

# Interactive Retelling of Midnight's Children

INTERACTION DESIGN - PROJECT III

SHREYA GUPTA

156330006

GUIDE:

Prof. Venkatesh Rajamanickam



INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTRE (IDC)  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, BOMBAY  
2017



# DECLARATION

I declare that this written document represents my ideas in my own words and where others ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources.

I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/ source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

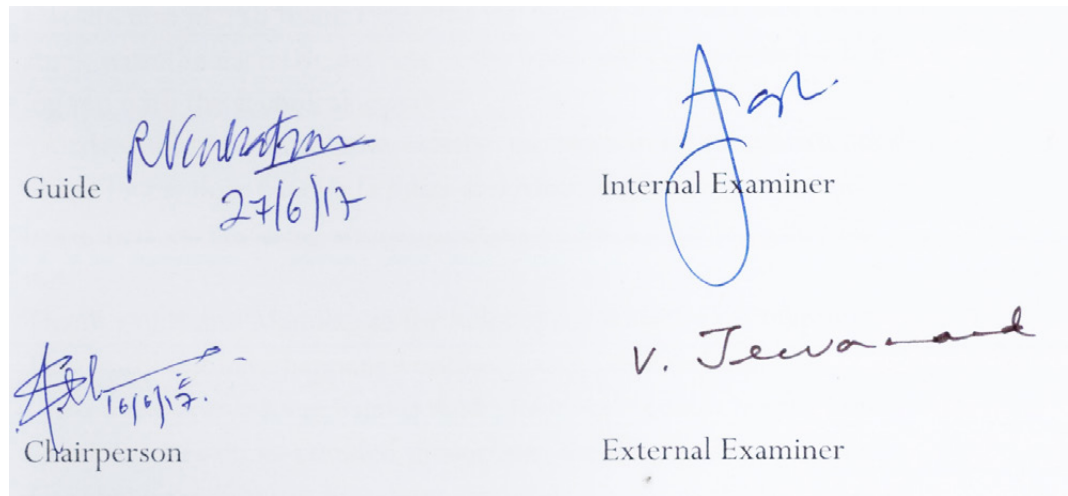
SHREYA GUPTA  
Industrial Design Centre,  
Indian Institute of Technology,  
Bombay  
June 5th, 2017

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shreya Gupta', written in a cursive style.



# APPROVAL SHEET

The project titled 'Interactive Retelling of Midnight's Children' by Shreya Gupta is approved for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of 'Master of Design' in Interaction Design.



Date 27/6/2017



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My first share of gratitude goes to my guide Prof Venkatesh for placing faith in me and not only guiding me in this project but also for having me here at IDC.

I would also like to thank Prof Alka for helping me whenever I was stuck with the narrative aspects of the book and Prof Jayesh for helping me with the technical aspects.

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Thank you Rahul Manoharan for helping me with the VR mapping. This could not have happened without your valuable help.

I also want to thank my friends Salik, Tahir and Harshit for the emotional support they extended throughout the length of the project.

The project would not have been completed without the tremendous support of Neha who helped me emotionally as well as helping me with ideation, narratives, and data parsing. A mighty thanks to her for believing in me throughout.

And finally a heartfelt gratitude to my parents and siblings who love me unconditionally.

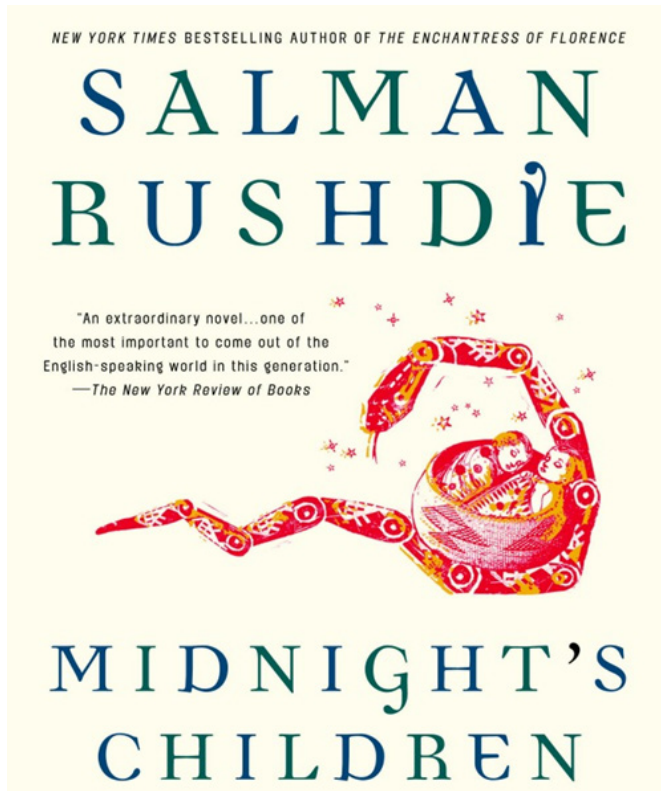
And of course, thanks to Salman Rushdie for writing a splendid book that was the basis of the project.



*“I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred.”*

- Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*





## ABSTRACT

The project aims at retelling the story of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in an interactive medium by remediating the events described in the book into spaces. The intention was to immerse the reader in the life of Saleem, the protagonist, such that the story could evoke empathy and nostalgia. Thus Virtual Reality was chosen as the form. A mansion was designed that is an abstraction of Saleem's mind. Each room in it is an event or a memory that shaped his life. Artefacts from the book were recognised that connect these events/rooms with each other. The user experiences the VR mansion from Saleem's perspective and travels from one room to another using these artefacts as teleporting devices.



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# INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been practised in various forms throughout history. Right from cave paintings to religious texts and scriptures, stories have been used as methods of documentation, preservation of history, entertainment, and conveying messages and meanings. In the current scenario literature and cinema have been some of the most dominant and wide reaching forms of storytelling. With the advent of the internet and personal computers, interactivity has taken a front seat in engaging people with stories in more immersive ways.

The aim of the project is to replicate a popular work of literary fiction into an interactive medium. The idea is to convey the story through new media such that the essence and the message remains intact, but the form changes in order to add to the interactivity. The process is called remediation[9] where a story changes in order to adjust to a new medium.

Virtual reality is chosen as the medium here as it is known for its high empathy quotient and immersion.

## Initial Objectives

- Parsing the literature to map the culture and experience of Mumbai.
- Arriving at interesting insights through data visualisation, breaking the linearity of the books, and other methods.
- Using the above to enrich the reader's experience of the city. The project is also intended for people who have not read these books, so that they too can get the gist of the book.

## Current Objectives

- Parsing the literature to map the events taking place in the book across the Indian Subcontinent, mapping the frequency and importance of the characters, etc.
- Arriving at interesting insights by breaking the linearity of the books, finding common threads linking the chapters, using the above to enrich the reader's experience of the novel.
- Attempting to provide a template for similar kind of analysis for other works of fiction.
- Literature has always fascinated me. I have always been smitten by the power of the written word. However, films and theater have been the only other media to relive the written stories.
- I took this project in order to explore storytelling in an alternate medium. I wished to learn the intricacies of storytelling and how the story changes with media.

## **Motivation**

Midnight's Children is an immensely popular work of fiction from the last century. While a lot of people have read the book, it also features in the bucket-list of a lot of readers who have not. The book excited me because the plot is heavily driven by the protagonist's own opinions on the world and his surroundings. It lists down his angst, anxieties, confusions and identity crisis. Also, it is discussed across academia mainly in terms of its political undertone and fragmented writing style. Hardly anyone has discussed it with respect to its themes of recurrence and memories.

