



## THE ROLE OF ZOROASTRIANISM IN SHAPING SALMAN RUSHDIE'S ARTISTIC VISION AND IDENTITY: INSIGHTS FROM *MIDNIGHT CHILDREN*

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### Abstract:

This research explores Salman Rushdie's deep connection to his Zoroastrian roots and reveals how he reframes fundamental ideas in his writing. The approach, which focuses on books like *Midnight's Children*, highlights Zoroastrian-influenced themes of dualism, magic, and hybridity. The study reveals subtle levels of significance and creative vision by focusing on particular scenes and characters, providing new perspectives on how Rushdie handles his cultural and religious background. Rushdie's work *Midnight's Children*. Zoroaster, the prophet, established the ancient Persian religion known as Zoroastrianism, which focused a strong emphasis on the ideas of good versus evil, free will, and the eventual victory of good. Zoroastrianism plays a major role in the story since it shapes the attitudes, behaviors, and general thematic development of the characters. Saleem Sinai, the main character, was born on the very day that India gained its independence, and his links to Zoroastrianism represent the conflicting cultures and identities that exist in post-colonial India. The paper investigates the connections between Zoroastrianism and more general topics of history, identity, as well as the pursuit of meaning in an ever-changing world. Rushdie's utilization of Zoroastrianism highlights the richness and depth of the story. Zoroastrianism is included into Rushdie's writing to illustrate the great cultural diversity of India and to give the story more depth and complexity. Rushdie's Zoroastrian background profoundly informs his portrayal of characters and the exploration of themes within *Midnight's Children*. The novel becomes a canvas where Zoroastrian philosophy paints nuanced strokes, enriching the narrative tapestry. Rushdie incorporates Zoroastrian ideas of dualism, free will, and cyclical time into the story of *Midnight's Children*. And the story reveals how Salman Rushdie's artistic vision and identity were shaped by Zoroastrianism. *Midnight's Children* depicts the intricacies of Indian culture and past via its numerous levels of symbolism and thematic significance, as well as offering a thorough examination of universal human issues and ideas. By doing good deeds and experiencing spiritual rejuvenation, Zoroastrianism promises redemption. Aligned with Zoroastrian concepts of ethical obligation and divine fairness, Saleem's voyage can also be read as an attempt at both individual and community reconciliation. By exploring these extra dimensions, the connection between Zoroastrianism and *Midnight's Children* becomes more profound, providing readers with a sophisticated examination of ethical, intellectual, and spiritual concerns woven across the rich fabric the Indian history and culture.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Zoroastrianism, Dualism, Heritage, Symbolism, Identity, reconciliation

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## Introduction

**Rushdie's Background:** Salman Rushdie is from a Muslim family in India. Salman Rushdie, the well-known writer of thirteen books, including the Booker Prize-winning *Midnight's Children* has won numerous awards. He has been honored with numerous important honors, including the James Tait Black Prize, the Writers' Guild Award for Excellence, and the Whitbread Prize, in recognition of his creative talents. In addition to his creative accomplishments, Rushdie has presided over the PEN Worldwide Voices International creative Festival and served as president of the PEN American Center, two organizations that strongly support freedom of speech. Awarded a knighthood in 2007, he remains a well-known personality in the literary community, with more than forty languages having translated one of his works.

**India's Zoroastrian Legacy:** India has a Zoroastrian community, the Parsis, who migrated centuries ago. Rushdie, growing up in Bombay (now Mumbai), was exposed to Zoroastrian elements in Indian culture and society. Zoroastrianism emphasizes good versus evil, a duality also present in *Midnight's Children*. Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, traces its origins to ancient Persia and the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster around 600 BC. Central to this faith is a dualistic worldview, where forces of good and evil, light and darkness, engage in perpetual conflict. **Zoroastrian Influences in *Midnight's Children*** Salman Rushdie's magnum work, *Midnight's Children*, intricately entwines Zoroastrian elements into its narrative, enriching the storyline with layers of symbolism and philosophical depth.

**Dualistic Themes:** Central to Zoroastrianism is the concept of dualism—the eternal struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. *Midnight's Children* reflects this dualistic worldview in the moral choices faced by its characters, especially Saleem. His unique abilities symbolize the constant battle between opposing forces, providing a nuanced exploration of Zoroastrian dualism.

