

UNVEILING RUSHDIE

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UNVEILING RUSHDIE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Unveiling Literary Representations of The Veil

Veiling is not the dominant theme in Rushdie's works; however, according to Daphne Grace, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* reveal "how the veil is used as a self-conscious literary device and a means of social and political comment" (7). For instance, Rushdie opens up *Midnight's Children* with a chapter entitled "the perforated sheet" that alludes to the failure of veiling in keeping the female character, Naseem, modest and chaste—an identity that veiling is supposed to unveil. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie also dedicates a chapter about veiling under the title of "The Curtain," a brothel that simultaneously mirrors and contradicts all the practices of the housewives of the Prophet. Similarly, in *Shame* Rushdie names one of the chapters "The Woman in the Veil." The important message from the three novels is that veiling or unveiling should be a free choice for women. In contrast, in some Muslim countries where veiling or unveiling is enforced by laws, veiling is no longer a personal decision; it is always loaded with political interests. As Marnia Lazreg remarks, "The politicization of the veil—its forced removal or its legal enforcement (as in Iran and Saudi Arabia)—hampers women's capacity to make a decision freely, just as it also compels them to

abide by an intrusive law at the expense of their own conscience and judgment” (8).

While it is true that veiling and unveiling can be a means of resistance and provide agency for women, most of the female characters in the novels are not totally free in deciding what they actually want. They are caught in the rigid option of whether to veil or unveil; their veiling and unveiling are given, not decided.

Veiling and unveiling in the three novels are less about personal preferences and more about political manipulation that will eventually benefit the patriarchal institutions. Gayatri Spivak eloquently describes this situation of “third-world women”: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (102). Spivak’s argument highlights the suffering of women, how they are robbed of their freedom and are left with choices that are highly constraining. Under traditional patriarchy, women are absolutely the oppressed ones, but imperialism that promises modernization, which will bring women into enlightenment, free from the claws of traditional patriarchy, still positions women at a disadvantage. This civilizing mission of the imperialists basically held the colonial principle in which “the Muslim woman was to be exploited by the Western Man but protected from enslavement by the Muslim man; she was to be liberated from her ignorance and her culture’s cruelty” (Moghissi 16). It is in this context that veiling is seen as the sign of Muslim women’s backwardness, and is made a justification for the imperialists to “free” them from their savage, patriarchal men.

Nonetheless, veiling and unveiling in the novels are a matter of religious, political, economic, and social survival of these female characters in the society where

they live in and a matter of voicing women's desires and resistance against the patriarchal domination, even though they are not totally free from the male political bias. As Nancy J. Hirschmann asserts, "If survival is the basis of feminist theory, I would argue that finding ways for women to see survival as a viable form of resistance against this normative oppression should be feminism's primary goal both in theory and practice" (35). Thus, even though veiling and unveiling in the novels are problematic forms of resistance and agency, they are women's ways of survival.

Veiling Defined

In this study of veiling in three of Rushdie's novels, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Satanic Verses*, "veil" is defined in four ways: a head covering that covers the hair and the neck but not the face, simply called "veil" in the novels; a head-to-toe covering that hides all parts of the body and leaves the eyes only revealed, mentioned in the novels by the word "burqa"; a curtain that segregates men from women that is called "hijab" in *The Satanic Verses* and is called simply "curtain" or "purdah" elsewhere; and the seclusion for women in a special place called "zenana." Rushdie's antipathy with burqas and other forms of veiling that are highly restrictive are apparent in the novels under study.

Rarely does Rushdie portray the more moderate and common form of "hijab," which is a headscarf or head cover. In all the three novels, only Naseem and Doctor Aziz's mother in *Midnight's Children* wear head covers, while the rest are either covered in burqas or secluded in a zenana. Furthermore, his statement that the veil "sucks" refers to a full face covering or burqa. These instances may indicate that Rushdie is not against the form of veil as moderate as head cover or headscarves, even though they also do not

prove Rushdie's support of veiling in the form of head covering. Nonetheless, the emphasis Rushdie gives on the portrayal of burqas, segregation, and seclusion proves that he is strongly against these forms of veiling that he believes, as he reveals in his interview, "[are] a way of taking power away from women" (AM). While it is true that Rushdie portrays the veil as "a way of taking power away from women," through the various forms of veiling he explores, Rushdie also reveals the various strategic uses of veiling as a means of resistance against patriarchy.