# DECIDING ON A BOOK

## Available Material

The Guardian released its list of “most popular books based in Mumbai” in the year 2012. It features the following books:

1. The Moor’s Last Sigh, Salman Rushdie, 1995
2. Shantaram, Gregory David Roberts, 2003
3. Family Matters, Rohinton Mistry, 2002
4. Breathless in Bombay, Murzban F Shroff, 2009
5. Maximum City: Bombay Lost & Found, Suketu Mehta, 2004
6. Bombay Meri Jaan, Jerry Pinto & Naresh Fernandes, 2003
7. Love & Longing in Bombay, Vikram Chandra, 1997
8. Zero Point Bombay: In and Around Horniman Circle, Kamala Ganesh, Usha Thakkar, Gita Chadha, 2008
9. Ravan & Eddie, Kiran Nagarkar, 1994
10. Midnight’s Children, Salman Rushdie, 1981

The idea is to choose one novel from the above list and visualize its content. The intention is also to see if the template for visualisation works for other books in the list.

## Method

1. Reading excerpts
2. Reading commentaries and essays
3. Talking to other readers
4. Reading two books

## Selection Criteria

1. Should have a story
2. Should have a lot of characters
3. Should have a lot of spaces
4. Should be descriptive
5. Should be popular
6. Should be short

## Why Midnight’s Children?

Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie fulfills most of the above criteria except that it is very long (533 pages). Also, it is high on imagery, making it rich with ideas for visualisation.

Midnight’s Children was the winner of the Booker prize in 1981, and the Best of the Bookers prize twice in the years 1993 and 2008. With its universal popularity and literary honors, it seemed relevant to take it up for retelling.

### Interesting Features of the Book

The timeline of the book is nonlinear with a lot of incidental jumps into the past and the future events.

It has a vast stretch of locations strewn throughout the map.

It also long list of characters across five generations and across the vast mass of the Indian subcontinent.

Also, a good amount of tangible and intangible artefacts not only make the narrative richer and complex, but also put ‘recurrence’ as

an important theme to play with.

Apart from the story's timeline, it has a parallel timeline of actual historical events that have a strong correlation with the events happening in the protagonist's life.

The book is high on nostalgia and reminiscing.

The complications give a scope for simplification, and hence make visualisation more relevant. [1]

# DESIGN DISCUSSIONS

## **Approach**

Plotting locations of the story on the map.

Creating an interconnection of all the chapters since they are not just connected linearly.

Visualizing the occurrences of characters through the chapters.

Plotting the locations of the other Midnight's children

Plotting a simplified timeline of the story and the historical timeline parallel with it.

Narrating the story from the perspectives of certain recurring artefacts.

## **Methods**

Parsing the data in an excel sheet, suggesting various parameters to work upon.

Creating a priority list of characters that drive the plot.

Reading essays and commentaries on the book from various sources.

[4]



# MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN- THE SYNOPSIS

The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, was born on the stroke of the midnight hour right when India achieved independence on 15th August, 1947. His life gets mirrored in the events taking place in his country. He also discovers his telepathic connection with a thousand other kids that were born in the first hour of India's independence.

The story starts in Kashmir and meanders through Amritsar, Agra, Delhi, Mumbai, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Dacca and runs through five generations, spanning across six decades. Saleem struggles with his identity, as to who are his parents. He also struggles with the ideas of love and its loss. And just like every hero, he even identifies his arch rival.

The book is about fate, identities, and how destiny can play more magic than magic itself.

The genre of the novel is magical realism. It is a literary genre or style that incorporates fantastic or mythical elements into otherwise realistic fiction [7].