**Free Will and Destiny:** Zoroastrianism places a significant emphasis on free will, and this theme resonates strongly in the novel. Saleem and other characters grapple with choices that shape their destinies. The exploration of free will becomes a philosophical cornerstone, mirroring Zoroastrian

teachings on individual responsibility and the power to shape one's own path. Saleem Sinai's dual heritage is born at the precise moment of India's independence reflects Zoroastrian diasporic experiences. The tension between individual identity and communal expectations mirrors Zoroastrianism's nuanced stance on the individual's role within the larger community.

**Zoroastrian Heritage Shaping Rushdie's Perspective:** Rushdie's Zoroastrian heritage has a significant influence on how he presents characters and explores themes in *Midnight's Children*. Zoroastrian philosophy transforms the book into a canvas on which it applies modest strokes of brush to enhance the story's overall storyline.

**Narrative Elements** Zoroastrianism emphasizes the constant struggle between good (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Angra Mainyu). **Mythology and Legends:** The Parsis have their own creation myths and legends. Explore if any elements of Indian mythology or folklore in the novel resonate with Parsi narratives, particularly those dealing with good versus evil or miraculous occurrences. Salman Rushdie mirrors the age-old conflict between the forces of good and evil in *Midnight Children*, deftly incorporating Zoroastrian dualism into his story. The characters' struggles and identities become more complex as a result of this dualistic viewpoint, which penetrates both their internal and outward conflicts. The internal duality that characters like Saleem Sinai, who struggles with the contradictory parts of his uniqueness as both Indian and British, experience is one of the novel's main themes. This internal struggle emphasizes the universality of such struggles by mirroring the cosmic struggle between good (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Angra Mainyu) in Zoroastrianism. Rushdie used characters such as Shiva to represent the story's dualistic nature. Regardless of having characteristics linked to Zoroastrian dualism, Shiva is named after the Hindu god of destruction and is a powerful representation of the ongoing conflict between opposing forces. His persona serves as an example of the complexity of life and the ongoing struggle between opposing destinies and ideologies. Rushdie explores deep philosophical issues regarding the nature of good and evil, identity, and the human condition through these complex depictions of dualism. He adds layers of symbolism and allegory to his story by taking cues from Zoroastrianism, which encourages

readers to reflect on the universal themes of moral ambiguity and duality. Salman Rushdie seamlessly integrates elements of Zoroastrian mysticism into his narrative, infusing it with a sense of enchantment and wonder. Zoroastrianism's rich tradition of ritualistic magic and mystical practices serves as a fertile ground for Rushdie's exploration of magical realism. Portraying inspiration from Zoroastrian mysticism and folklore, Rushdie spread through his narrative the supernatural elements that blur the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Characters in the novel possess supernatural abilities or encounter magical occurrences that resonate with Zoroastrian concepts of spirituality and metaphysical realms. Through these magical elements, Rushdie not only captivates the reader with tales of wonder but also digs into deeper themes of faith, destiny, and the hidden forces that shape human survival. The author skillfully explores the theme of cultural hybridity, drawing parallel to the syncretism nature of Zoroastrianism. Originating in Persia but influencing diverse cultures over centuries, Zoroastrianism embodies a fusion of religious and cultural elements. Similarly, Rushdie's narrative reflects this hybridity as characters navigate multiple cultural identities shaped by historical, social, and personal influences. The novel's portrayal of characters like Saleem Sinai, who grapples with his Indian and British heritage, mirrors Rushdie's own experiences of cultural complexity. Through these characters, Rushdie talks about the interplay of cultures, highlighting how diverse influences unite to shape individual and collective identities. Just as Zoroastrianism embraces various cultural elements to create a unique identity, *Midnight Children* celebrates the richness and complexity of cultural hybridity, offering deep insights into the human knowledge. Salman Rushdie stands as a towering figure in contemporary literature, known for his bold narrative styles, intricate storytelling, and exploration of complex themes. Emerging from a background deeply rooted in Zoroastrianism, an ancient monotheistic religion, Rushdie's work set the imprints of his cultural and religious heritage. As we dig into Rushdie's intricate relationship with his Zoroastrian heritage, we will navigate through the thematic landscapes of hybridity, magic, and dualism that pervade his narratives. These themes not only serve as essential elements in his storytelling but also reflect the rich tapestry of beliefs, traditions, and cultural nuances that shape his worldview. Rushdie's exploration of these themes adds layers