Scholarship on Veiling in General and in Rushdie's Novels

Despite its consistent appearance, limited scholarship exists addressing Rushdie's veiling in his texts. In her ethnographic study, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance*, Fadwa El Guindi argues that many scholars avoid the study of veiling due to its ideological meaning and "its association with Orientalist imagery" (xi). Her argument may well explain the same tendency to avoid studying veiling in Rushdie's works.

Fortunately, a few scholars have treated the topic of veiling in Rushdie's texts. These critics express divergent opinions about veiling: one belief is that veiling is inherently oppressive, but another belief is that the patriarchal system that renders veiling is oppressive, not the veil itself. Likewise, one belief is that the veiling need not be equated with oppression at all but rather with religious freedom and devotion, but another belief is that veiling as religious devotion is still patriarchal given that it has no actual support in the Quran.

Daphne Grace has pioneered the study of veiling in Rushdie texts, which she includes in her broad study of veiling in literary works across geographical boundaries. Grace decided to include Rushdie's works because "dominant themes in Rushdie's

novels are identity, migrancy, and exile—topics relevant to a consideration of how women are positioned in society. Moreover, several of his novels are rich in allusions to veiling and the trope of women beneath the veil” (7). Grace’s study “argues that the veil is by no means ineluctably oppressive” (10) as proven by the cross-gender studies she conducted.

Even though Grace’s study is cursory, it opens up a new path in the study of veiling in Rushdie’s works. Grace’s study finds that “the veil for Rushdie signifies modesty (Bilquis’s ‘dupatta of modesty’ and ‘womanly honour’ in *Shame* (1989: 85)); erotic enticement (the ‘perforated sheet’ in *Midnight’s Children* (1995: 9-23)); and male sexual fantasy (the ‘Hijab’ brothel in *Satanic Verses*)” (186). Grace focuses on veiling from the perspective of women’s and gender studies, particularly on how female sexuality and veiling are interrelated. Interestingly, she includes Rushdie in her critique, noting that “at the core of [Rushdie’s] representations . . . is a tendency to [eroticize] the veil, possibly reinforcing masculinist hegemonies: the overriding fascination of woman’s unveiling before the male gaze—and within this unveiling lies the inherent threat of female sexuality” (186). While it is true that Rushdie frequently eroticizes veiling in the three novels, it should be noted that his eroticization is deliberate and self-conscious, functioning as a catalyst for his female characters who unveil and veil in order to achieve agency and resistance in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, even though concluding that the veil “frequently represents a site of women’s oppression,” Grace admits that “both veiling and unveiling can be liberating or suppressive, depending on the context and on where and how women see themselves dominated” (7). As Rushdie shows, veiling is oppressive when it is forced on them by the patriarchal figures around them, ultimately

by their fathers and husbands. However, veiling can also be liberating when they take it as a way of resisting and fighting against the patriarchal values exerted upon them. In *Midnight's Children*, for instance, Naseem's voice drowns under the veil that is imposed upon by her father, Ghani. However, when she is forced to abandon the practice of purdah by her western-educated husband, Doctor Aziz, Naseem raises her voice to resist the coercion that she views as a colonial invasion towards her body and her religious beliefs.

The multiple interpretations of veiling and how veiling relates to women's agency are also explored by Leila Ahmed in her study of *Women and Gender in Islam*. Ahmed argues that as the issue of women and their relation to the current socio-political conditions of colonized countries came under scrutiny:

It was at this point that the veil emerged as a potent signifier, connoting not merely the social meaning of gender but also matters of far broader political and cultural import. It has ever since retained the cargo of signification. The fusion of the issue of women with issues of class, culture, and politics and the encoding of the issue of women and the veil with these further issues have been critical for women. (129)

Thus, as postcolonial works, Rushdie's novels become significant in the study of veiling not only because they portray the practice of veiling among women, but also because they portray the phenomenon during colonization and its aftermath, where veiling and women have been made a site of contestation for meanings, resistance, and agency.