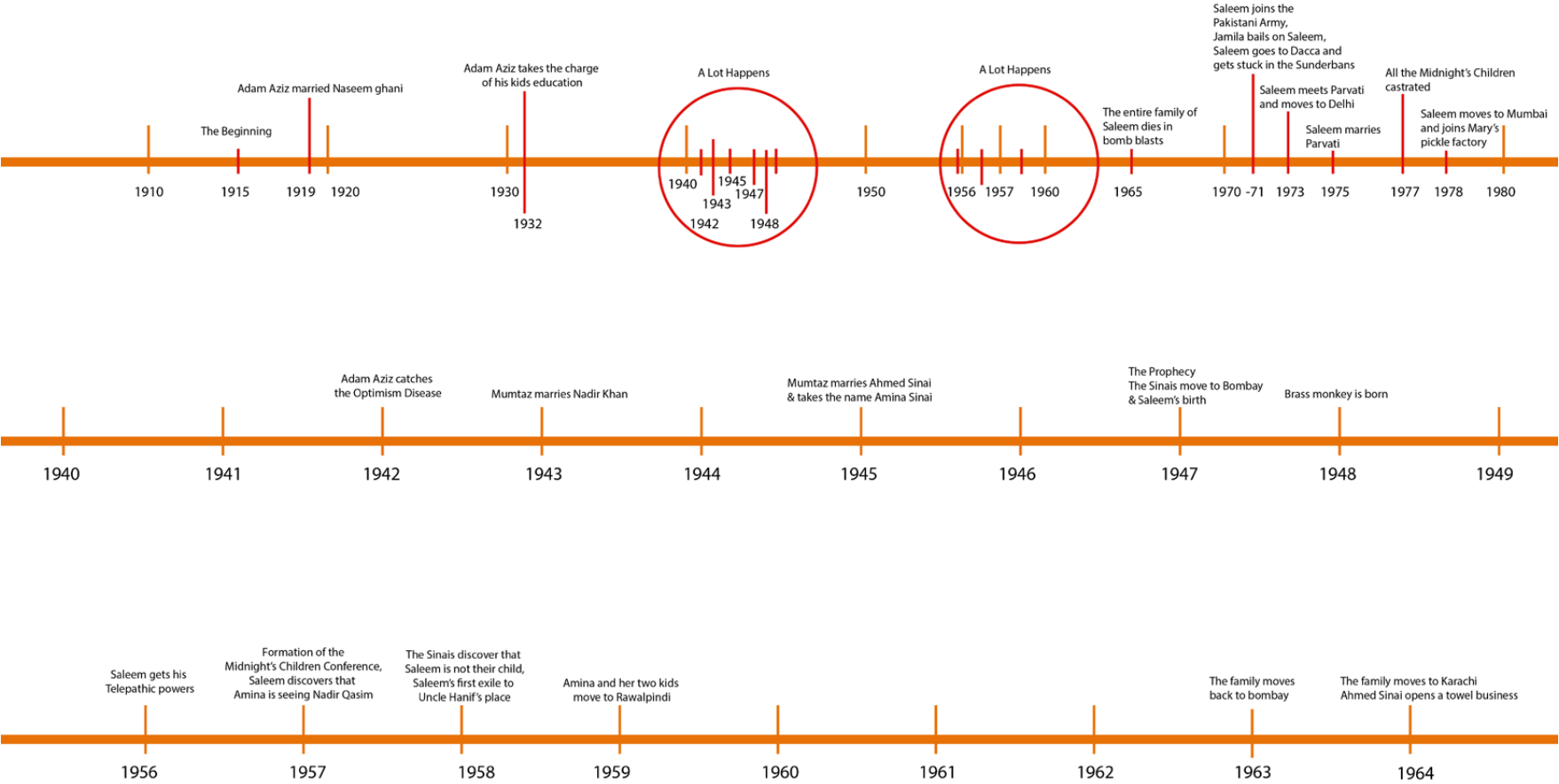


# THE DATA COLLECTION

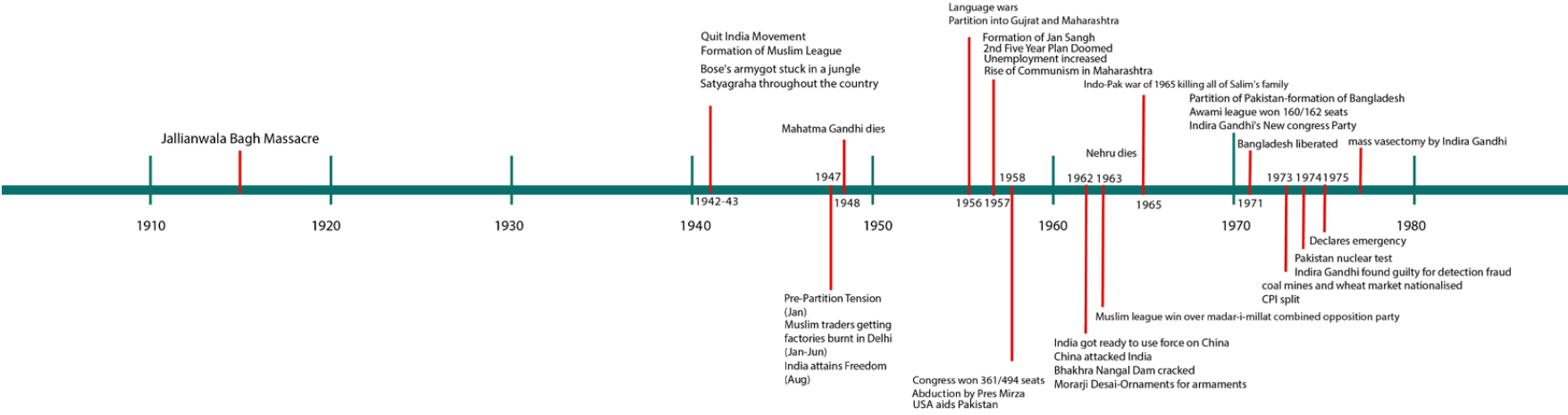
No.	Chapter Title	Characters Appearing	Characters Mentioned	Location	Time	Artefacts	Historical Timeline	Listeners
1	The Perforated Sheet	Adam Aziz, Naseem Aziz, Tai, Ghani, Adam's mot	Brass monkey, Hanif, En	Kashmir	1915	perforated sheet, rubies & diamonds, Legendary Nose, Sankaracharya hill		
2	Mercurochrome	Adam Aziz, Naseem Aziz, Tai, Ghani, Adam's mot	Brass monkey, Amina, al	Kashmir, Amritsa	1916-1919	merchurochrome, perfora	Jallianwala Bagh Massacre	Padma
3	Hit-the-Spittoon	Adam Aziz, Rev Mother, Nadir Khan, Hummingbin --		Agra	1942,	Silver Spittoon, made in Ir	Quit India Movement Foratic	Padma
4	Under the Carpet	Adam Aziz, Rev Mother, Nadir Khan, Emerald, Mu	Hummingbird,	Agra	1942-43, 1945	Silver Spittoon, undergro	Bose's armygot stuck in a ju	Padma
5	A Public Announcement	Adam Aziz, Rev Mother, Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinz	Nadir Khan	Agra, Old Delhi	Jan, 1947	Green Tin Trunk	Pre-partition tension, subhat	Padma
6	Many-headed Monsters	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Lifafa Das, Cousin Zo	Dr Narlikar, Tai, Zulfi, Ra	Old Delhi (red fo	jan-jun 1947	Fisherman's Pointed Fing	Muslim traders getting factor	Padma
7	Methworld	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, William Methworld, Hor	Ismail Ibrahim, Ishaq Ibrz	Bombay	jun-aug 1947	Times of India	--	Padma
8	Tick, Tock	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, William Methworld, Mu	Tai, Heidelberg, Emerald	Bombay	August 1947	rubies & diamonds, Leger	India gains freedom	Padma
9	The Fisherman's Pointing Finger	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Musa, Wee Willie Wini	Adam Aziz, Zohra,	Bombay	1947, 1954	perforated sheet, nehru's	Bombay land reclamation dr	Padma
10	Snakes and Ladders	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Musa, Mary Pereira,	C Mustapha, Hanif, Rashid	Bombay	1948	Snakes and ladder, Silver	Mahatma Gandhi dies	None
11	Accident in a Washing-chest	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Dr	Narfi Nadir Khan, Ramram Se	Bombay	1956	Diamonds for tears, Silver --		None
12	All-India Radio	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	Rani of Cooch Naheen, t	Bombay	1956		Language wars, Partition int	None
13	Love in Bombay	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	Parvati, Padma,	Bombay, Agra	1957	Arjuna Indiabike, Perforat	Formation of Jan Sangh	None
14	My Tenth Birthday	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	William Methworld, Jose	Bombay	1957	Fictional Family curse, Pic	2nd Five Year Plan Doomed	Padma
15	At the Pioneer Cafe	Amina Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass Monkey, Sonny,	WWW, Hummingbird	Bombay	1957	Pioneer Cafe, Nose kneer	Rise of Communism in Mahi	Padma, Son, Unknown person
16	Alpha and Omega	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	WWW,	Bombay	1958	the broken finger of salee	--	Padma, Son, Unknown person
17	The Kolynos Kid	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Hanif, P	Evelyn Burns, Masha Mir	Marine Drive, Bo	1958	Nehru's Letter, Pioneer ce	--	Padma, Son, Unknown person
18	Commander Sabarmati's Baton	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	Jimmy Kapadia, Pia, Dr I	Bombay	August 1958	Pioneer Cafe,	--	Padma, Son, Unknown person
19	Revelations	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Mary Pereira, Brass M	Homi catrack, Hanif, tai,	Bombay, Kashmi	1958, 1964	mercurochrome, Sankara	--	Padma, Son, Unknown person
20	Movements Performed by Pepperboats	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Rev Mother, Brass Mo	Shiva, Midnight's childrei	Rawalpindi	late 1958- sep 15	tin globe, Sabarmati boat	Abduction by Pres Mirza, Cc	Padma, Son, Unknown person
21	Drainage and the Desert	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Alice Pereira, Jamila S	Shiva, Midnight's childrei	Bombay	1962-1963	washing chest, tin globe, i	India got ready to use force	Padma, Son, Unknown person
22	Jamila Singer	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Alia, Jamila Singer, Tai	Shiva, adam aziz, mrs br	Karachi	1963-64	Lambretta scooter, umbliit	Muslim league win over mac	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
23	How Saleem Achieved Purity	Amina Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, Alia, Jamila Singer, Re	mary pereira, ramram se	Karachi	Sep 22 1965	tick tock, Sankaracharya	nehru dies (1964) Indo-Pak war of 1965 killing	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
24	The Buddha	Aycooba, Farooq, Shaheed, brig iskander,	Resham Bibi, Parvati, W	Pakistan border,	1970-1971		Partition of Pakistan-formati Awami league won 160/162	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
25	In the Sunderbans	Aycooba, Farooq, Shaheed, Sam Manekshaw	mustapha, parvati, jamilz	sunderbans	1971	Silver Spittoon, lost finger	--	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
26	Sam and the Tiger	Aycooba, Farooq, Shaheed, Sam Manekshaw, Pict	Brass monkey, Shiva, Mi	Dacca	Dec 1971	Silver Spittoon, Washing c	Bangladesh liberated	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
27	The Shadow of the Mosque	Picture Singh, parvati, Mustapha, Resham Bibi, sc	Shiva, Amina Sinai, Ahm	Delhi	dec 1971-1973	Alpha Omega, Silver Spitt	1973 coal mines and wheat CPI split	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
28	A Wedding	Picture Singh, parvati, Resham Bibi, Shiva, Roshz	Nadir Khan, Naseem azi	Delhi	1974-1975	Perforated Sheet, Pione	May 1974 Pakistan nuclear Indira Gandhi found guilty fo	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
29	Midnight	Picture Singh, parvati, Shiva, Adam Sinai,	Zulfikar, Schaapsteker, V	Delhi, Banaras	1975-1977	Fisherman's pointed finge	1977 mass vasectomy by In	Padma, Son, Mrs Braganza
30	Abacadabra	Picture Singh, Adam Sinai, Mary Pereira, Durga,	Roshanara Shetty, Comr	Delhi, Bombay		Silver Spittoon, Green Ch	--	Padma, Son, Mary Pereira

The data for the project was parsed on an excel sheet with respect to the fields mentioned in the sheet screenshot above.

