (the individual lives and choices illustrated in the narrative) most vividly.<sup>1</sup>

In *Regenerative Fictions: Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis, and the Nation as Family*, Alexandra Schultheis outlines a model by which to understand the ways in which Jameson’s theory and the inherent overlap between the private and public spheres in third world cultures provides for such an easy assessment of national allegory. Schultheis focuses on the family as the location from which such allegory is most commonly born. “The nation as family metaphor,” she says, “facilitates the subject’s concomitant identification as individual and citizen by bridging his nominally public and private roles” (36). Schultheis’ studies revolve around the treatment and application of her model in *Midnight’s Children*, which she says is:

Constructed around the literalization of the metaphor as [Saleem’s life corresponds] to the national history...In the end, dissolution of narrator and nation, though both cling to familial forms, results in the privileging of the imaginative aesthetic as the site of meaning and pleasure. In *Midnight’s Children*, the oral narrative...serves as the regenerative antidote to the narrator’s decline (8).

Schultheis’ treatment of *Midnight’s Children* is useful to consider in the context of this argument because she makes a distinct connection between Saleem’s (national) identity and the national allegory within the narrative of the novel. What is especially important

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, other connections can be made. The consummation of Baby Kochamma’s love for Father Mulligan is prevented by the religions that separate them, both before she has converted to Christianity, and after he has converted to Hinduism. Perhaps the most everlasting symbol of this overlap, however, is that of Pappachi’s moth, the tangible – yet intangible – representation of the hereditary effect of the labors of Indian men in the service of the empire that tried to destroy and degrade them, a rejection that would haunt the members of Pappachi’s family until the family ceased to exist. Readers can assume, I think, that the family lineage ends with Estha and Rahel, their union assumed to be futile.

to note is Schultheis' claim that both narrator and nation, that is Saleem and India, "cling to familial forms." The source of the importance of this statement is an answer to the most basic and ever-elusive question: "Why?"

Benedict Anderson's seminal text, *Imagined Communities*, provides a framework around which one can construct an answer to that question. The basis of Anderson's theory of the nation is grounded in his assertion that the nation is, above all things, "an imagined political community...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Likewise, then, for Anderson, the function of nationalism is to "invent nations where they do not exist" (6). In *Midnight's Children* and *Small Things*, it is clear that nationalism of the sort that Anderson imagines does not exist. The country, and most importantly the regions surrounding Bombay and Cochin and Ayemenem where much of the novel's take places, is riveted by social, political, and economic turmoil, each in their own specific contexts. These factors have caused long-standing and enduring divisions within the population:<sup>2</sup> between the Anglophiles and the nationalists, between the Hindus and the Muslims, between those who speak Gujarat and those who don't, between the Touchables and the Untouchables, between the landlords, or "Modalalis"(Roy 76), and the Communists, and between the landlords and their employees.

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<sup>2</sup> It may be said that these divisions, as I call them, are the social, political, and economic factors themselves. That is to say, I do not wish to claim that it is turmoil alone that has caused these divisions, as most of them are long-standing traditions, but rather that the divisions themselves have caused epic turmoil within the nation, and that turmoil can be located at the site of the divisions and where their respective populations collide.

Furthermore, within the context of these novels, there is no observable national consciousness or national continuity; there are only opposing factions, which inherently prevent a larger national community. On a personal (private) level, each family is affected by the hostility between their respective pairs of opposing factions. The story of *Midnight's Children* extends back to Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and so does our ability to trace the Sinai family's presence in these contact zones:<sup>3</sup> Aadam, who grew up in Kashmir, is seen as a marked Anglophile, as evidenced by his leather doctor's bag, bearing the inscription, "HEIDELBERG;" a Muslim living in India, Ahmed Sinai attracts the attention of the government when he invests in a land-reclamation scheme, and his assets are frozen in an attempt to force his family's migration; and Saleem accidentally rides his bike into the midst of a language riot, where he sheepishly recites a poem in Gujarat that he learned as a child to prevent any harm done to him by the marchers. In *Small Things*, the Ipe family is equally affected:<sup>4</sup> Ammu, a Touchable from a prominent Ayemenem family begins a sexual relationship with Velutha, an Untouchable; Chacko, a Marxist and co-owner of Paradise Pickles and Preserves, has a complex, though thoroughly professional relationship with a local communist leader, Comrade Pillai, who intends to cause an uprising in Chacko's factory; and Mammachi, as "Sleeping Partner"(55) of Paradise Pickles and Preserves, employs low-level Touchable employees, but privileges Velutha, a highly-skilled carpenter and mechanic, who is more importantly a Paravan, an Untouchable.

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<sup>3</sup> "Contact zones" is a term borrowed from current rhetorical theory. See Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone" for an examination of the usage of contact zones in composition curriculum.

<sup>4</sup> Though Ammu puts off deciding whether or not to keep her maiden or married surname after she leaves her husband, the family lineage within the text of the narrative extends back and is influenced by the absent grandfather, Rev. E. John Ipe, and thus his name will be used to represent the line of his descendants who are present in the novel, and, more specifically, that reside for the earlier period of the novel in the Ayemenem house.

So the answer to the question of why Schultheis' Saleem and Mother India cling to "familial forms" is because of the lack of stability of the larger community of the nation. The same can be said for the Ipe family in *Small Things*. In the face of unstable nationalism, as represented by the hostility between our opposing factions, the necessity of maintaining a coherent family relationship is increased. It may be said, then, that rather than following Schultheis' "nation as family" model, we may substitute a slightly inverted version, the *family-in-place-of-nation* model, for application in understanding the complicity of the "familial forms" or family relationships that begin to develop in *Midnight's Children*, and that, twenty years later, inform the course of events that take place throughout *Small Things*.

In terms of Anderson's theory of "imagined communities," it should be said that the inability to successfully create a communal, though imaginary, version of India – or even a smaller scale regional community – necessitates the existence of an even smaller scale *family community*. Thus, though the families in both *Midnight's Children* and *Small Things* self-destruct on many levels, it is the incestual tendencies of the family members that begin to reconstruct the families themselves. Thus, though Saleem's incestual leanings toward his sister when she becomes the coveted Jamila Singer are stunted by a number of factors (her rejection of his advances, his family's death, his entry into the military and loss of his name and her supposed religious conversion), they are taken up again in *Small Things*, if in a different place and a different time. In *Small Things*, as the family members are slowly and individually isolated for each person's part in the tragedy that occurs, ultimately Estha and Rahel, by participating in the act of incest that takes place at the novel's conclusion, attempt to redeem and reunite themselves and

the family, though their sense of redemption may be false. It is through this model that readers may understand and, ultimately, accept the necessity of their coming-together and appreciate it as something other than taboo. For Roy, and for Rushdie, it is in the family community that India can find redemption, especially when an individual finds him or herself isolated from any larger scale communities and when national cohesion proves difficult to achieve.

## Chapter 2: *Midnight's Children* and the Development of the Family Community

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie establishes the importance of family in his narrative on the first page, refusing to start the story with the birth of his main character, Saleem, but extending the narrative back in time two full generations. Saleem writes, "I must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as *present* as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth" (4, emphasis in original). For Rushdie, and for Saleem, people in the present are inevitably and irrevocably affected by the actions of people in the past, but specifically, it is the actions of one's familial predecessors that directly influence the lives of their offspring. While Rushdie undoubtedly affords history a certain prominence in the novel, in choosing to begin Saleem's story with his grandfather Aadam's return from medical school in Germany, Rushdie highlights the importance of Aadam's decisions and actions and places an acute emphasis on the specific influence and importance of family.

### I. Performing Family and Biological Complications of Familial Identification

A prevailing theme in the text of *Midnight's Children* is that of creation, and, more importantly, the power of storytellers to recreate history. Much of the novel is devoted to emphasizing Saleem's role as author, with notes regarding his actual composition of the text – as when he yields his story to the acts of the narrative's "present," that is his residence inside the Braganza Pickle Factory, in which he is goaded

to continue with the story by his satiric muse, Padma – and in his references to his own errors in the text and their subsequent dismissal. At various points in the text, Saleem points out that it is his version of his history that will remain when he is gone, emphasizing the “truth” of the events he is narrating saying, “It happened that way because that’s how it happened” (530). As such, readers are aware that Saleem’s version of history may simply be the dreams of a madman, his hopeful plans to mend the problems of nationalism in India. It is tempting, especially in the context of this argument, to read Saleem as an active agent in the making of history, and also as an actual person who exists outside of the realm of the novel, one who is “doing work” to fix the problem of nationalism in India. While the actions that Saleem goes through can be read as an extension of Rushdie himself, the fictional version of what Rushdie would like to happen in actual India, one must not give Saleem that realistic persona. Strictly limiting Saleem’s power of authority to the narrative itself, however, one should note that in authoring or “recreating” the narrative of his life, Saleem implicates himself in the creation not only of himself and the events that he is directly involved in, but he also becomes the creator of the people with which he has chosen to populate his story.