One of the most recent scholars to include Rushdie's work in her study on veiling and to give more emphasis on the issue of veiling and agency is Colleen Ann Lutz

Clemens with her 2010 dissertation entitled “*Prisoner of My Own Stories*”: *Women and the Politics of Veiling in Postcolonial Literature*. Taking the issue of veiling in Rushdie’s work, *Shame*, a step further than Grace, Clemens also differs in her view of veiling and its most agreed upon function as a symbol of patriarchal oppression. While Grace finds in her study that veiling is “by no means ineluctably oppressive” (2), Clemens argues that “the veil is a manifestation of [women’s] oppression, but these veils are not the source of the oppression: a patriarchal political structure is the culprit” (14). Clemens’s argument differs greatly from most hegemonic western feminists who see it otherwise.

Nancy J. Hirschmann acknowledges the tendency of western feminists to see the veil as inherently oppressive, but she argues that such a tendency “believes a great diversity in the practice . . . and ignores the fact that many Muslim women not only participate voluntarily in it, but defend it as well, indeed claiming it as a mark of agency, cultural membership, and resistance” (171). Moreover, Hirschmann warns against the essentialist view of freedom. Western feminists should not believe that they share the same idea of freedom as the Muslim women. Just as some women find freedom and agency in the miniskirt or scanty dresses, Muslim women find that a fully covering garment gives them freedom and agency. Thus, the different views and beliefs on freedom will result in different choice of a means of agency:

The relevance of agency and freedom once again invites the image of choice, for many women themselves see veiling as a sign of devotion to Islam. Others see it as a symbol of cultural and political identity, rather than religious faith, but no less important. And indeed, it is precisely the women who choose veiling, defend it, and consider it vital to their self-

identity who pose the greatest challenge to Western understandings of agency. (Hirschmann 184)

The fact that Muslim women choose to veil is conflicting for “Western understandings of agency” because of the prevailing belief that the veil is oppressive and imposed upon Muslim women by the patriarchs. Nevertheless, the majority of Muslim women believe that veiling is an obligation that has nothing to do with patriarchy. Veiling for these women is an expression of piety and modesty.

Whereas some believe that veiling is an obligation as is revealed by the commands in the Quran, some believe that due to the contextual nature of the revelations, the obligation was only applicable for the Prophet’s wives. Scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed, for instance, argue that the command of veiling is nowhere to be found in the Quran. Ahmed, in particular, explains the historical background of veiling, either referring to head covering or physical segregation, as not originating from Islam; rather, its origin can be traced back to the early Mediterranean and Mesopotamian civilizations:

Veiling was not introduced into Arabia by Muhammad but already existed among some classes, particularly in the towns, though it was probably more prevalent in the countries that the Arabs had contact with, such as Syria and Palestine . . . It is nowhere explicitly prescribed in the Quran; the only verses dealing with women’s clothing, aside from those already quoted, instruct women to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms (Sura 24:31-2). Throughout Muhammad’s lifetime veiling, like seclusion, was observed only by his wives. (55)

Even the two intrinsically diverging views explained here have branched out into diverse views on veiling. Many who believe that veiling is an obligation differ in the way they practice it, ranging from simply wearing headscarves to secluding themselves from any interaction from non-muhrim or ineligible men—men who are not blood-related and are eligible to marry. Even veiling in the form of headscarves also varies in terms of preferences for the types of fabric, color, and length of the scarves. A certain group of veiled women wearing headscarves, for instance, will argue that the more they cover and the thicker the garments they wear, the more pious they are. As for those who do not believe veiling to be an obligation for all Muslim women, they also vary in their reasons. Ahmed's contention, thus, only represents one of the existing arguments. These dividing views in veiling inside and outside of Muslim society reflect how complex and varied the practices of veiling and the beliefs underlying those practices are.