of complexity to his works, inviting readers to contemplate the interplay between cultural identity, artistic expression, and the magical realism that defines his literary oeuvre. Zoroastrianism has a big impact on the beliefs, morals, and behaviors of the characters in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* throughout the whole book. Zoroastrianism serves as a cultural and theological backdrop that influences the identities and interactions of the individuals, giving the story more nuance and complexity. Zoroastrianism provides a typical viewpoint on the protagonists' cultural environment, which enhances the story and character development. Zoroastrianism in the story aids in character and reader orientation within Rushdie's intricately constructed world, much like a compass indicates pointing north. It enhances the reading experience on the whole by acting as a key to reveal hidden meanings and layers inside the text. Zoroastrianism provides the structural basis for the novel's thematic depth much like a foundation supports a structure. Zoroastrianism's significance in *Midnight's Children* might be summed up as important threads that are skillfully woven throughout the plot to connect unequal pieces and give the narrative depth.

#### **Background on Zoroastrianism:**

Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, traces its origins to ancient Persia and the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster around 600 BC. Central to this faith is a dualistic worldview, where forces of good and evil, light and darkness, engage in everlasting conflict. Salman Rushdie's connection to Zoroastrianism is deeply rooted in his upbringing. Born to a Zoroastrian father, he was raised in an environment infused with the rich cultural and religious heritage of this ancient faith. The dualistic concepts inherent in Zoroastrianism, the continuous struggle between opposing forces, and the stress on individual responsibility have deeply shaped Rushdie's outlook and found expression in his literary works. As we explore Rushdie's engagement with Zoroastrianism, it becomes evident that the religion's doctrine serves as a thematic suggestion, influencing the narrative tapestry of his novels. Scholarly discussion on Salman Rushdie's engagement with his Zoroastrian heritage has been a subject of both interest and limitation. Several works have explored the profound influence of Zoroastrianism on Rushdie's writings, shedding light on themes like dualism, individual responsibility, and the continuous battle between

good and evil. However, the literature review also reveals gaps in the current scholarship. Limited attention has been given to the comparative analysis of Rushdie's treatment of Zoroastrian themes in contrast to other religious or philosophical influences present in his works. Also, a comprehensive exploration of the impact of Zoroastrianism on specific characters, scenes, and narrative structures remains an underexplored area. This study aims to address these gaps by providing a nuanced analysis that goes beyond the existing literature. By digging into specific scenes and characters in Rushdie's novels, the research seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how his Zoroastrian heritage intricately shapes the thematic elements of his literary creations. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* echoes the ancient Zoroastrian idea of virtue against evil, not through obvious references, but with a subtle dance of duality woven within the story framework and character depictions. The novel's divide is based on the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, which marked both India's birth and the violent separation. This dualism prepares the stage for the advent of the midnight children, each bearing a unique gift that reflects the interconnection of good and evil. The tale reflects this internal conflict. Saleem Sinai's untrustworthy narration breaks up the plot, revealing glimpses of the lives of other youngsters with varying abilities and dispositions. Shiva, with his relentless ambition, continuously challenges Saleem's viewpoint, emphasizing the underlying duality of human existence. Magical talents blur the distinction between the good and the bad. Saleem's sniffles may both damage and heal, and Shiva's telepathy can influence or incite revolt. The children's connection emphasizes this concept: their futures are tied, and their abilities represent the intricate fabric of human nature. This dualism extends to the individuals themselves. Aadam Aziz is idealistic and moral, in sharp contrast with Emilie Jinnah's realistic and deceptive personality. Their opposing points of view represent the ongoing conflict between principles and deeds. The *Midnight's Children* Conference exemplifies this contradiction. Children of various powers congregate, some using their talents for good and some for personal gain. This range of impulses underscores the Zoroastrian belief that both the good and the bad exist inside us all. Through this sensitive dance of opposing components, Rushdie forces the reader to face the complexity of human nature. The distinction between good and evil blurs, echoing the Zoroastrian faith and forcing us

to confront the dualism that influences both history as well as our own lives.