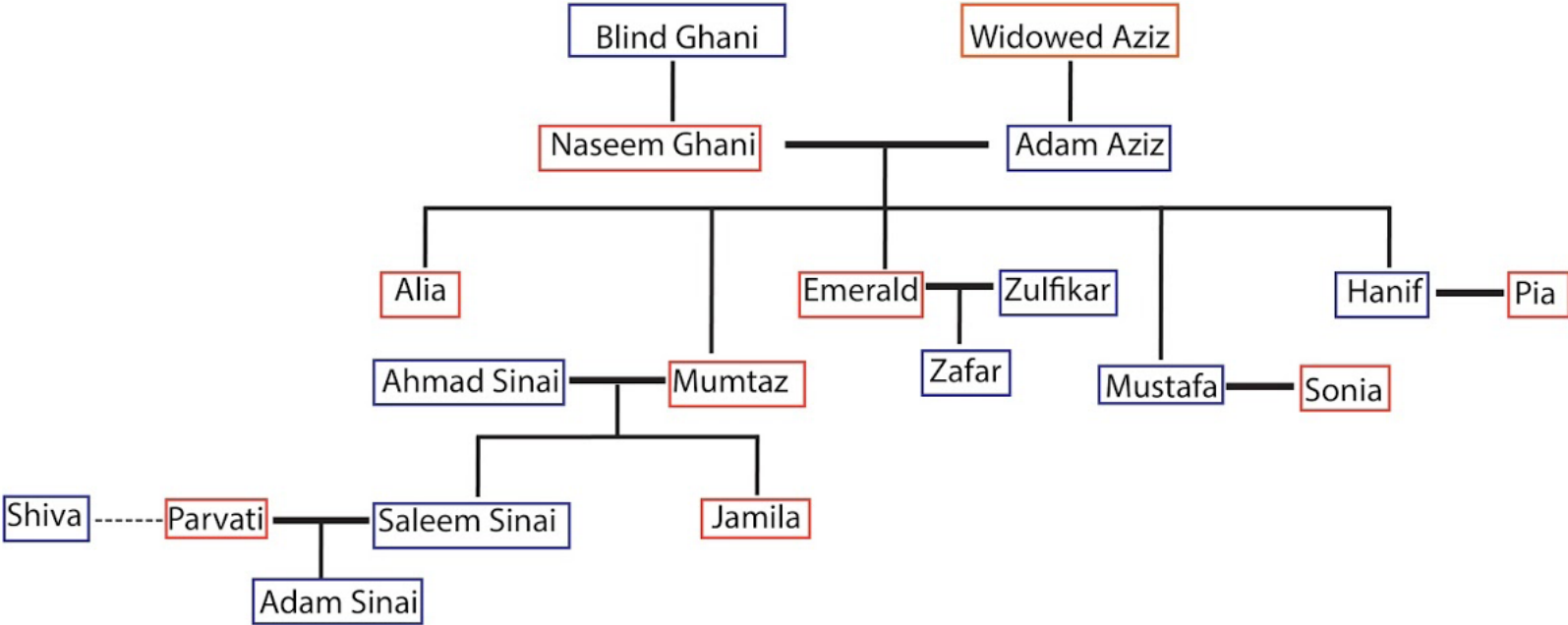
# THE TIMELINE



# THE HISTORICAL PARALLEL TIMELINE



# THE FAMILY TREE

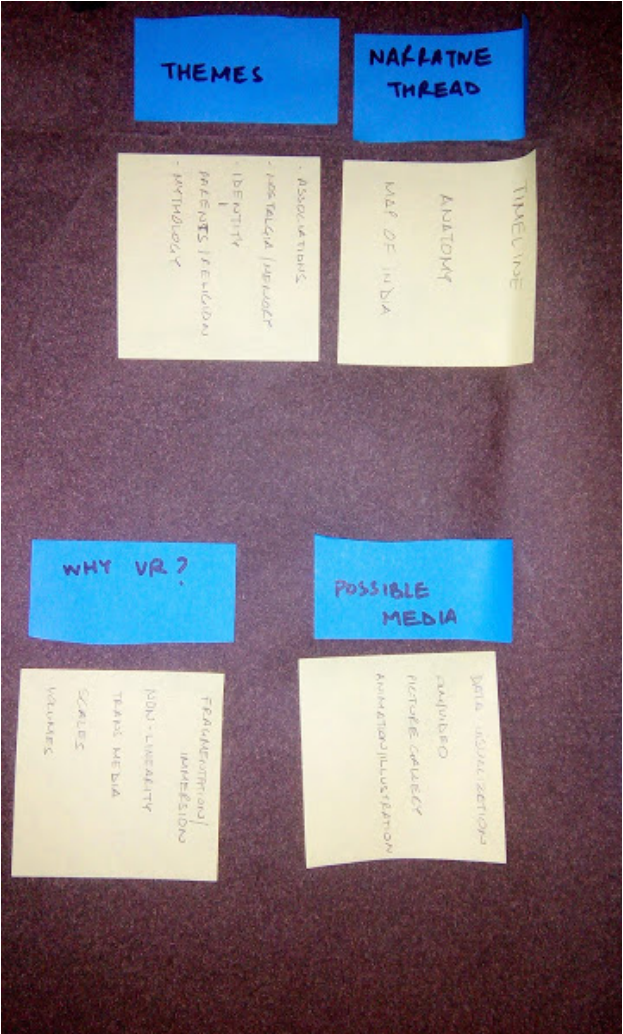


# THE LOCATIONS



The story takes place through three countries and across numerous cities, beginning from sriNagar in Kashmir in the year 1915. It then goes through Amritsar, Agra, Delhi, Mumbai (then Bombay), Rawalpindi, Karachi, Dacca, and Banaras. Most of the book takes place in Mumbai.

# CARD SORTING



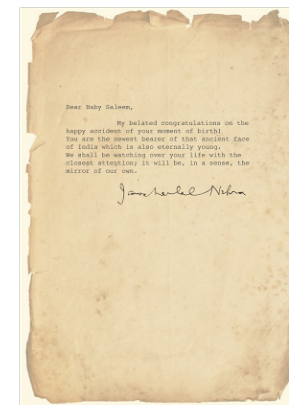
# MY PERSONAL TAKEAWAY FROM THE BOOK

Midnight's Children, for me, was a story of objects and the memories associated with them. The way the protagonist Saleem, associates the same old objects to the subsequent years of his life's events much till his later years was the highlight of the book for me.

The recurrence of an object such as the perforated sheet, an artefact mentioned in the first chapter, till the last chapter- sixty years later, gets one more immersed in the story. This is because one can feel the passage of time and the baggage of memories and events that affected Saleem's life.

In fact, objects such as the silver spittoon and the memory such as that of the Pioneer Cafe, are pivotal to the advancement of the plot. The recurrence of artefacts such as the painting of the Fisherman's Pointed Finger, or Nehru's Letter to Saleem on his birth, are critical in suggesting the philosophical aspects of the events that unfold through his life.

In this project, I have intended to retell the story of Midnight's Children through these artefacts. In doing so, the realisation of its nonlinearity became starker. The story does not necessarily need a timeline if it has to be told through these objects. In fact, the journey of all the major characters can be traced through these artefacts. The project aims at this very approach.