Rushdie himself, in an interview with Stephanie Kennedy from *AM*, declared his opinion against veiling; specifically, he spoke out against the head-to-toe covering that is famous by the name burqa, although some cultures may call it differently. His statement was a defense for the former Foreign Minister and leader of the House of the Commons, Jack Straw, who suggested that “wearing full-face veils could harm community relations,” and “urged Muslim women to discard their veils” (*AM*). In defense of Straw's controversial statement, Rushdie declares, “He was expressing an important opinion, which is that veils suck, which they do.” He backs up his opinion by reflecting on the real experiences of his own Muslim sisters:

But I'm speaking as somebody with three sisters in a very largely female Muslim family. There's not a single woman I know in my family or in

their friends who would've accepted the wearing of the veil. And I think, you know, the battle against the veil has been a long and continuing battle against the limitation of women. (AM)

Rushdie's view of veiling is well reflected in the three novels under discussion. He portrays how the patriarchal manipulation of veiling limits women's agency. However, he also depicts how these women negotiate their veiling in order to subvert its patriarchal manipulation.

Veiling in Rushdie's Novels

Interestingly, in his novels, Rushdie acknowledges the diversity of perspectives offered by the critics cited here, ultimately of how veiling is oppressive when it is imposed upon Muslim women by their patriarchs, and how veiling is liberating when it is used as a strategic means of resisting the patriarchal oppression. For example, in *Midnight's Children*, Doctor Aziz's mother has to unveil in order to survive the financial difficulties that she faces after her husband's illness fails him as a breadwinner. In the same fashion, Naseem has to unveil or come out of purdah if she wants to survive in her marriage. On the other hand, Jamila has to veil if she wants to pursue a career in singing. When she is faced with the death threat of war, she has to veil herself in a church. In *Shame*, Sufiya Zinubia has to veil in order to survive the inflicted shame that has rendered her monstrous, while in *The Satanic Verses*, Mishal agrees with her husband's decision to seclude her because she wants to keep her marriage intact.

Hirschmann attests to this kind of patriarchal oppression that uses veiling as its main tool: "veiling itself is not oppressive, but rather . . . its deployment as a cultural symbol and practice may provide (and often has done so) a form and mode by which

patriarchy oppresses women in specific contexts” (171). Resonating with Clemens’ idea, Hirschmann’s argument also casts patriarchy as the “real culprit” of women’s oppression with veiling as the tool.

On the other hand, Rushdie shows how the female characters claim their own veiling and resist the patriarchal oppression. Naseem, a female character from *Midnight’s Children* defends her veiling against the persistent request of her husband to abandon it because she wants to choose her own means of agency. In the end, she gives up her purdah or physical seclusion, but maintains her head covering. Leaving the practice of purdah behind, Naseem continues veiling her body and her household against any Western cultural invasion. She resists any Western beliefs and practices that her husband, Doctor Aziz, imposes upon her. In *Shame*, Bilquis finally adopts a complete silence and physical covering of burqa as way of expressing her free choice and voicing her resistance against her patriarchal husband. Both female characters find their voice or agency by employing the very tool the patriarchs use to oppress them, and reclaim veiling as their own choice. Even though for non-Muslim women of privilege, veiling may seem to be conceding to a patriarchal institution, these female characters are able to find their voice and resist the patriarchal oppression.

Meanwhile, Rushdie’s harsh critique towards the head-to-toe covering or burqa is demonstrated clearly by how he depicts this kind of veiling in his novels. In the works under study, burqas are often represented as a means of covering, of hiding identity. Sufiya Zinubia Shakil from *Shame*, for instance, breaks her accumulated shame and anger towards the patriarchal figures in her family by turning to violence: she kills men as revenge for the men who have inflicted shame and anger in her, and she does so by

manipulating burqa as her disguise. Nonetheless, this negative representation of burqa still unveils its strategic use as a means of resistance for Sufiya. Ironically, the covering can also be beneficial for men, such as proven by the intelligent disguise of Omar Khayyam Shakil and Raza Hyder in *Shame*, who can escape from their assassinations by wearing burqas.

These female characters' survivals in various aspects of their lives that are controlled and dominated by patriarchy revolve around veiling and unveiling. The act of veiling and unveiling shows that a woman's body is a site of a constant negotiation of power. The female characters constantly struggle to find their own voices to resist patriarchy. Even if the voices come from the male perspective of the author, Rushdie, they are still women's voices that call attention to women's sufferings in a male-dominated society.