It is worth noting that as much as Saleem is a creation of his own imagination, so are the characters in his story: from his parents, to his grandparents, to his sister, to his “twin” Shiva. Additionally, those around him influence Saleem’s idea of self-creation; this is evidenced by his repetition of Mary Pereira’s nursery rhyme, in which she sings, “Anything you want to be, you can be; you can be just what-all you want” (177). For Saleem, he can determine both the lives and characteristics of those he writes about in the same way that he authors his own life; this is evidenced near the end of the novel when,

learning of his sister's disappearance, Saleem refuses to believe she is dead and authors for her a life as a nun.

Specifically, it is interesting to consider the role Saleem consciously takes up as a creator of his parents. He says, "My inheritance includes this gift, the gift of inventing new parents for myself whenever necessary. The power of giving birth to fathers and mothers" (120). Saleem outright states that he is consciously creating the roles of his parents and deliberately choosing who his parents will be. This is illustrated by the history Saleem gives of his pre-birth, and Padma's irritation at Saleem's slow narrative. Saleem presents us with several possible sets of biological parents, and also emphasizes the parental-like control others not related to him have. Padma in her outrage over Saleem's mysterious parentage proclaims, "You might as well call [Mary Pereira] your mother...she made you, you know" (132). Even though Padma is angry with Saleem for withholding the true identity of his parents, she has begun to willingly buy into his idea that parents can be those other than your biological ones. She succumbs, as do readers, to Saleem's theory of parentage and family: that it is not solely determined by genetics.

Though Padma ultimately accepts Saleem is not Ahmed and Amina's biological son, registering the response and understanding of Rushdie's readers, it is the switch performed by Mary Pereira that complicates the notion of family in *Midnight's Children* because, as we learn before his parents do, Saleem is not the biological child of Amina and Ahmed Sinai. Padma expresses the concern most likely shared by readers that this greatly affects the people who can be considered to be Saleem's family. But Saleem reassures Padma that biology is not the only important factor in determining familial identity. He writes:

[When] we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it *made no difference!* I was still their son: they remained my parents. In a kind of collective failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts...if you had asked my father...who his son was, nothing on earth would have induced him to point in the direction of the accordionist's knock-kneed, unwashed boy (131, emphasis in original).

It is interesting to note that Saleem says that it is the “collective failure of imagination” on the part of his family that results in their refusal to dismiss Saleem as no longer a member of their family, especially in a novel that is clearly not lacking imagination on the part of the storyteller. For Saleem and the other Sinais, however, biology is not the only factor that determines their family relationship. History is the main determining factor, as it is for many other scenarios in the novel, and the Sinais continue to accept Saleem as their son even when the switch has been revealed. It is because of their past experiences with each other and, most importantly, because they have only ever experienced each other in the context of their family that they can only continue to consider each other as family.

As Matt Kimmich notes, the combination of Amina and Ahmed's continuing acceptance of Saleem as their son and Saleem's ability to create parents results in a notion of familial identification that relies less on biology than more traditional ideas of family relations. Kimmich notes, “Saleem's notion of family is thus more affiliative than filliative, as it is based on choice rather than on the problematic concept of biological determinism. Belonging and identity are active, ongoing processes the individual

participates in, not attributes imposed from above” (43). Kimmich’s theory is most interesting to consider in terms of the last point, that one’s ideas about belonging are not determined by outside forces as much as by the motives of the individual and the “ongoing processes” of which the individual is an active part. In Saleem’s case, not only are we as readers aware that he is actively a part of the process of creating his family and creating the relationships that he has with those family members, Saleem himself recognizes it.

It seems only natural then, that although baby Aadam Sinai is his great-grandfather’s great-grandchild, he is not Saleem’s biological son, that instead “he was the child of a father that was not his father” (482). But following the tradition of what constitutes family in the preceding parts of the novel, Saleem still takes Aadam as his own, and Aadam seems to accept Saleem as his father. Saleem notes that Aadam’s first words, at the age of three starts off, “‘Abba...’ Father. He is calling me father. But no, he has not finished, there is strain on his face, and finally my son...completes his awesome first word: ‘...cadabba’” (528). Though Saleem dismisses the idea that Aadam is possibly calling him father, the word itself, as is explained, is “not an Indian word at all” (529), but a hybrid like Saleem himself. In this way, Aadam seems to claim the sonship of Saleem, one that is not explicitly biological, but determined, as it were, by history.

## II. The Importance of Family

The authoring of Saleem’s parents is interesting to examine because it not only complicates the notion of family early on but it emphasizes the need for parent figures by his continuing attempt to create them. Furthermore, the theme of parenthood within the

novel is recurrent, as is evidenced by the multiple conceptions in the novel and the references to fertility. It is noted that Wee Willie Winkie, before the birth of Saleem and Shiva, “had, once, given them an important clue about their lives. ‘The first birth,’ he said, ‘will make you real.’ [And as] a result of Winkie’s clue, [Saleem] was, in [his] early days, highly in demand” (146). For Winkie, and for those that hear his clue and allow it to affect their ideas about their own importance and lives, it is parenthood that makes one “real,” that makes one’s existence important. In the context of the novel, Winkie’s clue is important because, within the first two pages of the novel, Saleem admits, “above all things, I fear absurdity” (4). For Saleem, and for others in the novel, absurdity renders one obsolete, unimportant and erased for the pages of their own history. According to Winkie, one’s life is important if and only if one can conceive of (and give birth to) a child.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, Saleem emphasizes the fact that he is, as addressed earlier, Aadam Sinai’s father, and emphasizes that he is telling his story for his son. After he has finished with the bulk of his story, Mary Pereira says, “Now you finished your writing-writing, baba, you should take more time for your son” and Saleem writes in response, “But Mary, I did it for him” (528). By saying so, Saleem gives himself purpose; his whole point in writing his story was for his son. Thus, it is ultimately Aadam Sinai who has given Saleem his purpose, becoming like Saleem yet another son giving birth to a father who was “not his own.” Saleem is, coincidentally, unable to conceive a child with

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<sup>5</sup> In this instance, the term “conceive” is not necessarily to be considered strictly in terms of biological conception. As has been addressed, one may “father” a child in more senses than simply biological ones, and, thus, though Winkie may not have explicitly considered the notion of non-biological conception, the novel seems to accept and argue that the idea of conception should not be limited to usage in the strictly biological sense.

Parvati, because of his inability to escape the rotting image of his sister, and then, inevitably unable to conceive with Padma because he has been sterilized during the Emergency, during a “sperectomy” (503), which occurs in the mysterious Widow's hostel. Thus, in more ways than one, Aadam Sinai's acceptance of Saleem as his father makes Saleem “real” (146), as when his own birth made Ahmed Sinai real, and it gives him a way to escape absurdity.

It is not only Saleem, however, that is guilty of inventing parents. For the Sinais such confusion has continually plagued the family. For example, when talking with William Methwold about the history of his family, Ahmed Sinai fabricates a royal lineage, one that he eventually comes to believe as true. Saleem says that his “father demonstrated that he, too, longed for fictional ancestors...he came to invent a family pedigree that, in later years, when whisky had blurred the edges of his memory and the djinn-bottles came to confuse him, would obliterate all traces of reality” (122-3). Here, readers can appreciate the reality of these inventions to the people that invent them. As such, Rushdie lends credibility to Saleem’s own inventions, because he allows other characters in the novel to create their own parents. Saleem’s awareness that the “djinn-bottles” are partially responsible for Ahmed’s reliance on his falsified history does not lessen his dependence on them, but actually intensifies it. As Ahmed becomes more detached from the actual communities that surround him, he becomes more reliant on the family community that he has invented for himself.

Though the Sinai family illustrates the idea of parent-authoring most plainly, there are further instances of invented ancestry and parentage in the novel as evidenced most clearly by the midnight children themselves. The example of the midnight children may

be seen as linked quite closely to the consequences of postcolonialism. As is allegorically evident in the figure of Saleem, the illegitimate child of a British man and a poor Indian woman, the parentage of the newly independent India can be seen as equally complicated. Saleem reiterates the idea that he and all the other children of midnight are born, because of the nature of their midnight, “clock-ridden” births, with multiple parents. Ultimately, like Saleem, they, too, have the ability to create their own parents and are likewise children of parents that they are not biologically related too.