### **Objectives:**

This study attempts to show how Salman Rushdie's Zoroastrian tradition greatly influences his artistic vision and sense of self in *Midnight's Children*. According to the study, Salman Rushdie's Zoroastrian background gives *Midnight's Children* a nuanced depiction of good and evil that reflects the main struggle in the faith between Ahura Mazda, the kind creator god, and Ahriman, the destructive power. This inner conflict is embodied by figures like as Saleem Sinai, whose deeds reveal the human predisposition toward both creation and destruction. Others, such as the repressive authorities of the Emergency and Indira Gandhi, or the talented kids who use their abilities for good, symbolize more lone forces of good or evil. Rushdie does not, however, create overly simple heroes and villains. He gives his characters a mix of positive and negative Zoroastrian notions. He gives his characters both good and bad qualities by incorporating Zoroastrian concepts, illustrating the complexity of human nature. Important themes in *Midnight's Children*, such as exile, dualism, and the need for belonging, are given additional significance by Rushdie's Zoroastrian heritage. Characters and events can represent both positive and negative forces; this idea of dualism is informed by the ongoing struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. Exile, a typical Zoroastrian experience brought on by persecution, speaks to personalities like Saleem, who struggles with being away from home and longing for it. The idea of belonging is enhanced by the Zoroastrian notion of discovering truth via free will. The Zoroastrian concept of allying oneself with the forces of good is reflected in characters such as Saleem, who must negotiate a world of opposing powers and create their own sense of identity. Rushdie crafts a deeper tapestry by incorporating Zoroastrian concepts into these themes, enabling readers to examine the intricacies of the human experience within the context of this antiquated spiritual system. Rushdie's Zoroastrian heritage adds depth to *The Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's Zoroastrian heritage adds layers of mythology and symbolism to *Midnight's Children*, enhancing the story's intricacy and depth. The novel's villains are comparable to the idea of Daevas, evil spirits hostile to Ahura Mazda. These destructive powers can be observed in the forms of characters such as the tyrannical Emergency rule or individuals such

as Indira Gandhi. Tales of creation and free will are present in Saleem's voyage, wherein his magical powers serve as a symbolic representation of the Zoroastrian notion of choose between the paths of good and evil. Furthermore, Zoroastrian symbols such as fire, which represents purifying, appear in the story during pivotal moments of change or discovery. Rushdie gives readers who are familiar with Zoroastrianism a greater grasp of the problems and struggles the characters face in the book, as well as a richer tapestry of meaning. Salman Rushdie's usage of Zoroastrianism in his works, including *Midnight's Children* demonstrates his close ties to his religious and cultural background. Through themes of dualism, magic, and hybridity, Rushdie reinterprets fundamental ideas and offers readers a novel perspective on identity and the human experience. A detailed investigation of certain situations and individuals reveals subtle levels of relevance, which enriches and complicates Rushdie's story. Using both primary and secondary sources, this analysis focuses on Rushdie's distinctive literary voice and contribution to contemporary writing. In Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*, Zoroastrianism plays a significant role as it is the religion of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai. The novel explores themes of identity, history, and the clash between tradition and modernity, with Zoroastrianism helping as a cultural backdrop that influences Saleem's worldview and experiences. The religion's emphasis on duality, truth, and the eternal battle between good and evil mirrors the larger narrative of the novel, adding depth and complexity to the characters and their interactions. Zoroastrianism in the novel gives out as a rich source of symbolism and cultural heritage that enriches the story's themes and characters. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* projects as a captivating canvas where Zoroastrian themes are intricately woven into the narrative fabric. In specific scenes, such as Saleem Sinai's birth, the Zoroastrian concept of the cosmic egg or "egg of time" is mirrored. This cosmic egg symbolizes the intertwining of Saleem's life with the historical path of India, showcasing the power of Zoroastrian mythology. Characters in *Midnight's Children* struggle with the dichotomy between good and evil, mirroring Zoroastrian dualism. The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, embodies the struggle to navigate the opposing forces, adding layers of complexity to his identity. Through analysis, this paper explores how Zoroastrianism infuses depth into the thematic elements of the novel. Salman Rushdie's