Thesis Overview

This study reveals how the female characters in the three of Rushdie's novels, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*, negotiate their veiling and unveiling in a tightly patriarchal society. I will divide my discussion into two chapters, with chapter two focuses on how the patriarchy manipulates the religious functions of veiling in order to suppress and dominate women for their own benefits, and chapter three discusses the strategic uses of both veiling and unveiling in resisting those patriarchal manipulations using Third Space Feminism as the framework. Throughout the discussion, the veiling and unveiling of the female characters will be analyzed from the religious, political, social, and economic aspects. As Grace remarks, "political, social, religious and gender factors all play a part in determining the reasons for and symbolism

of veiling. Structuring concepts of both religious ‘identity’ as well as indicating new social hierarchies, the veil remains a primary site of national and political negotiation” (13). Exploring Rushdie’s novels will help illuminate how Rushdie’s female characters claim and employ veiling in order to survive within a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER 2

VEILING, MODESTY, PIETY AND PATRIARCHY

Rushdie's novels abound with religious allusions and satires, especially ones regarding Islam. Even though Rushdie includes other religions in his stories, the topic of Islam is predominant. As Rushdie admits, "I have been finding my own way towards an intellectual understanding of religion, and religion for me has always meant Islam" (430). In his discussions of Islam, Rushdie frequently includes veiling, one of the highly debated Islamic practices. Even though veiling does not originally root from Islam, it is the religion that institutionalizes veiling, making it an obligation for all eligible women. Rushdie's novels demonstrate that when veiling is used as a religious patriarchal tool, it disempowers women and robs them of their agency not only in their religious life, but also in their political, economic, and social life. The patriarchal manipulation of veiling, especially the enforcement of segregation and zenana which are not obligatory according to the ayahs in the holy Quran, promotes seduction and turns women into the object of male sexual fantasy. Rushdie's representations of veiling, I believe, suggest that veiling should not be manipulated by the patriarchs to eliminate women's power in their lives; instead, it should conform to its basic religious function as a sign of piety, not a submission to patriarchy. Indeed, the patriarchal manipulation of veiling runs counter to the basic principle of Islam that believes in equality between men and women. As

Rushdie evinces, piety parallels with one's intimacy with God; consequently, veiling should be a woman's personal decision, free from any political agenda.

I will start with the general discussion on the position of women in Islam and show how veiling is neither originally from Islam nor, once embraced and institutionalized by Islam, was it designed to be a tool of oppression. The revelations on veiling in the forms of segregation and seclusion, for instance, have been manipulated so that they become the obligation for all women, even though it is clear that the revelations were intended for the wives of the Prophet during a particular situation. Later on, I will show how patriarchal institutions manipulated the Islamic regulations of veiling and other rights of women for men's advantage. After setting the background and theoretical frameworks, I will demonstrate how Rushdie's novels reveal the manipulations of veiling in patriarchal families, where fathers and husbands steer veiling away from its religious function as a sign of piety and turn it into a means of seduction that promotes women's position as sexual objects. In addition to dehumanizing women through their manipulation of veiling, the patriarchs seclude the women from their social life, bar them from gaining education or entering professional realms, and disempower them by denying their rights to make their own choices.

Background: Women's Position in Islam

Islam basically holds an egalitarian principle whereby men and women have equal status in front of Allah regardless of their wealth and social status. Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi, two important scholars who arduously work to raise Muslim women's voices, argue for the egalitarian nature of Islam. In her preface to the English edition of *The Veil and the Male Elite*, for example, Mernissi evinces how Islam attracted

the people of Mecca, especially the women, because of its promise for an egalitarian society: “Women fled aristocratic tribal Mecca by the thousands to enter Medina, the Prophet’s city in the seventh century, because Islam promised equality and dignity for all, for men and women, masters and servants” (viii). In line with Mernissi, Ahmed particularly shows how remarkable the holy Quran is in terms of its equal treatment of men and women, because “in comparison with the scriptural texts of other monotheistic traditions . . . women are explicitly addressed” (65). Citing verse 35 of sura Al Ahzab, Ahmed underscores how the Qur’an explicitly addresses women, “declaring the very structure of the utterance, as well as in overt statement, the absolute moral and spiritual equality between men and women” (65). Based on what is revealed about gender equality in its sacred text, both Mernissi and Ahmed agree that Islam is not an inherently sexist religion.