In order to illustrate the multiple “parents” responsible for the midnight children, Saleem says, “all of these were the parents of the child born that midnight, and for every one of the midnight children there were as many more. Among the parents of midnight: the failure of the Cabinet Mission scheme; the determination of M.A. Jinnah, who was dying and wanted to see Pakistan formed in his lifetime...Mountbatten and his extraordinary haste” (121). Saleem’s list of “parents,” though he eventually moves into very personal territory with examples such as “a center-parting and a nose from Bergerac,” begins with political events that had an obvious effect on the creation and formation of the new nation of India. Later, Saleem notes that “the children of midnight were also the children of time: fathered, you understand, by history” (132). In saying so, Saleem replaces the traditional construct of family with history; because he cannot justify a traditional family community, history serves in its place. Such a statement indicates the interchangeability of these two familial constructions, and, more than anything, reinforces both the importance of the family community in postcolonial nations and the allegorical nature of the family in the specific context of the novel. These references

should serve as reminders that, ultimately, in postcolonial nations parenthood and the characteristics that children inherit in a postcolonial divorce are always unresolved issues.

As is evident in the narrative of *Midnight's Children*, many of the characters grapple with the effects of postcolonialism. Generally, these effects are registered along the lines of separation and isolation that occur within the community. Specifically, there is a sharp division between those who are considered Anglophiles and those who are not. The Sinais experience an acute Anglophilia, which they inherit from William Methwold in the form of his estate. Methwold sells one of his houses to the Sinais on the condition that everything stay in the house until the official date of transfer, some two and a half months later, on the day of India's independence. Methwold explains his reasons for this, saying, "It seems, Mr. Sinai...that beneath this English exterior lurks a mind with a very Indian lust for allegory...I'm transferring power, too. Got a sort of itch to do it at the same time the Raj does" (106). What Methwold calls his little "game" (105), begins to affect the inhabitants of the four houses of Methwold's Estate, and as they try to impress him with their "imitation Oxford draws" and their knowledge of "ceiling-fans and gas cookers and the correct diet for budgerigars" (109), they seem to inherit some of his Englishness. Of course, no one inherits his Englishness quite like Saleem who, fatefully, is William Methwold's biological son and the most obvious allegorical symbol in the novel.

### III. Isolation and Reintegration Through Incest

As in *The God of Small Things*, the communities of *Midnight's Children* are deeply divided, not only along religious and geographic lines, but there are divisions between even smaller scale communities. The Sinai family, like the Ipe family, finds

itself isolated from the greater community of Bombay because of the various choices the family members make and Saleem himself eventually finds himself isolated from his family, though this isolation seems to be perceived more by Saleem than by the members of his family.

In the early pages of the novel, Saleem introduces readers to his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, upon his return to India from medical school in Germany. Aadam quickly isolates himself from the members of his home community and is perceived by them as an outsider. This perception is registered by Tai the boatman who condemns Aadam for carrying a leather medical bag. Tai says to Aadam, “A fine business. A wet-head nakkoo child goes away before he’s learned one damned thing and he comes back a big doctor sahib with a big bag full of foreign machines...big bag, big shot. Pah! We haven’t got enough bags at home that you must bring back that thing made of pig’s skin that makes one unclean just by looking at it?” (15). To Tai, Aadam’s bag makes him an outsider; it marks his newfound Europeanness. Additionally, the bag sharply offends Tai because, in a country where pigs are considered sacred, it is made out of leather. Aadam’s offense, then, is not simply his abandoning India to go to medical school in Europe; it is his blatant disregard for the rules of the community that he used to be apart of. The HEIDEBERG bag stands between Tai and Aadam as a symbol of Aadam’s new outsider status. Tai, by openly condemning him, announces Aadam’s exclusion from his community.

Within the newest generation of the Sinai family, the family also suffers isolation from larger-scale communities. When Ahmed Sinai refuses to leave India for Pakistan after partition, the state forces him to migrate. As Saleem notes, “the state froze my

father's assets" (154).<sup>6</sup> In doing so, the state of India effectively excludes Ahmed and his family from the community of the nation of India, and they eventually, though not as a direct result of the freeze, move to Pakistan. The largest fissure, however, is not necessarily between the Sinais and the communities that surround them, but between Saleem and his family. Saleem, when the truth of his birth and Mary Pereira's crime is revealed, feels that he is no longer a part of the family. Though he is still accepted as Ahmed and Amina's son, and as the Brass Monkey's brother, he perceives a difference in the family dynamic. Rushdie writes:

[There] was...a relationship to rebuild, between mother and son. She held me tightly one night and said, "Love, my child, is a thing that every mother learns; it is not born with a baby, but made; and for eleven years, I have learned to love you as my son." But there was a distance behind her gentleness, as though she were trying to persuade herself...a distance, too, in the Monkey's midnight whispers of, "Hey, brother..." – and it was my sense of this gap which showed me that, despite their use of *son* and *brother*, their imaginations were working hard to assimilate Mary's confession (329-330).

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<sup>6</sup> As a sidenote, it is interesting to consider the events that lead up to the freezing of the Sinais assets, and the language with which Ahmed and Rushdie choose to describe the event. Ahmed Sinai initially draws the government's attention by investing in Dr. Narlikar's (a gynecologist) land reclamation scheme, a plan that involves the systematic construction of thousands of phallic-looking tripods. Additionally, Ahmed, upon hearing of the freeze, runs to his wife exclaiming, "The bastards have shoved my balls in an ice-bucket!" (153). Such a metaphor then translates into reality as, though the Brass Monkey is conceived on the first day of the freeze, Ahmed and Amina Sinai's sexual relationship is consequently extinguished. The use of such language draws a unique comparison between Ahmed's (and the rest of the family's) exclusion for the community of India and his inability to perform sexually, and, consequently, to conceive a child. Thus, it is as though India, in excluding Ahmed, makes him less "real."

In this section, Rushdie illustrates Saleem's inability to reorient himself in the community of his family. As is revealed later when Jamila rejects his advances, Saleem finds that his family does actually continue to consider him a member of their community because "what-had-been-sanctified-as-truth (by Time, by habit, by grandmother's pronouncement, by lack of imagination, by a father's acquiescence) proved more believable than what [they] knew to be so" (373). As such, Saleem seems to be the one who rejects his own family community. It is not the family community that rejects him.

Working from a framework provided by Homi Bhabha, Laura Eldred suggests that it is this instability that causes Saleem to have incestual tendencies. She writes that in postcolonial cultures, and especially in the context of an unstable family community "the child seeks the comfort of authenticity in familial origins alongside the freedom of a separate identity...[and] these twin demands on identity may produce anxiety and a child may seek to eliminate hybridity through a return to origins, an attempt to graft the self back onto the family stock, to become original – in short, through incest" (61). Thus, while it is interesting that Saleem develops incestual feelings for both his mother and his aunt, with whom he engages in a pseudo-sexual interaction, it is only useful to consider the implications of Saleem's incestual love for his sister, as the newly transformed Jamila Singer, because this occurs after he has learned that he is not her biological brother.

Saleem, when he first becomes aware that he loves his sister, asks himself, "Is it possible to trace the origins of unnatural love? Did Saleem, who had yearned after a place in the center of history, become besotted with what he saw in his sister of his hopes for life? Did much-mutilated no-longer-Snotnose...fall in love with the new wholeness of his sibling?" (361). Saleem most likely asks these question because the answers are

yes. It is especially interesting to consider his last question, which fits neatly within the theory that Eldred suggests; Saleem is attracted to Jamila because she represents a completeness that Saleem does not believe he is entitled to. Ironically, Jamila is also fragmented as, like her grandmother, the world has only seen her behind the veil of a perforated sheet. For Saleem, however, she is whole because she is an accepted member of the family and her claim to the family is biological and, thus, both viable and tangible. Saleem, both succumbing to the “national longing for form” (344) and to his desire to become a part of the family again, “grafts” his love of the family onto Jamila in an attempt to “graft” himself onto the family.