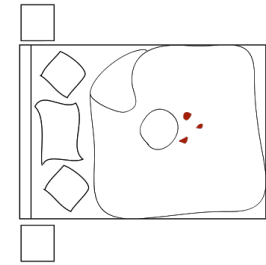
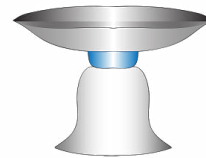


# ARTEFACTS

The book is strewn with recurring objects and memories throughout. However, there are a few prominent ones which drive the narrative. They are enlisted as under:

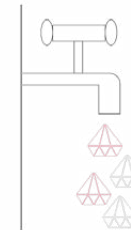
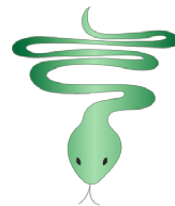
## The Physical Objects:

- The Perforated Sheet
- The Silver Spittoon
- Nehru's letter on Saleem's Birthday
- Fisherman's Pointing Finger
- Washing Chest
- Tin Globe



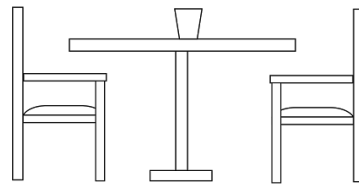
## The Metaphors:

- Snakes
- Pickles
- Diamonds and Rubies
- Mercurochrome



## Memory:

- Pioneer Cafe





# STORIES AS DATA: SECONDARY RESEARCH

## Understanding Settings

The setting of a story can play a pivotal role in unfolding the narrative. The space described by the writer can have various forms, such as:

- Are they real, imagined or transformed?
- Are they replaceable?
- Do they have a specific activity or phenomenon taking place?

What a setting does is that it contributes to the development of the characters, offers multi-sensory experience for the reader and, thus, becomes integral to the narrative.

The space, per se, can be of many kinds, such as:

- Fragmentary
- With vague boundaries
- It could be really minuscule with respect to the city
- The place might have changed in the present time
- The place could be fantastical
- The author can transform or remodel the space. [2]

## Distant Reading and Literary Cartography

Parsing literature through maps has always been a way to look at the text from afar. It helps in eliminating excess details and provide a sharper sense of the interconnections between characters and spaces. Literary maps help in simplifying the text for analysis by providing a better sense of space and geography.[3]

Depicting places and routes on maps to indicate the trajectory of movement of characters is often an effective way of visualising the text. A text such as the *Midnight's Children* is rich with places and locations that play a pivotal role in the narrative.

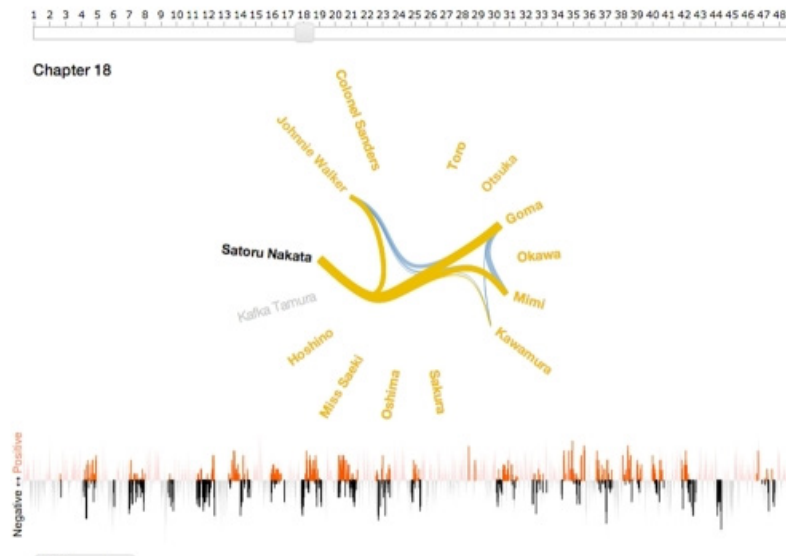
## Data Visualisation of Literature

Literary Data is visualised through various forms. Graphs, trees, maps, etc are some ways of depicting the data in simple ways. These projects have been considered for study as they are an alternate way to retell a story. Also, data visualisation of narrative structures help understand abstraction of the story into very basic visuals such that one can capture subtexts and read between the lines.

### Visualization of Narrative Structure

The image depicts character relations of the book 'Kafka on the Shore' by Haruki Murakami. It is a dynamic visualisation of how the characters are appearing with respect to each other through various chapters. A color-coded sentiment plot shows the emotional strength and valence of each sentence. The text of the original sentences is revealed by hovering over the sentence bars below. Clicking on the character names in the graph reveals the emotional path of each character through the book. This highlights the corresponding sentences in the sentiment plot where that character appears. [5]

The project was implemented on two more books, namely: the Hobbit by JRR Tolkien and The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams.



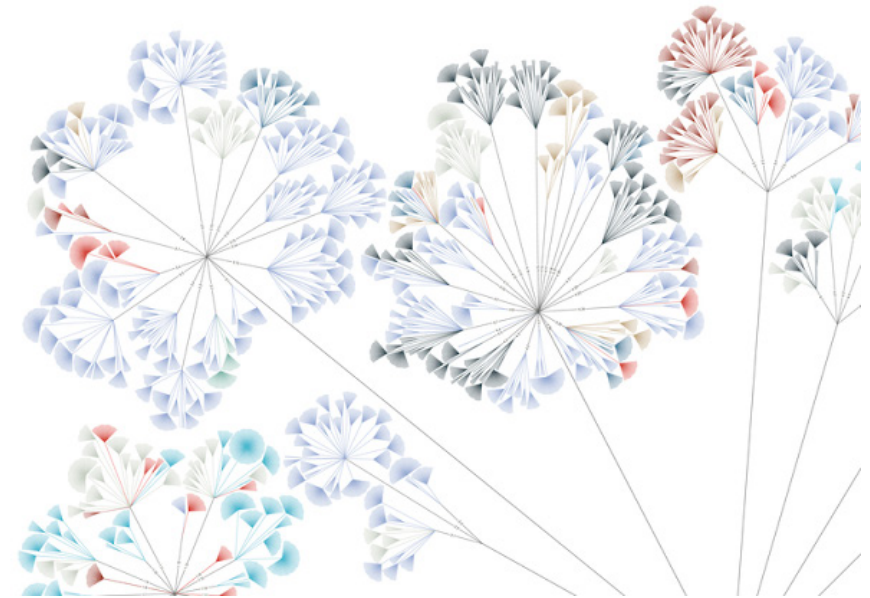
### **Writing Without Words**

Stefanie Posavec's project on Jack Kerouac's bestseller 'On the Road' depicts text as a 'literary organism'.

Each chapter is broken down into paragraphs, paragraphs into sentences, sentences into words. Each of these individual entities have been assigned a color according to the mood.

The image shows a portion of the diagram thus formed. It looks like a plant and the designer, thus, calls the outcome a 'literary organism'. [6]

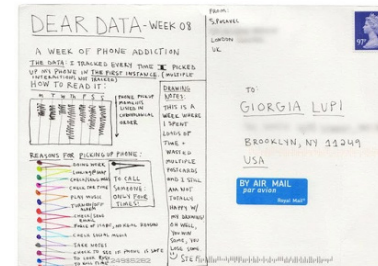
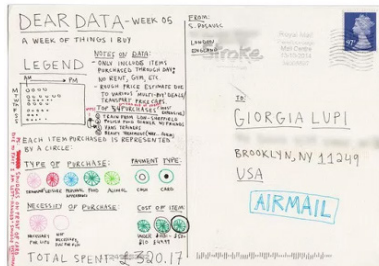
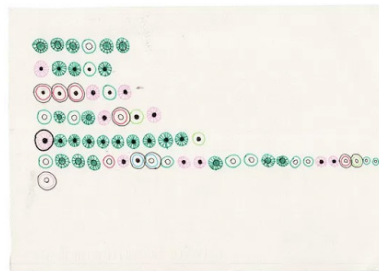
The method to gather the data for the project was manual, where Stephanie counted words and sentences and used highlighters and markers, all by hand. The graphics were also created manually on Adobe Illustrator instead of an information visualization softwares.



