

**Salman Rushdie** (born June 19, 1947, [Bombay](#) [now Mumbai], India) is an [Indian](#)-born British-American writer whose allegorical [novels](#) examine historical and philosophical issues by means of [surreal](#) characters, [brooding](#) humor, and an effusive and [melodramatic](#) prose style. Because of his treatment of sensitive religious and political subjects, particularly in his [novel](#) *[The Satanic Verses](#)* (1988), Rushdie has been the target of death threats and violent attacks and a central figure in debates about [free speech](#) and [censorship](#).

## Early life and first novels

Rushdie, whose father was a prosperous [Muslim](#) businessman in [India](#), was educated in [England](#) at Rugby School and the [University of Cambridge](#), where he received a [master's degree](#) in history in 1968. Throughout most of the 1970s he worked in [London](#) as an advertising copywriter. His first published novel, *Grimus*, appeared in 1975. Rushdie's next novel, *[Midnight's Children](#)* (1981), a [fable](#) about modern India, was an unexpected critical and popular success that won him international recognition. A film [adaptation](#), for which he drafted the [screenplay](#), was released in 2012.

# ***The Satanic Verses* and life under the fatwa**

The novel [\*Shame\*](#) (1983), based on contemporary politics in [Pakistan](#), was also popular, but Rushdie's fourth novel, [\*The Satanic Verses\*](#), encountered a different reception. Some of the adventures in this book depict a character modeled on the [Prophet Muhammad](#) and portray both him and his transcription of the [Qur'ān](#) in a manner that, after the novel's publication in the summer of 1988, drew [criticism](#) from Muslim [community](#) leaders in Britain, who denounced the novel as [blasphemous](#). The book faced bans and opposition in many countries. The Indian government issued a ban on the import of the book on October 5, 1988. Public demonstrations against the book spread to Pakistan in January 1989. On February 14 the spiritual leader of revolutionary [Iran](#), Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#), publicly condemned the book and issued a [fatwa](#) (legal opinion) against Rushdie; a bounty was offered to anyone who would execute him. He went into hiding under the protection of [Scotland Yard](#), and—although he occasionally emerged unexpectedly, sometimes in other countries—he was [compelled](#) to restrict his movements. A string of assassination



In November 2024 the Delhi High Court overturned the 1988 ban on the import of *The Satanic Verses* due to an extraordinary situation—the original notification was untraceable. A petition was filed in 2019 by an individual who attempted to import the book or acquire it through unofficial channels. The case took a pivotal turn when he requested a copy of the original notification under India's Right to Information Act. However, all efforts by government officials to locate the document proved futile. The missing notification led the bench to assume that no such notification

exists. With the ban lifted, readers in India will be able to import the book; however, further decisions on its distribution and sale are still under consideration.

## **Post-fatwa writings**

Despite the standing death threat, Rushdie continued to write after 1988, producing *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a collection of [essays](#) and criticism; the children's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990); the [short-story](#) collection *East, West* (1994); and



the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). In 1998, after nearly a decade, the Iranian government announced that it would no longer seek to enforce its fatwa against Rushdie. He recounted his experience in the third-person memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012); its title refers to an alias he adopted while in seclusion.

Following his return to public life, Rushdie published the novels *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001). *Step Across This Line*, a collection of essays he wrote between 1992 and 2002 on subjects ranging from the September 11 attacks to *The Wizard of Oz*, was issued in 2002.

Rushdie's subsequent novels include *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), an examination of terrorism that was set primarily in the disputed Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent, and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), based on a fictionalized account of the Mughal emperor Akbar. The children's book *Luka and the Fire of Life* (2010) centers on the efforts of Luka—

younger brother to the protagonist of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*—to locate the titular fire and revive his ailing father. *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015) depicts the chaos ensuing from a rent in the fabric separating the world of humans from that of the Arabic mythological figures known as jinn. Reveling in folkloric allusion—the title references *The Thousand and One Nights*—the novel unfurls a tapestry of connected stories celebrating the human imagination.



In *The Golden House* (2017) Rushdie explored the [immigrant](#) experience in the [United States](#) through a wealthy Indian family that settles in [New York City](#) in the early 21st century. His next novel, *Quichotte* (2019), was inspired by [Cervantes's](#) [Don Quixote](#). *Languages of Truth: Essays 2003–2020* appeared in 2021.

## 2022 attempt on life

In August 2022 Rushdie was attacked and seriously injured while onstage at a literary event in [Chautauqua, New York](#). He had been scheduled to give a speech about the United States being a refuge for [exiled](#) artists. Rushdie faced a long recovery and ultimately lost one eye. In 2023 he released the acclaimed novel *Victory City*, which had been completed before the attack. A work of [magic realism](#), it opens in 14th-century India, where a nine-year-old girl becomes a [vessel](#) for a goddess and builds a thriving city known for its [egalitarianism](#). However, [greed](#) and religious extremism ultimately lead to the city's ruination. In 2024 Rushdie released *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder*, a [memoir](#) of the attack and his subsequent recovery.

# Honors and personal life

Rushdie received the [Booker Prize](#) in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. The novel subsequently won the Booker of Bookers (1993) and the Best of the Booker (2008). These special prizes were voted on by the public in honor of the prize's 25th and 40th anniversaries, respectively. In 2004 Rushdie married model, television personality, and [cookbook](#) author [Padma Lakshmi](#); the couple divorced in 2007. That same year Rushdie was [knighted](#), an honor that was criticized by the Iranian government and Pakistan's parliament. He became a U.S. citizen in 2016 but has also retained his British citizenship. In 2021 he married poet and novelist Rachel Eliza Griffiths. It was Rushdie's fifth marriage.