Unfortunately, when he confesses his feelings to Jamila, Saleem finds that his love for Jamila is not reciprocated and, even with the help of Mutasim’s magical parchment, Jamila is both annoyed and repulsed by his fleeting advance. Saleem acknowledges that:

[Although] what he was saying was the literal truth, there were other truths which had become more important because they had been sanctified by time; and although there was no need for shame and horror, he saw both emotions on her forehead, he smelt them on her skin, and, what was worse, he could feel and smell them in and upon himself. So, in the end, not even the magic parchment of Mutasim the Handsome was powerful enough to bring Saleem Sinai and Jamila Singer together (371-372).

Jamila’s lack of feelings for Saleem can be explained in several ways. Jamila, unlike Saleem, does not register his alienation from the family. She relies on the “sanctified by time” truth rather than the “literal truth.” Additionally, it is Saleem, not Jamila that finds

he is not a biological member of the family. Jamila still has biology to fall back on and does not have to rely on the choice of affiliation as Saleem now does. As such, Jamila does not feel the need to “graft” herself back onto the stock of the family. Because Jamila does not experience the same alienation that Saleem does, she does not understand his desire to connect with her in such a way, and consequently rejects him, repulsed by his feelings for her.

As a result of Jamila’s rejection, Saleem, unable to consummate his love for Jamila and unable to find his place in the family again, is now further alienated from them. Soon after, Saleem is forever separated from his family when a bomb is dropped on his Aunt Alia’s house and, excepting Jamila, his family is effectively wiped out. Saleem, having suffered a head injury from his mother’s silver spittoon, loses his memory, forgets his name, and enlists in the army as a bomb-sniffer, a job reserved for canines. At this point in the narrative, catalyzed, perhaps, by his admission of love to Jamila and her subsequent rejection, Saleem is forever isolated from his family. It is not until he meets Parvati, years later, that he remembers his name and raises his son, finding his purpose and becoming “real” again. It is no small coincidence that Parvati, in a very affiliative way, can be considered Saleem’s sister.

It should be said that the Midnight Children’s Conference functions as a family community that Saleem creates in much the same way that he creates his actual family. Unfortunately, the Midnight Children’s Conference also becomes a fruitless outlet for Saleem to “graft” himself back onto, first because he is unable to hold the convention’s meetings in his mind after he has his sinuses drained and is thus “[banished] from the possibility of the midnight children” (348); and second because, like Saleem, all of the

children are rounded up in the Emergency and sterilized. Saleem does, however, become married to Parvati, who is another of the midnight children and, in such a way, also Saleem's metaphorical sister. Ultimately, it is this union that makes Saleem a father, though the child is not Saleem and Parvati's, but Shiva and Parvati's. Additionally, it is the fruit of this union, Aadam, which represents the future in the novel – one that looks to be much like Saleem's already narrated story as Aadam, too, will be trampled by the same enemies of his father (533) – as Aadam is expected to live on past Saleem's strange and untimely death. Saleem, in fact, even solidifies this notion by composing the novel, by pickling his history for his son.

#### IV. Conclusion: The Life and Death of Saleem Sinai

As has been demonstrated, Saleem and the other characters in *Midnight's Children*, have the unique ability to invent parents and family relationships “where they do not exist,” much like Anderson says that the people of postcolonial countries invent “nations where they do not exist.” Thus, throughout the course of the novel, one can see that familial communities can be invented, just as national ones can. For Saleem and the other Sinais, and later for Estha and Rahel, the invention of a family community may simply be much simpler than trying to establish a coherent national one. At least for Saleem, the prospect of creating national consciousness, as evidenced by the allegorical *Midnight Children's Conference*, may be a fruitless endeavor. As Saleem notes when the children undergo their sperectomies (503), they become what he always knew they would: Saleem asks, “Who were we? Broken promises; made to be broken” (505). In admitting this, Saleem admits that his attempt to form a national community was always doomed. Unfortunately for Saleem, he is also unable to form a coherent family

community because of his multiple parentage and, perhaps, because he is unable to consummate his love for Jamila Singer.

From the very beginning of the novel, Rushdie artfully illustrates the importance of family within the narrative of *Midnight's Children*. He also, however, defines family in very non-traditional terms, allowing factors other than biology to account for and to determine familial communities. Saleem, as acting author of his story, illustrates his ability to write history the way he wants to and, thus, cues readers in on his ability to consciously rewrite his life. In this way, Saleem is not only able to record a certain version of himself, he can also intentionally author the people in his story. Likewise, Saleem has the ability to create parents and families “where they do not exist,” and does so both in his affiliation with the Sinais and with the other midnight children.

Because Rushdie allows for a more affiliative definition of family, Saleem remains an accepted part of the Sinai family even after it is revealed that he is not Ahmed and Amina’s biological son. The shock of this revelation, however, leaves Saleem feeling distant from his family, even though they continue to call him “son” and “brother.” Soon after the family migrates to Pakistan and the Brass Monkey makes her transformation into the coveted Jamila Singer, Saleem develops incestuous affections for his sister. This can be explained using Homi Bhabha’s theory about the desire for members of unstable families to “graft” themselves back onto the family. Saleem, feeling intangibly disconnected from his family, experiences just this phenomenon, but when he reveals his feelings to Jamila, Jamila, not needing to reconnect with the family in the way that Saleem does, rejects his advances in disgust. Soon after this incident, Saleem’s family is wiped out in the war and he loses his identity when he forgets his

name.

Saleem recovers from his amnesia only when Parvati, his sister in the family of the midnight children, calls out his name in a crowd. Saleem and Parvati eventually marry, though they do not conceive of a child together because Saleem imagines that he sees the ghostly, rotting face of Jamila when he looks at Parvati. After a brief affair with Shiva, Saleem's midnight twin, Parvati gives birth to Aadam, Saleem's son who is not his son. Though Parvati dies in the Emergency, and Saleem and the other midnight children are sequestered and sterilized, Saleem raises Aadam as his own, finally finding meaning by pickling the events of his history for his son. In such a way, Aadam completes the cycle, in a way giving birth to his own father, in order to be trampled in much the same way that Saleem is, in the strange narrative of his untimely death.

Saleem's death is perhaps the most climactic part of the novel even if, like so many times before, it simply summarizes everything that has come before it. Unable to complete his life story "because it has not taken place" (532), Saleem's life ends in a regurgitation of the past, his life continuing to cycle back over itself until he is trampled to death, so to speak, by all the people in his life. For some, this may seem like a moment of hope because of the legacy of Aadam Sinai that Saleem leaves behind, but it is most simply a death, and death by the hand of the past. For Saleem, his life cannot continue, but it cannot end either; it can only be recycled. In his "death," he continues to revisit the events, people, and places that he has encountered before. It may be said, then, that without some sort of change in the way his life has been written, Saleem's life and, thus, the allegorical life of India will continue on as it has before.

This notion is solidified by the fact that Aadam, who is Saleem's son and thus,

allegorically India's son, will also suffer the same fate as Saleem. Saleem, in narrating his own death, says, "Yes, they will trample me underfoot...reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his...until the thousand and first generation" (533). By writing Saleem's death in this way, Rushdie leaves a hopeless view of the future of India.

Though it is useless to consider what would have happened had Saleem written his life differently, had he, for example, been able to consummate his love for Jamila, Rushdie encourages us to understand the effects that any single change may have had on his whole life, especially the end of it, and the simple fact that it is not sustainable the way that it is. Regardless, by ending with a death, Rushdie leaves readers with the question, "What now?" and leaves future postcolonial Indian writers, Roy included, to provide the answer.

### Chapter 3: Familial Communities in *The God of Small Things*

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* comes onto the scene of postcolonial Indian literature nearly twenty years after the dramatic birth and rebirth of Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie's epic treatment of the tribulations of his fledgling homeland. The progression between Rushdie's India and Roy's becomes an important point to consider when regarding the genre of postcolonial Indian literature as existing on a continuum, as it undoubtedly does. Additionally, the temporal locus of Rushdie's novel (India's independence in 1949) is also twenty years before even the earlier parts of Roy's novel (the year in which Sophie Mol dies is 1969), with the 'current' parts of the story assumed to be taking place around the time of the novel's release in 1997. Thus, Roy's India is plagued by the same turmoil as Rushdie's is, but the issues that provide the basis for the conflict at the heart of novel are slightly more contemporary; for example, while the Emergency serves as the crisis that marks the climax of *Midnight's Children*, in *Small Things*, the main source of conflict revolves around Velutha's communist leanings.