The appeal of Islam as a religion that promises equality for men and women is the reason so many Muslim women, despite the attacks by non-Muslims towards Islam as a religion that oppresses women, defend Islam wholeheartedly. Ahmed explains, “The unmistakable presence of an ethical egalitarianism explains why Muslim women frequently insist, often inexplicably to non-Muslims, that Islam is not sexist. They hear and read in its sacred text, just and legitimately, a different message that heard by the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam” (66).

It is precisely “a different message” conveyed by “the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam” that has turned the revelations protecting and supporting women into means of patriarchal oppression. As Mernissi boldly expresses, “If women’s rights are a problem . . . it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic

tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite” (ix).

In other words, patriarchy is the culprit for the manipulation of Islamic regulations regarding women, not the revelations or the messenger of those revelations.

The History of Veiling and Its (Misleading) Interpretation

Historically, veiling does not originate from Islam; therefore, the manipulation of veiling as a patriarchal tool does not come from Islamic teachings. Rather, veiling has been used from generation to generation to establish and maintain male dominance by restricting women’s mobility and power. Hence, the patriarchal institutions of Islam merely continue the tradition and justify it by relying upon the masochist interpretation of the Quran and hadith. In her book entitled *Women and Gender in Islam*, Ahmed provides a historical account of women’s subordination in the ancient Middle East, and how veiling was used as one of the tools to maintain the subordination. Ahmed particularly explains how the increasing male dominance that came hand in hand with the growth of civilization further reinforced the establishment of patriarchal family and the control over female sexuality:

The patriarchal family, designed to guarantee the paternity of property-heirs and vesting in men the control of female sexuality, became institutionalized, codified, and upheld by the state. Women’s sexuality was designated the property of men, first of the woman’s father, then of her husband, and female sexual purity (virginity in particular) became negotiable, economically valuable property . . . The increasing complexity of urban society and the growth of populations comprising artisans and merchants as well as agricultural laborers contributed to women’s further

subordination by facilitating their exclusion from most of the professional classes. (12-3)

The manipulations of religious beliefs and practices by the male elites can be traced back to the ancient times. The establishment of patriarchal family as the smallest unit of power in society granted control of women to the patriarchal figures of fathers and or husbands. Marriage, property ownership, even state regulations were deployed to restrict women's mobility and power. As women were increasingly domesticated and barred from political involvements in the public sphere, the patriarchs increasingly controlled and regulated women's sexuality. As women's sexuality became a public concern, women had less and less power over their own sexuality.

One of the tools deployed in controlling women's sexuality was veiling, especially in the form of seclusion. Other forms of veiling prevailed as well, functioning primarily as the signifier of women's social status and their sexual availability. The Assyrian law, for instance, determined who was eligible to wear the veil: "Wives and daughters of 'seigniors' had to veil; concubines accompanying their mistress had to veil; former 'sacred prostitutes,' now married, had to veil; but harlots and slaves were forbidden to veil" (14). Sexual availability was associated with "respectability" (14), highlighting the significance of marriage as the only legitimate form of union between men and women. For instance, married women, whose sexuality was only available for their husbands, were able to veil and were distinguishable from the prostitutes, thus showing their more respectable and higher social status. Fadwa El Guindi adds to the list of those who could observe veiling with the emphasis on how veiling determined women's social status: "Women of nobility *had* to veil. Servants, according to the Laws

[of the Assyrian], had to veil too, but *only* when accompanying noble women. The law is clear on the prohibition of veiling for slave-girls” (15). These patriarchal roles of veiling persisted even after Islamic teachings of equality between men and women were introduced.