## Dear Data

Dear Data is a project by Stefanie Posavec, an American designer in London and Giogia Lupi, an Italian designer in New York. The two women exchanged postcards containing weekly data visualization made in hand of everyday things such as their laughter patterns, their decision making patterns, the things they purchased, their phone addiction, etc. They carried this on for 52 weeks, noting routine phenomenon through data viz in postcards. [8]

Quantifying the subtle and mundane information meticulously, and creating interesting visuals got these postcards a permanent position in the MOMA New York collection.



# IMMERSIVE AND INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING: SECONDARY RESEARCH

## **Imago: A Virtual Reality Short film**

Imago is a 9 minute VR short film from the perspective of a wheelchair bound man called Sam who used to be a dancer before he contracted the Locked In Syndrome. The project aims to evoke empathy towards people like Sam. However, the perspective of such a person makes the viewer bound to inactivity, which syncs with the inability of the VR live action storytelling for interactivity.

The narrative, however, explores the emotional journey through live action dance sequences, Sam's house and his family members,. The movie culminates into a surreal space with white backgrounds and butterflies.

The film explores the unacknowledged life of Sam, with some characters looking him in the eye while others ignoring him.

The final act that has abstract dots around the viewer, tries to evoke a sense of calm. In a situation like this, acknowledgement does not matter. The dots transform into butterflies in a rather surrealistic manner. The viewers were found to report a feeling of calmness in this act [10]



## A Virtual reality Retelling of Madame Bovary

The project is a retelling Madame Bovary, a 19th century French classic by Gustave Flaubert. The reason for choosing this book is because the protagonist, Emma bovary is so engrossed in the books she reads that they seem to appear to her as reality. VR as a medium, can help retell the story as it can help blur the boundaries between real and fiction.

The project, however, intends to explore the possibility of retelling a story in completely immersive medium. The novel acts as a baseline narrative. [11]

In a particular scene, where a married Emma asks her lover Rudolphe to run away with her, the latter responds in negative expressing concern, anger, disdain, fear of judgement. The user gets these options for response, all of which would trigger feelings in Emma that drives the plot further. The user must, therefore, be familiar with the baseline plot and dialogues before engaging with the medium.

The image shows the preconditioning, and possible reactions of Emma.

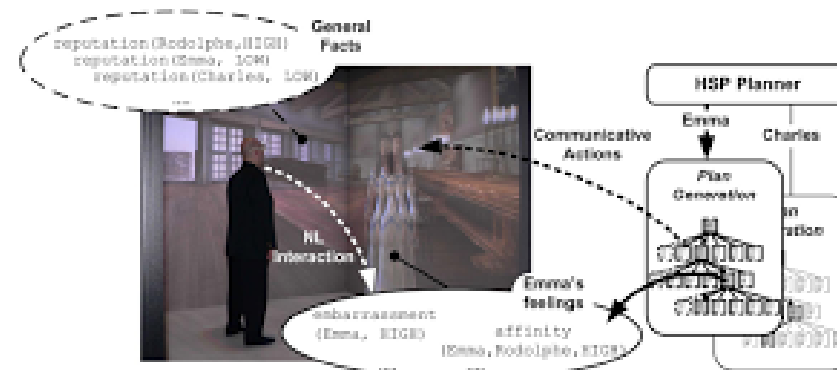


Figure 4: Emotional Planning for Interactive Storytelling: narrative states are based on characters' feelings.

# INSPIRATION

## The Narrative of Max Payne

The private eye monologue of Max Payne was the first virtual world story that ever impressed me as a child. The narrative is driven forward by the Film Noir[12] kind of narration that is taking place in Max's head. The narration also gives cues to the player as to how to proceed with the gameplay.

*"The past is a gaping hole. You try to run from it, but the more you run, the deeper, more terrible it grows behind you, its edges yawning at your heels. Your only chance is to turn around and face it. But it's like looking down into the grave of your love, or kissing the mouth of a gun, a bullet trembling in its dark nest, ready to blow your head off"*

The abovementioned quote is the kind of narration that goes in Max's head and gets the player more immersed in the game. The player tends to empathise with his character and that makes Max Payne a popular game with respect to narrative style and empathy factor. Also, the game gives choice to the player like killing the wounded enemy or not[13]. This kind of choice making render the game more immersive as the player not only get their emotions invoked but also determine the gameplay through these choices. Through the voices in his head, the player also gets the cues to move in the correct direct with respect to the gameplay. It is better than direct instructions like "move right" or move" forward".

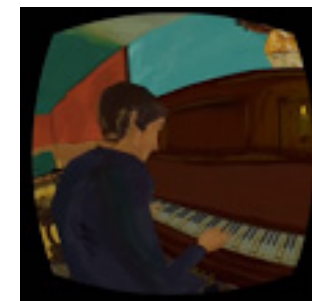
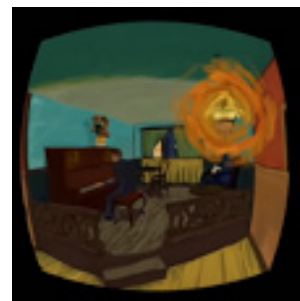


### **Recreation of van Gogh's painting in Virtual Reality**

In January 2017, I got the chance to view Vincent van Gogh's painting in virtual reality at an event conducted at the Bombay Art Society in Bandra.

The project was a rendition by animator Mackenzie Cauley who extrapolated van Gogh's painting *The Night Cafe* into a three-dimensional VR environment. The viewer could experience the painting in 360-degree and can walk through the cafe that is rendered in van Gogh's signature painting style.

The animator has, however, softened the perspectives in the film so as to avoid irritation in the head of the viewer. A lot of extra shots like the piano player have been added to the scene in order to detail out spaces beyond the visible painting.





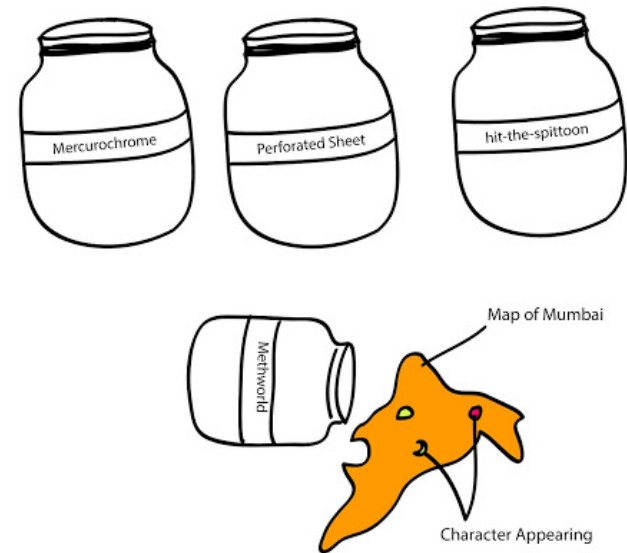
## Idea 2

Saleem, in the last chapter, is shown to be working in a pickle factory. He is also writing his story and makes a pickle jar out of each chapter.

The idea is to depict each chapter through a pickle bottle with its constituent as the character appearing,

The spillage is in the shape of the map of the city in which the chapter occur,

The color would symbolizes the mood and dominant emotion.