#### I. Isolation and the Complicity of the Family Community

While Roy explicitly reinforces the idea that Estha and Rahel have a special metaphysical bond and, in some ways, form a separate community of their own, apart from that of their family, she also takes pains to illustrate the ways in which the family

itself is isolated from any other larger-scale community.<sup>7</sup> Beside that of the individual family community, and the slightly larger community of families in general, Roy establishes a number of individual communities within the bounds of the novel, which are comparable to the opposing factions noted earlier: Touchables, Untouchables, landlords (Modalalis), employees, and Communists. While each community seems to have its opposite, the overlap between the communities – such as the employees and the Communists, and the Touchable and the landlords – should not be ignored, nor should it fail to be said that the number of those who participate in each community is widely disproportionate. Likewise, because of the communities to which the Ipe family belongs, and because of their caste, profession and local prominence, they are ultimately members of a community that has few participants, which generally causes their isolation from many in their physical location.

Chacko unwittingly demonstrates their isolation during one of his Oxford-talks. Roy writes, “Chacko told the twins that, though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. They were a *family* of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (51, emphasis in original). Chacko’s claim that the family members, because of their Anglophilia, are “trapped outside their own history” serves to distinctly isolate the family and exclude them from any, if only imaginary or hypothetical, larger community. They are intrinsically separate from the non-Anglophiles when they admit

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<sup>7</sup> The narrative point of view of *The God of Small Things* is not fixed, and while I hesitate to give Roy the authority of narrator, causing a troublesome overlap between her role as author and as storyteller, I find it most appropriate at times to give her that position. At other times, when the point of view of the story is obviously attributed to a specific character, it will be noted as such, and that character will be given narrative authority. I wish to acknowledge, however, that this is not necessarily accurate, but rather done out of convenience in the current essay.

or acknowledge their own Anglophilia.<sup>8</sup> As Almeida notes, Chacko draws a direct comparison here between his own family and Untouchables, who historically were required to erase their own footprints as they backed away after speaking to a Touchable, so as not to leave a trail.<sup>9</sup> Almeida says:

We can conclude that the erasure of bodily marks excludes one from history and that in a hierarchical scheme of social relations the Untouchables are for the upper caste Indians what [the Anglophilic Indians] in turn are for the colonizer – bodily absences in official historical records. Roy exposes here the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the complex structure of colonial and postcolonial relations in the sense that there is a constant sliding of categories of power and dominance (266).

Here, Almeida makes clear both the distinction and isolation of Untouchables from those in higher castes and of Anglophiles from the beloved British, but also contextualizes the importance of such isolation. For Untouchables and for Anglophiles, attempts to infiltrate the community from which they are excluded will always be futile. This is an interesting point to note because it illustrates the rejection, the unimportance of the presence of the Other within the community from which it is excluded. Exclusion from the “historical record” is the ultimate gauge of unimportance in the course of events that take place within a community. Only those who are valued, that is included, are

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<sup>8</sup> Rhetorically speaking, to include oneself in a group consequently and inherently causes that same person to be excluded from the groups that oppose it. See Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives*, a useful excerpt from which appears in Bizzell and Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition*.

<sup>9</sup> Roy relates the origin of this social tradition in the novel when she explains, “Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprints.”

recognized. Furthermore, Almeida also notes that those who are authorities in one community are inevitably excluded or subjugated in another.

It should be noted, also, that the family members' attempts to partake in the activities of communities of which they are not inherently participating always render themselves futile. For example, Chacko, a self-proclaimed Marxist, identifies with the communists leanings of some of his workers and, in a private conversation, confides in Comrade Pillai that he would like to "formerly organize [his workers] into a union" (265). Pillai, quietly scheming against Chacko, deftly places him outside of their communist/worker community:

[Pillai says,] "But comrade, you cannot stage their revolution for them. You can only create awareness. Educate them. They must launch their *own* struggle. *They* must overcome their fears."

"Of whom?" Chacko smiled. "Me?"

"No, not you, my dear comrade. Of centuries of oppression... Revolution is not a dinner party. Revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence in which one class overthrows another."

And so... [Pillai] deftly banished Chacko from the fighting ranks of the Overthrowers to the treacherous ranks of the To Be Overthrown.  
(265)

Thus, Comrade Pillai, having nothing personal against Chacko, and, in fact, all the while managing a personal and professional relationship, still excludes him from his community. It is through this example and others that one can see the isolation of the Ipe family and their inability to participate in communities outside of that of their own

family. Necessarily, they are excluded based on principle and the inherent characteristics that define them also prevent them from inclusion. Furthermore, all members of the family do not necessarily desire this exclusion at different times. Though the family invites their exclusion from certain communities, as evidenced by Mammachi's reaction upon hearing of Ammu and Velutha's relationship, there are times, as evidenced by Chacko's communist sympathies, that readers can sense a certain regret at their exclusion from others, and the resulting isolation they experience.

While cautiously excluding the family from inclusion in other, wider-ranging communities, Roy also illustrates the degree to which the family may be deemed unacceptable as far as the traditional idea of family is concerned. She does this efficiently by drawing significant attention to the family's excursion to Cochin and to the Abhilash Talkies to see *The Sound of Music*. The family's rejection from this larger community of families, in general, is registered by Rahel and Estha as they observe the behavior of the children and of Baron von (Clapp) Trapp in the film. Ultimately, they understand that the relationship between Baron von Trapp and his children is characterized by love and cleanliness, things that they find lacking in their daily lives. They perceive his relationship with his children in the film by noting, "He pretended not to love them, but he did. He loved them. He loved her (Julie Andrews), she loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other. They were clean, white children, and their beds were soft with Ei. Der. Downs" (100). Of course, the mention of Julie Andrews by name, rather than by her character's name, complicates things further because it signifies a certain recognition by Rahel and Estha, or by readers, that the film's representation of the von Trapp family is not real. The members of the

family are actors playing roles. For Rahel and Estha, however, this family represents real reality or, at least, what they want real reality to look like, as evidenced by their repeated trips to see the film and their repetition of the songs' lyrics.

Still, they find themselves standing outside of this particular image of what families should be. To illustrate the contrast, one that both Rahel and Estha understand, Roy gives room for "some questions [to arise] that needed answers:"

(a) *Did Baron von Clapp-Trapp shiver his leg?*

(b) *Did Baron von Clapp-Trapp blow spit bubbles? Did he?*

(c) *Did he gobble?* (101, italics in original)

The answer to all of these questions, as imagined by the twins, is "He did not." Ammu says Estha and Rahel's father behaved in such ways; the twins imitate these behaviors and Ammu scolds them for doing so, saying, "Only clerks behaved like that. Not aristocrats" (80). Ammu does not realize that in doing so, she has formed an image in the minds of her twins of their father, but more importantly it is a negative image. Thus, when Rahel and Estha ask themselves whether or not Baron von Trapp behaved in the same "clerk"-like way, they are pitting von Trapp against their father and von Trapp comes out on top. Consequently, this questioning results in a silent realization that their family is not ideal. Regardless of the absence of their father and the disgrace of their mother leaving him, the twins acknowledge that their father would still be inferior to Baron von Trapp were he present.

Directly after this line of questioning, the twins wonder whether or not Baron von Trapp could love them. Roy writes, "Oh Baron von Trapp...could you love the little fellow [who] has just held the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's soo-soo in his hand...?"

And his twin sister? Tilting upwards with her fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo?" (101). After this, the twins imagine that Baron von Trapp asks the same questions about them that they did about him. The answers to all the questions this time are, "Yes. (But Sophie Mol doesn't.)" (101). This section further illustrates the idea that Estha and Rahel see their family as unusual, and more than unusual, undesirable. Ammu and her children both recognize this fact; Ammu acknowledges "that, for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man" (38). In answering the questions of Baron von Trapp, after unconsciously dismissing the image of their father as inferior, the twins discredit their own right to be loved. They admit what they see as their faults: Estha's participation in a sex act with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, and Rahel's appearance are seen as things that make them less-deserving of a parent's love.

Ammu unwittingly confirms this belief when Rahel teasingly suggests that her mother marry the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, and Ammu calmly says to her, "When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less" (107). Ammu does not realize the effect that her words have on her daughter. Rahel's voice in the text constantly refers to herself afterwards as the "One Loved a Little Less" (177). It should be noted, however, that Rahel's acceptance that Baron von Trapp could not love her is significantly less damaging than when she gains the misappropriated knowledge that her mother loves her less. The twins, as represented by this knowledge of Rahel's, seem to blindly accept the idea that a white man could not love them, or perhaps concede that they are not deserving of the love of a "good" father. Ultimately, and person by person, the twins are forced to acknowledge that the parts of their family – the mother, the father, the brother, the sister – are all

flawed, which further serves to isolate them from the community of families, if only in their own minds where the members of this community sharply resemble the von Trapp's.