dealing of Zoroastrian themes stands as a distinctive and enriching contribution to literature and engages in a comparative analysis which is put together Rushdie's approach with other artists inclined by varied religious or philosophical traditions. The novel aims to place Rushdie's work within a broader literary context, showcasing the unique features that distinguish his approach to Zoroastrian themes. Also the fresh Insights and challenges tells about the new perspectives and insights gained from the analysis. By researching into specific scenes, characters, and thematic elements, the study has uncovered layers of meaning and distinct artistic vision. Saleem Sinai's journey in *Midnight's Children* becomes a powerful lens for exploring themes that resonate with people around the world. The constant movement of his family mirrors the experience of many migrants, highlighting the challenges of leaving your home and finding your place in a new environment. As Saleem struggles with his mixed Indian and potentially British heritage, the novel probes into the complexities of cultural identity, especially for those with diverse backgrounds. Throughout his story, Saleem's yearning for belonging is a constant thread, reflecting a universal human desire for a place to call home. By exploring these themes through Saleem's experiences, Rushdie sheds light on the displacement and cultural complexities faced by many in post-colonial societies, reminding us that the search for identity and belonging is a shared human experience. Salman Rushdie's artistic vision and identity in *Midnight's Children* are explored in relation to Zoroastrianism, and significant discoveries about dualism, magic, and hybridity are made. The story is replete with dualistic elements, which show themselves in the inner battles of the protagonists and mirror the cosmic war between good and evil in Zoroastrianism. By skillfully fusing Zoroastrian mysticism with magical realism, Rushdie blur the boundaries among the extraordinary and the everyday. Zoroastrian ideas on spirituality and metaphysical worlds are reflected in this blend of magical elements. As the people pass through numerous cultural identities molded by diverse influences, the novel's investigation of cultural hybridity echoes Zoroastrianism's incorporated nature. The study of *Midnight Children* shows how Zoroastrianism influenced Rushdie's topic investigation and narrative construction, providing insights into the difficulties of identity, morality, and cultural fusion. The novel also reveals that there is an effect on the author's writings due to the mindset

and diverse culture, social and biological backgrounds. Saleem Sinai's journey in *Midnight's Children* becomes a powerful lens for exploring themes that resonate with people around the world. The constant movement of his family mirrors the experience of many migrants, highlighting the challenges of leaving your home and finding your place in a new environment. As Saleem grapples with his mixed Indian and potentially British heritage, the novel delves into the complexities of cultural identity, especially for those with diverse backgrounds. Throughout his story, Saleem's yearning for belonging is a constant thread, reflecting a universal human desire for a place to call home. By exploring these themes through Saleem's experiences, Rushdie sheds light on the displacement and cultural complexities faced by many in post-colonial societies, reminding us that the search for identity and belonging is a shared human experience.

### Discussion

Salman Rushdie's ingenious fusion of Zoroastrianism in pieces such as *Midnight's Children* is evidence of his close ties to his religious and cultural heritage. Rushdie reinterprets basic concepts all the way through themes of dualism, magic, and hybridity, giving readers a singular viewpoint on identity and the human condition. Through close examination of particular events and characters, Rushdie reveals levels of meaning that emphasize the depth and intricacy of his story. This investigation highlights Rushdie's unique legendary voice and contribution to modern literature in illuminating India's cultural richness. Saleem Sinai's experience as a migrant in *Midnight's Children* mirrors the historical diaspora of the Zoroastrian people, who faced persecution and migrated to various parts of the world. Just as Zoroastrians fled religious persecution, Saleem and his fellow midnight's children leave India amidst political turmoil and communal violence. Both Saleem and Zoroastrians grapple with questions of identity in foreign lands, reflecting themes of displacement and longing for homeland. Saleem's nostalgic longing for his homeland and his challenges in adapting to new cultures resonate with the experiences of Zoroastrians who migrated generations ago. His journey involves cultural adaptation and assimilation, mirroring the Zoroastrian experience of integrating into new societies while preserving their cultural heritage. Through Saleem's narrative, Salman Rushdie explores broader themes of migration, cultural identity, and belonging, shedding light on the