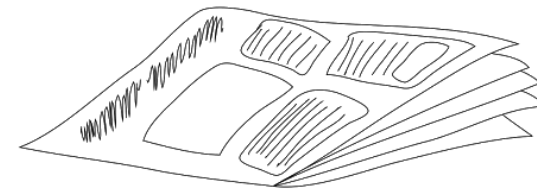
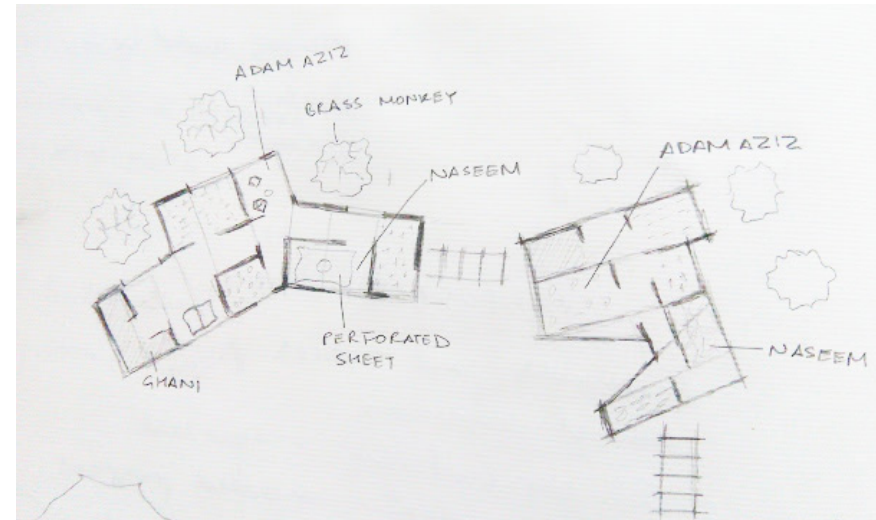
### Idea 3

The idea is to represent each chapter in the form of plans or sections of a house.

It is an abstraction of each chapter, depicted in the form of rooms that represent the characters appearing in the chapter.

The trees represent the characters mentioned, while the shape of the plan is roughly the map of the city in which the chapter takes place. The furniture and objects are the artefacts that recur throughout the book. These are the portals that lead you to other chapters that have these same artefacts. One completes the whole book by using these portals as time jumps.

There is a newspaper lying in each space that reveals the news clipping of the real incidents happening in India at that point in time. Thus, it provides one with the historical timeline suggested in the book.



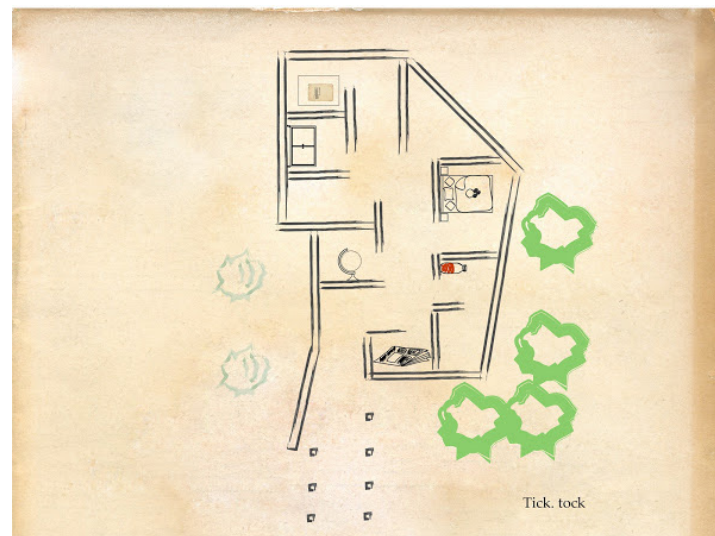
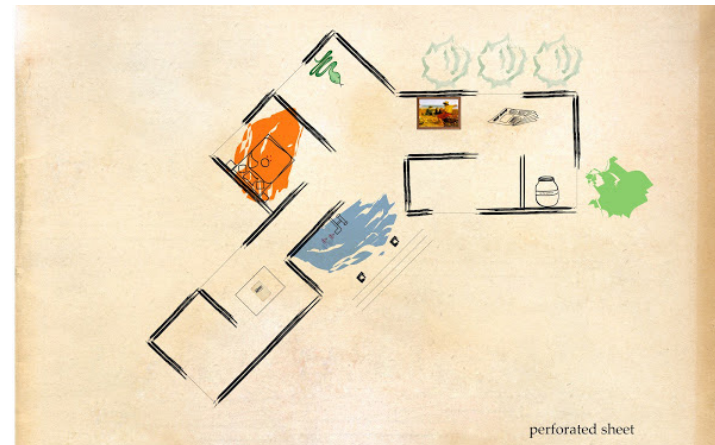


## WHY REPRESENTATION THROUGH SPACES?

Midnight's children is a story of people and objects, and the associations of the former with latter. To represent this through spaces is conducive because a space is where people and objects come together and interact. Not in memories, not in words, not in a box, but in spaces.

The concept was to tell the story of Midnight's Children through artefacts. Most of these artefacts were objects of daily life for Saleem. He was surrounded by them in his home. Thus, to recreate a house in order to abstract Saleem's state of mind at every stage in his life seemed like a reasonable option.

The images show chapter plans and the artefacts that they mention. These are the 1st and 8th chapters and have two common artefacts, namely the perforated sheet and Nehru's letter. Clicking on either of them in chapter one would lead you to chapter 8.





# WHY VIRTUAL REALITY?

Virtual reality is an immersive medium which has a scope of interactivity as well. With advent of gears like HTC vive, the length of the VR experience can be extended beyond a few minutes.

The book is based on the identity crisis of the protagonist and his memories associated with events, objects and places. VR gives a scope of immersion in ways that can incorporate abstract ideas and surreal imagery.

There is a scene in my rendition where Saleem has lost his memory and is lost in the forest. I have chosen this scene to free the user (who is viewing everything from Saleem's perspective) from the looping story of memories and events. The user can choose to stay in the virtual mansion that i have created for as long as they want, or they can make an exit by discovering a way out in that space that has the forest. The more time the user spends in the dense forest, the more the forest begins to clear. By the time it is more than five minutes, the forest is scanty enough to reveal a door that is an exit from the mansion.

The action of exiting is symbolic of Saleem's freedom from his mental turmoil and breaking the pattern of going back to the same old memories. The artefacts serve as the portals to those memories.

The place where the user enters after exiting from the mansion is the space of calmness and respite. Here a surrealistic and beautiful imagery can bring the user to rest.





# FINAL IDEA

## Approach

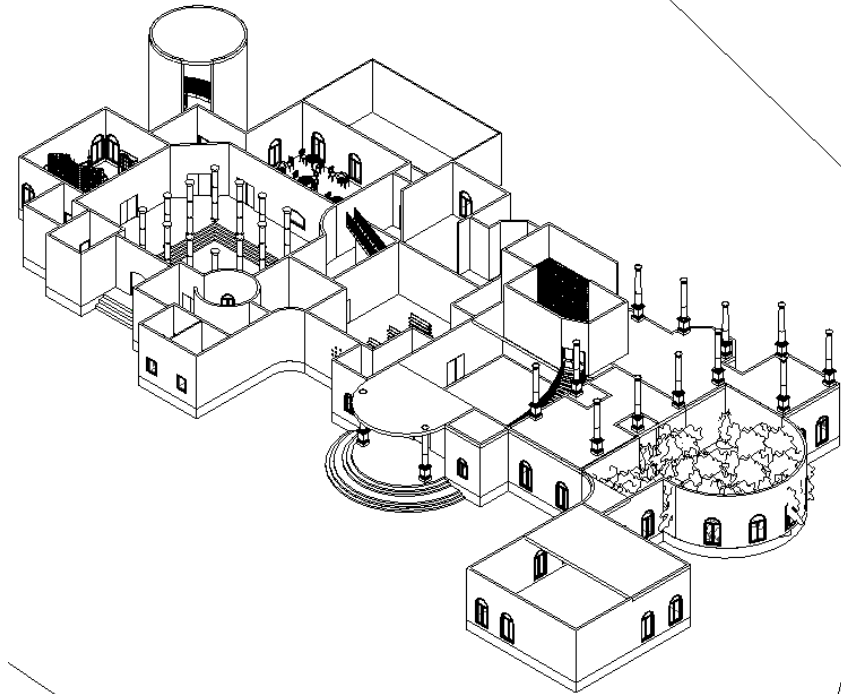
Most of the novel is about what goes on inside Saleem's head. Be it the voices of the Midnight Children or his personal opinions on people and events. To depict all this in an immersive way, I took the approach of depicting events and objects inside his headspace.