It is worth noting that Rahel and Estha draw a connection between Sophie Mol and the more acceptable family standard of *The Sound of Music*, assuming that Sophie Mol, unlike Estha and Rahel, would be accepted and loved by Baron von Trapp. Furthermore, it is significant that Sophie Mol's mother, Margaret Kochamma, left Chacko for another Englishman. Her vague unhappiness in her marriage to Chacko did not necessarily have to do with the fact that he was Indian, though her family was highly disapproving, but her increased happiness when she marries a very run-of-the-mill white man suggests that the model of family as illustrated by the von Trapp's in *Sound of Music* prevails in the novel as the idyllic version of family, the one that provides the most comfort for its members, and one that is inevitably more appropriate than the Ipe family.

## II. Familial Self-Destruction and the Siamese Two-Egg Twins

To achieve the effect of and to justify the actions that take place at the end of Roy's novel, the author necessarily established the unique relationship that the twins share both before and after their births. Biologically, Estha and Rahel are dizygotic, or "two-egg twins," which are most commonly referred to in the West as fraternal twins. Specifically, they are conceived and inhabit their mother's womb during the same period of time, but do not share the same genes and, therefore, do not share their gender or physical appearance.

In the opening pages of *Small Things*, Roy explains the unique relationship between Estha and Rahel, one unusual for most dizygotic twins. She states that, although

there were never any “Who is who?”-type questions, there was a certain amount of confusion about their distinct identities and that “The confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place” (4). She goes on to say that, in the early years, “Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (4-5). It is not until the separation of the twins is many years in the past that Rahel, herself, imagines them separate, as “*Them*, because, separately, the two of them are no longer what *They* were or ever thought *They’d* be” (50). It is important to note, though, that even after the separation Rahel thinks of herself and Estha as a single entity to be considered together. The distinction she makes between the “Them” of the present and the “They” of the past is not in terms of number. That is to say, she does not take the “They” and separate this categorization into “He” and “She,” or “Him” and “Me.” She is still envisioning them as singular. What has changed, then, is her perception of their identity. In other words, they remain a single unit, but are a different single unit than they once were. They have been altered, but they have been altered together and simultaneously.

In the preliminary chapters, the narrator expresses Ammu’s relief that her twins are not deformed, and that they are two complete, but separate beings: “Two little ones, instead of one big one” (40). But again, Roy encourages the idea that physical separation does not limit a deeper metaphysical sharing or connectivity. She notes, “[Ammu] didn’t notice the single Siamese soul” (40). As pointed out above, the twins are said to be like a “rare breed of Siamese twins,” in which siblings would normally be physically connected. Here, Roy reintroduces the metaphor, and clarifies it, saying that the twins are

inseparable, but metaphysically; that is, they share the same soul. This concept is important for the novel's progression because the twins are, perhaps inevitably, separated by Estha's Return. Though the twins have been physically separate since birth, they have occupied the same general location. Estha's Return imposes a greater separation, a geographical separation. This distance, however, is not able to cause the separation of the still-conjoined Siamese soul.

Estha and Rahel, however, are not the only ones that appreciate the connection between the twins. For example, Baby Kochamma, when Rahel returns to Ayemenem to see Estha, even imagines the twins as one:

She deemed [the twins] Capable of Anything. Anything at all. *They might even try to steal their present back* she thought, and realized with a pang how quickly she had reverted to thinking of them as though they were a single unit once again. After all those years. Determined not to let the past creep up on her, she altered her thought at once. *She. She might steal her present back* (29).

It is interesting to note a couple points in the passage. For one, even Baby Kochamma is in the habit of referring to the twins as “a single unit,” as if they do not operate independently of each other, as if they share their volition. It is essential to recognize that others recognize the continuity between the twins so readers do not dismiss the fact as a childish perception. While, as Laura Eldred notes, “the novel's narrator reminds us, again and again, of differences in the twins, of their two-ness despite the appearance of a single soul – they are, after all, separate people and brother and sister” (71), Roy also goes to great pains to emphasize the fact that their one-ness is significant. Further

instances of their widely perceived one-ness are found in the mystery of their unsynchronized front teeth – “It puzzled everybody that an eighteen-minute age difference could cause such a discrepancy in front tooth timing” (37) – and Chacko’s dismissal of Rahel’s unaccounted for knowledge of Estha at their hotel-room door – “Chacko didn’t bother to wonder how she could have possibly known that Estha was at the door. He was used to their sometimes strangeness” (113). These two instances solidify the idea that not only do Estha and Rahel regard their sameness, their oneness, as significant enough to govern their biological synchronicity and their own metaphysical understanding of the other, but that others outside of the twins do, as well.

When the twins are separated, when Baby Kochamma suggests that Estha be returned to his father, the family further expresses the idea of their one-ness by seeking out a professional opinion on the viability of each in the event of separation. Roy writes:

They consulted a twin expert in Hyderabad. She wrote back to say that it was not advisable to separate monozygotic twins, but that two-egg twins were no different from ordinary siblings and that while they would certainly suffer the natural distress that children from broken homes underwent, it would be nothing more than that. Nothing out of the ordinary (32).

While the doctor suggests that the separation will not cause any permanent damage in the twins, it is apparent to readers that this does not turn out to be the case. Estha becomes mute and Rahel is shuffled in and out of different schools for disobedience, for *depravity*, and for not knowing “how to be a girl” (18). Although the doctor is undoubtedly giving an informed opinion, she is ignorant of the “sometimes strangeness” of the twins. The

opinion of the doctor, and the resulting trauma suffered by the twins after Estha's Return only further serves to illustrate the idea that the twins are unusual. Though dizygotic, they share a deep connection, one more characteristic, perhaps, of monozygotic twins, and, thus, they acutely suffer the consequences of separation.

Estha and Rahel, regarded as strange by the members of their own family community, actually form a community of their own. Surely their attempt to run away after Estha's encounter with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, and Ammu's exclamation that they are "the millstones round [her] neck" (240), is an attempt to dislodge themselves completely from the community of their family and forge one of their own. Baby Kochamma views the twins as separate from her family community already. This is evidenced when Roy writes that Baby Kochamma "disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She was keen for them to realize that they...lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be..." (44). With this passage, Roy establishes the status of the twins as outsiders even in their own family community. Their characteristics – their lack of a father, and their Hindu heritage – qualify them as unacceptable. Baby Kochamma draws a line between herself and the twins and between the twins and the family by saying that they have no right to even live in the house. As such, the twins, whether consciously or not, form a community of their own, enabled by the quality of their sameness and mandated by Baby Kochamma's rejection of the twins from hers.

The twins' subconsciously-imagined community becomes a source of comfort for the two of them. Regardless of the world around them, they function on their own, and abide – fatally – by their own rules. Again, Roy acknowledges this subtle formation of a community and the effect that it has on the twins and the way in which others perceive them by writing, again, from Baby Kochamma's view. Roy says, "But most of all, [Baby Kochamma] grudged them the comfort they drew from each other. She expected from them some token of unhappiness. At the very least" (45). It is important to note that the twins find a certain solace in each other of which the other members of the family are neglected. In this way, the community that Rahel and Estha form between each other, not only excludes others from its membership, but also can be said to be the very source of comfort itself. Generally speaking, one can suppose that community is a source of comfort in the face of stringent division and population isolation. It may even be said that because the twins find themselves isolated from their family, in order to allow themselves a certain feeling of acceptance and the comfort inherent in such an acceptance, attach greater value to and rely even more fully on the connection that they have with each other.<sup>10</sup>

During the period after which Estha is Returned, the family encourages Rahel to write to him, but Rahel refuses. Roy writes with insight into the mind of Rahel, "Rahel

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<sup>10</sup> Almeida makes an interesting point in her article about the rejection of the twins from any larger-scale community, elaborating on the reversal of traditional gender roles, though she focuses on the part that such a reversal plays in the eventual act of transgression. She writes, "It becomes manifest in both cases [of Ammu and Velutha and of Estha and Rahel] that transgression is triggered by the intervention and volition of female characters...while the male characters play the culturally reversed role of the seduced ones. This reversal is carried out even further by the obvious feminization of these male characters: Velutha dies wearing Rahel's nail varnish and Estha, after his 'Return,' does household chores for his father and stepmother" (270). Further, during a game, Estha dresses up as a woman, refers to himself by a woman's name, and encourages Velutha to play along (Roy, 181). This point, the feminization of the male characters, but especially of Estha, and Rahel's subsequent masculinization, can be said to further isolate the twins because they do not abide even by gender laws.

never wrote to him. There are things you can't do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or Hair. Or heart” (156). This statement implies that even after they are separated, Rahel regards the two as one, so much so that she cannot bring herself to write to him. To Rahel, in the way Roy has written it, writing a letter to a part of oneself seems almost absurd. The full effect of their idea of their relationship with each other is achieved through this passage. Rahel's refusal to write to Estha is based on the fact that she not only considers him to be connected to her, but to actually be a continuation of herself. As such, readers can appreciate the fact that, even after they have been forced into a greater geological separation, Estha and Rahel still feel indelibly connected to each other.