universal human experience of displacement and the complexities of cultural diversity in post-colonial societies. The novel's depiction of history as cyclical is consistent with Zoroastrian notions of cosmic cycles that never end. But *Midnight's Children* also suggests that transcendence beyond the bounds of time and fate is possible, implying a more profound spiritual aspect to human existence. Zoroastrianism emphasizes the value of communal duty and cohesiveness. Characters in the book struggle with issues of identification and belonging in the richly varied fabric of Indian culture, which reflects Zoroastrian principles of social justice and peace among the people.

### Conclusion

Salman Rushdie's writing is greatly influenced by his close connection to his Zoroastrian heritage, which is most noticeable in pieces like *Midnight's Children*. This study has highlighted the ways in which Rushdie reinterprets basic concepts through themes of dualism, magic, and hybridity that are influenced by Zoroastrianism. The study reveals deep levels of interpretation and creative vision by concentrating on certain situations and characters, providing fresh insights into how Rushdie negotiates his spiritual and cultural background. This study's comparative methodology, which draws from academic sources, improves our comprehension of Rushdie's unique literary contribution. The attitudes, actions, and thematic development of characters such as Saleem Sinai, whose religious relationship represents the competing cultures and identities of post-colonial India, significantly shaped by Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is a powerful symbol used by Rushdie to highlight the cultural diversity of India and offer the plot more depth and richness. Rushdie explores fundamental questions of identity, purpose, and the human experience in a world that is constantly changing through this investigation, in addition to providing light on the historical and cultural background of India. In summary, the present study highlights the remarkable impact of Zoroastrianism on Rushdie's imaginative approach and the intricacy and wisdom of his literary compositions. This study not only contributes fresh insights into Salman Rushdie's engagement with his Zoroastrian heritage but also underscores the imperative for ongoing scholarly exploration in separating the intricacies of cultural and religious influences on contemporary literature. Salman Rushdie's Zoroastrian heritage acts as a powerful undercurrent in *Midnight's Children*. The concept of good versus evil

manifests in characters' internal struggles and motivations, while themes of free will and the search for belonging echo Zoroastrian beliefs. Magical realism flourishes with Zoroastrian influence, adding depth and complexity to the narrative. By weaving these elements into the story, Rushdie transcends a simple post-colonial narrative. *Midnight's Children* becomes a tapestry rich with universal human experiences, demonstrating the profound impact an author's background can have on their artistic vision and storytelling. This paper centers its attention on Zoroastrianism and aims to explore Zoroastrianism within the context of history, identity, and the search for meaning reveals a profound connection between this ancient faith and the complexities of human experience. By means of examining Rushdie's characters and themes in *Midnight's Children*, there is a deeper understanding of how individuals struggle with change, forge their identities, and strive for purpose in a world that is continually developing. The lasting legacy of Zoroastrianism, with its emphasis on free will and the battle between good and evil, serves as a powerful reminder that the human search for meaning transcends time and culture. According to Zoroastrianism, believers have the freedom to make good or bad choices which is clearly shown in shaping Salman Rushdie's Artistic Vision and Identity in *Midnight's Children*. This novel is a political allegory that incorporates religious themes. Rushdie weaves the concepts of cyclical time, free choice, and dualism from Zoroastrianism into the tale of *Midnight's Children*. Zoroastrianism enhances the study of post-colonial India's history, identity, and human condition through symbolism and thematic resonance. *Midnight's Children* presents a comprehensive analysis of universal human problems and beliefs, in addition to portraying the complexities of Indian history and identity through its many layers of symbolism with thematic relevance. Zoroastrianism promises redemption via spiritual rejuvenation and good actions. Similar to Zoroastrian ideas of moral obligation and divine justice, Saleem's trip might be understood as an attempt at both individual and community rehabilitation. The parallel between Zoroastrianism and *Midnight's Children* is strengthened by exploring these extra dimensions; readers are provided with a sophisticated examination of ethical, intellectual, and spiritual concerns woven throughout the rich fabric of Indian history and culture.

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