## Concept

I created a mansion that has various events that took place in Saleem's life depicted through individual rooms and spaces. These events are defined by certain objects or artefacts that are a common thread to the entire narrative of thirty chapters.

The mansion is essentially a collection of Saleem's memories. The defining events are taking place inside various rooms and the objects that trigger those memories are the portals that help the user traverse from one room to another.

The user is viewing everything from Saleem's perspective and the intention is to make them go through the same confusions, emotions and conflicts that were experienced by Saleem.



The list of artefacts and their corresponding associations with people, memory and Saleem. They also encapsulate the essence of each space designed in VR.

Artefact	City	People	Memory	Saleem's Traits or Emotions
perforated sheet	Srinagar	Adam Aziz, Naseem	Adam discovering his wife bit by bit	fragmentation
silver spittoon	Agra	Amina/Mumtaz	hit-the-spittoon game	reminder of his past life when he loses memory
ashing chest	Bombay	Amina/Mumtaz	Amina crying over Nadir, Saleem discovers his telepathic powers	saleem getting his telepathic powers, witnesses his mother's betrayal
Pioneer Cafe	Bombay	Amina, Qasim	Amina cheating on his family	Mother's infidelity
diamonds and rubies	Srinagar	Adam Aziz	Adam hits his knees on the ground and decides to adopt atheism	tears and blood are precious
fisherman's pointed finger	Bombay	Mary	Saleem's childhood room	nostalgia
Nehru's letter	Bombay	Nehru	letter from PM on saleem's birth	he felt important because PM acknowledged his birth
snakes	Delhi, Bombay, Sunderbans	Picture Singh, Scaapstekar	sunderbans, jaundice, delhi slums	snakes and ladders, snakes could be good
tin globe	Bombay	Jamila/Brass Monkey	TOI picture crumbled inside the globe	remnant of his life at Methwold Estate
mercurochrome	Amritsar	Adam Aziz	Jallianwala Bagh massacre	symbol of bloodshed

## The Beginning

The journey begins from the courtyard which is surrounded by all the spaces where Saleem's life events took place. The user can choose to enter any of the rooms to begin their exploration. Everything is from Saleem's perspective and the themes of the spaces evoke certain emotions which Saleem went through during the particular event.

From the rooms the user can traverse across other spaces by interacting with the artefacts that feature in the rooms. Most artefacts are common to more than two events. The shared artefacts connect two events. All the events are connected to each other through at least one of the artefacts.



### Scene X

Most of the novel is about what goes on inside Saleem's head. Be it the voices of the Midnight Children or his personal experiences with respect to the events happening nationwide.

One event is when Saleem discovers that his mother Amina Sinai sneakily goes to the pioneer Cafe where communists and extras in films gather. He discovers by hiding in the trunk of the car and follows her to the cafe to discover that she used to meet her ex husband Qasim who earlier used to be called Nadir Khan.

Saleem witnesses the meeting by peeping in through a window. The user here is supposed to witness the cafe area through one of the windows. The cafe is empty in the virtual space but is enough to evoke the memory of the actual event. As the user circumvents the cafe exterior to have a look through the windows, s/he falls down to the basement where Qasim and Amina (who were then called Nadir and Mumtaz respectively) lived as a couple in hiding while in Agra. the underground basement has the silver spittoon, the artefact that could then transport the user to another space that shares the spittoon as one of the artefacts.



### Scene Y

The scene is of Saleem's childhood bedroom in methwold estate, Bombay. It has all the artefacts of his childhood. The washing chest where he discovered his telepathic powers, the painting of fisherman's Pointed Finger, the perforated Sheet and the letter sent by Jawaharlal Nehru on his birth at the stroke of midnight on 15th August 1947.

The user can move around this room and interact with the various artefacts of the protagonist's childhood. Each of them can lead him to events that share that particular artefact.

The space is supposed to evoke emotions of calmness and nostalgia. The background music is Mary's lullaby which she sang to Saleem. The lullaby too is a recurring theme.

If say, for example, the user interacts with the washing chest, s/he could be transported to the event called the pioneer cafe that has been described in scene X.





# EVALUATION METHOD

The design is expected to be evaluated on DDS on people who have read the book. Questions that would be asked after the experience are as follows:

**Did you manage to get through all the rooms?** This question is asked in order to test the navigation design of the experience. A good experience would be when a user can easily traverse through all the spaces.

**Were you able to recognise all the rooms?** This question intends to figure out if the representation was clear enough.

**Did you manage to get out of the mansion?** This question is asked as it is the personal intention of the designer to give an alternate ending to the story. Saleem is caught in the loop of his memories in the book. This rendition can help Saleem liberate from the journey and start afresh.

**Did you feel stuck in a particular room? For how long?** This question is asked in order to understand the engagement level of the user with a particular space. It can also reflect the possible flaws in designing the experience.

**Did you get reminded of anything from your own personal experience while in a particular space?** This question is asked in order to understand if the design evoked empathy. The book revels in nostalgia and if the design could bring out the same in the user, it would be a success for the designer.

**What aspect of the book did you feel was missing in the experience?** This question is asked in order to understand the user's takeaway from the book and how different was it from the designer's. Reading fiction is a subjective affair in terms the emotional journey. The intention is also to understand what objective detail the user found to be missing so as to enhance the project in future.



Name	Time since reading	What they remember from the book	What they recalled during the experience	What was missing	What worked	What did not
Aashimi	7 years	perforated sheet, South Bombay, laundry basket, hit-the-spittoon game, Indira Gandhi, political prisoners	Pioneer cafe	latter part of the book	the sound effects like "tryst with destiny"	the perforated sheet was not a good signifier, barren rooms
Kovid	8 years	Spittoon- memory loss, perforated sheet, fisherman's finger, Picture singh- the snake charmer, Bangladesh war, Delhi slum- memory regained, Ayah-the switch	Nehru's letter, shared perforated sheet, clock, Bombay house, the room in karachi, hospital	Delhi slums, telepathy not depicted	the cribs, Pioneer cafe, the Bombay room	the washing chest, the basement
Amruta	12 years	Sunderbans, the tower where he hid, Evelyn Bums, garden parties, gold fish pond, Jamila's radio shows	Pioneer cafe where his mother cheated with Qasim, Fisherman's painting, Hospital switch, Bombay room	-	the artefacts, the sound effects	barren rooms, the affordance of portals, lighting
Aparna	12 years	perforated sheet, Indira Gandhi and castration, Snake charmer. Picture Singh, Hospital swap, nose surgery, Shifting to pakistan and back, padma: the listener (akin to Arabian nights)	Perforated sheet reminded of kashmir, cafe: Bombay culture, Nehru's letter, Washing chest, spittoon	Independence euphoria, India gandhi, Snake charmer, Bangladesh war, gen Zulfikar, Midnight's children,	-	barren rooms, antiquity was missing, lighting



# SCOPE FOR FUTURE

The design has a lot of scope for enhancement in future. Some ideas are:

Telling the user about the amount of time spent experiencing a particular emotion, so that the user can get the idea of their own involvement with the book. A data visualisation of the time spent in each space could reveal patterns of user engagement.

The evaluation method would reveal missing plot lines. The future scope of work involves filling those blanks.

This method of representing stories in VR, ie. depiction of major events, can help visualise other works of fiction. Parsing data from books with respect to events and objects could be helpful in creating VR renditions of a lot of similar books.



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