### III. Togetherness and the Rhetoric of Twin Incest

It is for this reason, this inability to completely sever the metaphysical tie between Estha and Rahel, that their reunion is inevitable, as is their act of incest. If Estha and Rahel are conjoined in some respect, if their soul is one, it seems biologically impossible for them to inhabit two separate bodies. The act of incest brings together the two bodies as one in the most literal sense. Furthermore, the way in which Roy writes the act points to a tangible distinction between what the twins do and what one would consider sex to be, in the most usual sense of the word. More explicitly, the sex that takes place between Rahel and Estha is not a love act. It is a coming together for a purpose; that purpose is to complete and to share that which must be completed - which is marked by their reunification – and that which must be shared – their “hideous grief” (311). This idea is illustrated in the contrast between the description of Estha and Rahel's union, and that of their mother and Velutha in the last chapter of the book.

The inclusion of the detailed account of the first time that Ammu and Velutha have sex, included at the very conclusion of the novel, and its juxtaposition against that of Estha and Rahel, opens the floor for considerable debate. Some see the pairing of the two separate accounts as a sort of premonition that Estha and Rahel will also be punished for their ignorance of the “Love Laws” (33). For example, Almeida asks, “Are we to assume that they will have the same fate of their mother and her lover?” (269). Others imagine it as a mutual disapproval of the society that has rejected and oppressed them. This sentiment is articulated by Laura Eldred, who says that the act “shows the possibilities of breaking the ‘love laws’ as a useful rebellion against a repressive state” (70). While this may seem like the most viable conclusion to draw, it is also perhaps the easiest. It is more interesting to consider, especially in the context of the current discussion, the ways in which Roy describes both acts, and the differences in her rhetoric and what those rhetorical differences imply.

To start, one should consider the vivid detail that Roy affords the description of the sex between Ammu and Velutha.<sup>11</sup> Employing colorful language and a careful choice of words that embody the physicality of the experience, Roy reenacts the entire act for readers, preferring such a description over a simple sentence-long dismissal. She often describes the act as a “dance” (317), and explicitly describes their physical movements and actions. Similarly, Roy describes Ammu as Velutha experiences her “as wide and deep as a river in space. He sailed on her waters,” a river in which Velutha “drowned” (317). Roy omits few details, giving readers accounts, even, of their individual climaxes, though clothed in her usual metaphor. It is important to recognize, however, that even in

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<sup>11</sup> See Aijaz Ahmad’s essay, “Reading Arundhati Roy *politically*,” for a criticism of her erotic language and its place in the novel.

the semi-erotic detail through which Roy delivers this description, the emphasis is on the physical, and the words she chooses represent a tangible, understandable act of love. In a word, their sex is passionate. Though the two may be said to be strangers, this experience is not without emotion, which is evident in the fact that Ammu “cried and laughed at once,” when they were done (319). Her tears, however, are not of sadness, as evidenced by the fact that they are paired with laughter.

Furthermore, Roy says that, through this act, Ammu “lived...Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty quaking wings...And on Ammu’s Road (to Age and Death) a small, sunny meadow appeared” (319). Ammu’s perception of the experience is vibrantly positive. Even though Roy adds that “an abyss” lies beyond the meadow that has appeared in front of her, Ammu does not acknowledge it, either out of stubbornness or ignorance. Overall, the experience is viewed as a positive one, one that ultimately frees Ammu from the life that had, up until that point, imprisoned her.

Contrast this description with that of Estha and Rahel’s. Roy dismisses the act with a single sentence: “There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next” (310). In fact, Roy seems to place emphasis on the aftermath, rather than on the act itself, as was the case with Ammu and Velutha. She writes, “But what was there to say? Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-colored shoulder had a semi-circle of teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over” (311). The rhetoric of this passage is strikingly different than that which makes up the description of Ammu and

Velutha's encounter. Instead of using descriptive, physical language, Roy uses a more languid tone, and describes the twins in terms of inanimate objects – spoons – or disembodied parts – a throat, and a shoulder. Strangely, these terms make the act strikingly less personal, and de-emphasize the volition that either of the twins had in its commission. Furthermore, the tears that Estha and Rahel shed are not accompanied by laughter, and Roy adds later “that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311). This further illustrates the point that what occurs between Estha and Rahel that night is not sex in the usual sense. It is not an act of love and it is not necessarily a positive experience. This stands in stark contrast to Ammu's experience with Velutha, the language of which is vividly positive, and causes Ammu to recognize the beauty of possibility in her life, even if that possibility is, in fact, impossible.

Consequently, Roy points out that Rahel does not “[stare] out of a window at the sea” (310) when she has sex with her brother Estha as she does when she previously had sex with her husband, Larry. In doing so, Roy not only implies that having sex with her brother was an endpoint, somewhere she was always pointing towards, and that in doing it Rahel has completed herself, has found what she is looking for; Roy also makes a distinction between sex between a man and wife and between brother and sister, as if between a man and wife (comparable to that between Ammu and Velutha) sex is a physical experience, and that between brother and sister it is something different, or that, at least, it achieves a different purpose: coming-together. In different points in the novel, Roy describes Larry's relationship with his wife in physical terms, like when she described Ammu and Velutha. Still, during sex with Larry, Rahel is mentally detached, and regardless of Larry's attention to and displeasure with it, this detachment is the

opposite of the connectiveness she feels when having sex with Estha. Again, this comparison, between sex with Estha and sex with Larry, provides yet another interesting contrast between sex as a love act and sex an act of coming-together.

Once we establish the difference between sex in the act of love, and sex as a coming-together, it is interesting to consider how such behavior can become necessary and be acceptable in its context. Almeida notes:

Estha and Rahel build their own version of interaction and healing, through the sharing and the contact of their bodies, fitting perfectly like spoons, like their Siamese souls. In fact, this act can only be described towards the end when it becomes apparent that they have very little to lose in *societal terms*. After being emotionally destroyed, separated, and rejected by their social milieu, Estha, “Quietness,” becomes entirely mute and alien to the world around him, while Rahel, “Emptiness,” drifts aimlessly around the world. (269, *emphasis mine*)

The claims Almeida makes her are widely interesting. For one, Almeida uses the words “sharing” and “contact” equally to describe the interaction that Estha and Rahel partake in when they have sex. “Sharing” is a particularly interesting word to describe the union because it implies more than just a simple union, it implies the sort of communion that is symbiotic, that is both parties involved feed off each other in order to survive. Likewise, she points out that this bodily sharing is equal and, perhaps, complementary to the soul-sharing that has been a characteristic of the relationship between them for their entire lives. Again, this comparison seems to necessitate the sex act by billing it as a complimentary communion to their already shared, Siamese soul. Furthermore, the idea

that such an act is but one “version of interaction and healing,” suggests that it is not only necessary, but acceptable based on the sheer frankness of that necessity. In other words, it is to be understood simply as an act of overcoming. Again, there is a plain distinction between sex as a love act and sex as a coming-together.

The second idea worth considering in Almeida’s passage is her assertion that the incest is only possible, though wholly inevitable, at the novel’s end when the twin’s social identities have been reduced to nothing. This goes back to my earlier idea regarding the inability of the Ipe family to become engaged in any community outside of that of their family. Even more importantly, however, the idea that the incest can only take place after their social extradition implies that it is a product of that extradition. In other words, as a result of their exclusion from the more wide-ranging social communities around them, Estha and Rahel are forced to maintain, if not resurrect, a community between each other.

Ultimately, although Estha and Rahel share a Siamese soul, which is denied even of physically conjoined twins, their physical separation must be eliminated in order to illustrate the absolute importance and inevitability of physically rejoining their two pieces of the whole. It is perhaps for this reason that we, as readers, are not entirely shocked or disgusted at such a breach of standard and accepted moral and social code.