**The Satanic Verses**, [magic realist](#) epic [novel](#) by Indian-born writer [Salman Rushdie](#) that upon its publication in 1988 became one of the most controversial books of the late 20th century. Some Muslims considered its fanciful and satiric use of [Islam](#) blasphemous, and Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#) of Iran [condemned](#) the book and issued a [fatwa](#) in 1989 calling for the killing of Rushdie as well as his editors and publishers. Violent demonstrations followed in [Pakistan](#); copies of the novel were burned in [Britain](#), where several bookstores were bombed; and the work was banned in several countries.

## Summary

The complex and multilayered plot focuses on two protagonists, both Indian Muslims living in England. Gibreel Farishta is a successful film actor who has suffered a recent bout of [mental illness](#) and who is in love with an English mountain climber, Alleluia Cone. Saladin Chamcha is a voice actor who has had a falling out with his father. Gibreel and Saladin meet on

a flight from [Bombay \(Mumbai\)](#) to [London](#), and the plane is hijacked by [Sikh](#) terrorists. During an argument the terrorists accidentally detonate a bomb, destroying the aircraft over the [English Channel](#). The book opens with Gibreel and Saladin, the sole survivors, falling into the [Atlantic Ocean](#).

As Gibreel descends, he is transformed into the angel [Gabriel](#) and has a series of dreams. The first one is a revisionist history of the founding of Islam; the details of this subplot are what generated the controversy around the novel. The character based on [Muhammad](#) is called Mahound, and he is attempting to found a monotheistic religion in the polytheistic town of Jahilia. As in an [apocryphal legend](#), Mahound receives a vision allowing the worship of three goddesses, but, after realizing that the confirming revelation was sent by the devil, he recants. A quarter century later one of his [disciples](#) ceases to believe in Mahound's religion, but the town of Jahilia converts. Prostitutes in a brothel take the names of Mahound's wives before the brothels are closed. Later Mahound falls ill and dies, with his final vision being of one of the goddesses.



Saladin is transformed into the devil as he falls, and he later grows horns and goat legs with cloven hoofs. The two men crawl onto the coast, and Saladin is arrested as an illegal immigrant. After being hospitalized, he escapes, only to find that his wife is having an affair with one of his friends. His misfortunes continue as he loses his job. However, his rage at Gibreel for failing to intervene when he was arrested eventually transforms Saladin back into a fully human man. In the meantime, Gibreel is reunited with Alleluia, but an angel tells him to leave her and spread the word of God in London. He is hit by the car of an Indian film producer, who plans a trio of religious films in which Gibreel will star as an archangel. Later, Gibreel and Saladin meet at a party, and Saladin decides to kill him. However, although he has various opportunities, he does not murder Gibreel and instead induces him to believe that Alleluia has several lovers. Gibreel eventually realizes that Saladin has tricked him and resolves to kill him. However, when Gibreel finds Saladin in a burning building, he rescues him.

Upon learning that his father is dying, Saladin returns to Bombay and reconciles with him. He inherits a substantial sum of money and reconnects with a former girlfriend. Separately,

Gibreel and Alleluia also travel to Bombay, and a jealous Gibreel murders her and then kills himself.

A third story line is introduced through another dream of Gibreel's. It begins in the village of Titlipur, where a young girl named Ayesha and her adoptive parents, Mirza Saeed Akhtar and his wife, Mishal, live. Ayesha declares that an angel, named Gibreel, has revealed to her that Mishal has [breast cancer](#) but that if the entire village walks to [Mecca](#), Mishal will be healed. The pilgrimage is long and [arduous](#), and many pilgrims die along the way. Others lose faith. When they reach the sea, Ayesha says that the seas will part for them, but they do not, and the pilgrims drown.

## Response

Rushdie responded to India's banning of *The Satanic Verses* by [saying](#) [🔗](#) that "the book isn't actually about Islam, but about migration, [metamorphosis](#), divided selves, love, death, London and Bombay." The thematically complex work earned Rushdie a [Whitbread Book Award](#) for novel of the year, and it was short-listed for the [Booker Prize](#), both in 1988.



The book was overshadowed, however, by the [blasphemy](#) controversy. Rushdie was put under police protection after the issuance of Khomeini's fatwa, and he spent the better part of the next decade in hiding before the government of Iran declared in 1998 that it no longer sought to enforce it. Others connected to *The Satanic Verses* were victims of violence, though the attackers' motives were not definitively known in all cases: a Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, was murdered in 1991; an Italian translator was stabbed in 1991 but survived; and in 1993 the novel's publisher in Norway was shot but also survived. A [bounty](#) put in place by an Iranian foundation in 1989 to reward anyone who would kill Rushdie was increased several times into the 21st century.

Rushdie recounted his experience of living in seclusion in his 2012 third-person memoir *Joseph Anton*, which was an alias he used during that time. In 2022 Rushdie was stabbed multiple times at a public appearance in Chautauqua, New York; he was seriously injured, losing sight in one eye, but survived. In 2024 he published *Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder*, a memoir of the attack and his subsequent recovery.