#### IV. Conclusion: Implications of the Love Laws

I don’t want to overlook the fact that I have somehow managed to ignore the presence and disobedience of the “Love Laws” in the text of *The God of Small Things*. Of course, it is these very laws, these things we just seem to know, or accept as fact, as truth, that govern the novel from beginning to end. It is not just the Love Laws

themselves, however, that serve as the catalyst of the events that transpire in the novel, but the characters' disobedience – their blatant disregard for the Laws – that actually marks the beginning of chain of events.

It is interesting to consider, however, though perhaps not entirely relevant in the context of the novel, that because the Ipe family is a community of its own, broken up further into smaller factions, that they have their own rules. In the Introduction to *Transgression and Taboo: Critical Essays*, editors Vartan Messier and Nandita Batra write, “Transgression and taboo do not exist in a vacuum: they are context-specific and therefore the act of transgression can only be judged within its socio-historic context” (ii).<sup>12</sup> Likewise, attention should be given to the idea that, although Ammu and Estha and Rahel broke certain Love Laws, they may not have believed that those Laws applied to them. True, the larger “socio-historic context” of the novel is that of the regional community that the Ipe family lives in, Ayemenem, but this paper has hopefully successfully established that, not only does the majority of the community of Ayemenem fail to consider the Ipe family to be a member of their community, the Ipe family themselves appreciates and understands its own alienation. It is completely naturally, therefore, to make the claim that the Ipe family has created its own Laws that govern its own community.

As for Mammachi's reaction to Ammu and Velutha's relationship, and Baby Kochamma's enduring prejudices, it should be noted that these two characters may be the

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<sup>12</sup> This statement rises out of the debate, Messier and Batra say, that occurred at the Caribbean Chapter of the College English Association Spring 2005 conference, whose topic was “Transgression and Taboo,” which spawned the collection of essays that are cited here. The debate involved the politics of answering the question of whether or not certain topics historically considered taboo, like homosexuality, could still be considered taboo in this day and age.

only members of the Ipe family that have not completely accepted their rejection from the Ayemenem community and are still trying to function within its bounds and abide by its Laws. After all, when Baby Kochamma goes to the Police about Velutha's supposed crime against Ammu, when answering the Inspector's question of why it has taken the family so long to report, Baby Kochamma answers, "We are an old family... These are not things we want talked about..." (245). By saying this, Baby Kochamma is still placing her family inside the community of Ayemenem; she is summoning history to give them a place within it. But what Baby Kochamma fails to recognize is that their past inclusion in the community is no longer relevant. They are no longer members of the community of Ayemenem, and the members of their family have individually decided on Laws of their own that will govern their actions.

So, really, at the heart of the conflict in *The God of Small Things* are not necessarily simply the transgressions that Ammu and Velutha and Estha and Rahel commit: it is perhaps instead the point where different communities intersect. If we consider that the Love Laws that govern the behaviors of the citizens of Ayemenem do not apply to Ammu and her children, there is no reason that their actions should have been so received and punished. But if we consider the disparity between the two sets of Laws and the fact that, because of the spatial proximity of the two communities, they will inevitably intersect, it becomes logically apparent that it is that very disparity and that very intersection that serves as the course of conflict.

Ultimately, it is the lack of community and continuity on a large scale, then, that results in the conflicts that plague the Ipe family. For Estha and Rahel at the end of the novel, isolation has only ever been a source of distress. It is in community that they have

always found comfort, but more importantly, it is the community that they have formed with each other, one in which all parties agree on the rules, that they are attempting to revive in their act of incest, a union that ultimately allows them some comfort. So, as the novel progresses and comes to a close, Estha and Rahel are only trying one last time to establish a community. As Roy writes, before the full effect of the novel can be felt and appreciated, Estha and Rahel “would grow up grappling with ways of living with what happened” (54), and, ultimately, their way of grappling is to come together, once and, perhaps, for all.

## Conclusion

If Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* ultimately seems to ask the question "What do citizens of a nation have to cling to when a nation is divided?" then Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* seems to arrive at the answer. Throughout the novel, Saleem forcefully tries to create a national community around himself, and failing, literally cracks open at the novel's conclusion. While Saleem's cracking is very obviously allegorical, the role his family plays in the story is equally interesting because of the ways in which the novel complicates the very notion of what it means to be and have family. Saleem, through unusual circumstance, finds himself a member of two families, neither of which are biological: that of the Midnight Children's Conference and of his conventional family – the Sinais.

Though Saleem is technically born into the Sinai family, upon the revelation of Mary Pereira's crime, Saleem and the rest of his family wrestle with the concept of family and, ultimately, collectively agree that Saleem will remain Ahmed and Amina's son. Furthermore, Saleem willingly and at times forcefully generates the family of the Midnight Children's Conference, and eventually marries his midnight-sister and raises her son as his own. Saleem's families, like the Ipe family in *Small Things*, find themselves excluded from the general masses, and, at times, also turn on themselves. Eventually, both of his families are destroyed: the members of the Midnight Children's Conference – those who are not already dead – are detained and sterilized during the Emergency, an action that eliminates their supernatural powers, their abilities to conceive

children of their own, and, ultimately, their ties to each other; and the Sinais are killed when a bomb falls on their house during the Indo-Pakistan conflict. Even more important, however, especially when considering the ways in which the narrative of *Midnight's Children's* might have influenced *Small Things* or when considering the dialogue between the two texts, is Saleem's latent incestual affection for his sister, the nationally-coveted Jamila Singer. After his ill-fated attempt to reveal his feelings for Jamila, Saleem is separated from his family by their deaths and war and, after an accident with his mother's silver spittoon, simply forgets who he is.

Ultimately, at the conclusion of Rushdie's novel, we are left with Saleem's vision of his own death, one that is most simply a regurgitation of his past experiences, real or imagined. Rushdie has left us then with no real vision of the future except as a recycling of the past, and thus asks the question, "What now?" Seen through the lens of this study, Rushdie's novel can be seen to point to the necessity of the family community in preserving connectivity among people. Saleem, having learnt of his unusual parentage and grappling with his own biological discontinuity from his parents and sister, attempts to redefine his relationship with them through his incestual feelings for his sister. His actions are stunted, however, and though he has a vaguely sexual experience with his Aunt Pia, he never becomes fully connected with his sister, and she disappears into the depths of war, unable to serve her purpose to Saleem in his life story.

As seen as an answer to Rushdie's novel, the incestual act that takes place between twins Estha and Rahel at the conclusion of *Small Things* seems to provide readers with a different vision of family, one that ends with the word, "Tomorrow" (321). In stark contrast to Saleem's death at the end of *Midnight's Children*, Roy chooses to end

her novel with a real hope of the future. Though Ammu's expectation of what "tomorrow" will look like is tragically inaccurate, and one can assume that Estha and Rahel's union will be equally futile with possibly brutal repercussions as well, it is useful to assume that Estha and Rahel share a similar hope that, at least, they will have each other. Therefore, while the sex act that takes place between them is painful, it is also redemptive for the twins – if only because it gives them some hope for their futures and comfort in the community that they have formed – and in each other the twins find a certain solace that has escaped the rest of the members of their family, those who have managed to isolate themselves completely.

Because of the nature of the relationships between the Ipe family and their local community, between the twins and the rest of the family, and between Estha and Rahel themselves, Roy manages to justify the incest act that Estha and Rahel commit on the basis of its inevitability. It is inevitable because the twins find themselves isolated from any other larger scale community at a very young age, and consequently form a unique community between themselves, one that is terminated with Estha's Return and resurrected when Rahel returns to India twenty years later. Furthermore, though Estha and Rahel will undoubtedly pay for their disobedience of the Love Laws, they willingly commit the act of incest according to their own rules because of their insufferable desire to form a community of their own, one in which they are the only members.

Ultimately, these two novels and the families whose lives they chronicle seem to argue for the redemptive quality of community, and the lengths to which people will go just to feel that they are not alone. Even though the publications of the novels themselves

are separated by twenty years and their stories together span well over half a century, one can see between them an obvious connection and a movement away from the madness and inescapability of isolation in Rushdie's novel and toward a calmer, more proscriptive plan for unification in Roy's. It is clear, however, that even if unity was unfathomable for Rushdie, for Roy – and perhaps for the unwritten legacies of postcolonial literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – unity is no longer impossible; it is unavoidable.

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