Veiling in the forms of head covering, burqa, segregation, and seclusion was first introduced to the wives of the Prophet through different stages. Each form of veiling was introduced to his wives based on certain necessitating contexts. I will provide some Quranic verses that command women to veil and focus on who the intended audiences are, what form of veiling is commanded, and in what contexts these verses were given. My main intention is to prove that burqas, segregation, and seclusion are not obligations for all Muslim women. Only veiling in the form of head covering is obligatory to all women in general, even though this is still disputed as well. As I have mentioned in the introduction, some scholars such as Mernissi and Ahmed believe that veiling in any form, be it head covering, burqa, segregation, or seclusion, is not obligatory to any Muslim woman because the context in which the revelations of veiling were revealed is no longer relevant to the present day situation. Furthermore, these scholars also believe that veiling was only obligatory to the Prophet’s wives, not women in general. Some share the same view with these scholars, that veiling is not obligatory, but practice it for various personal reasons.

The majority of Muslim women believes that veiling in the form of head covering is an obligation for all eligible women, those who have reached puberty, as proved by the revelation of An Nuur 31 that commands all women to cover their “charms” and supported by the hadith explaining what charms that should be covered. However,

because there are diverse interpretations of whether veiling is an obligation for Muslim women or not, I believe that veiling should be a personal decision that women make in order to become more pious and intimate with God. Muslim women should be free to choose to veil or unveil and to determine the type of veiling they would like to adopt.

Unfortunately, the freedom of veiling and unveiling will never be granted to women as long as religious leaders and the patriarchal institution of states abuse religion and impose their “patriarchal” interpretation upon Muslim women. In *Shame*, the author-in-text clearly opts for a separation between states and religions and reveals a disturbing fact that Islamic fundamentalists who tend to enforce veiling on women are a part of the state’s institutions:

So-called Islamic “fundamentalism” does not spring, in Pakistan, from the people. It is imposed on them from above. Autocratic regimes find it useful to espouse the rhetoric of faith, because people respect that language, are reluctant to oppose it. This is how religions shore up dictators; by encircling them with words of power, words which the people are reluctant to see discredited, disenfranchised, mocked. (266)

The enforcement of veiling is often a consequence of religious and political leaders’ manipulation with the interpretation of the sacred texts. They tend to treat the Quran as if it stands the test of time that the interpretation of the Quran is as inflexible as the scripture is unchangeable. Their interpretation remains the same regardless of changes in society that come with the development of time.

With the power over the people, the religious and political leaders shut out the possibilities for other interpretations of the Quran, which is precisely what Rushdie is

trying to convey through his most controversial novel, *The Satanic Verses*. In “In Good Faith” one of the essays from *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie admits that through the character of Salman the Persian he invites readers to “think about the validity of religion’s rules” (400). Especially for Muslim readers, he asks:

[A]re all the rules laid down at a religion’s origin immutable forever? How about the penalties for prostitution (stoning to death) or thieving (mutilation)? How about the prohibition of homosexuality? How about the Islamic law of inheritance, which allows a widow to inherit only an eighth share, and which gives to sons twice as much as it does to daughters? What of the Islamic law of evidence, which makes a woman’s testimony worth half that of a man? Are these, too, to be given unquestioning respect: or many writers and intellectuals ask the awkward questions that are a part of their reason for being what they are? (400)

Rushdie questions the immutability of Islamic rules based on “literal” interpretation of the Quran that were situated in a certain time and context and may no longer be applicable for the present situation. He specifically protests the religious leaders who are politically biased and unwilling to listen to diverse voices, practices, and beliefs in the Islamic rules, and thus violate basic human rights.

In the case of veiling, the religious and political leaders dismiss any alternative interpretations of the Quran and see it as a threat to their power. Therefore, in some countries in which the leaders abuse the religion and deploy it to oppress the people, especially women, veiling or unveiling is never a free decision. Rushdie’s novels show

clearly how the interpretations of verses regarding veiling have been steered away from their original contexts and manipulated for the advantage of the patriarchs.

The particular and general intended audiences for all the ayahs about veiling in the forms of head covering, burqas, segregation, and seclusion respectively are distinguishable by relying solely on the scriptures. The ayah commanding women in general to observe veiling in the form of head and body covering is an-Nuur 24 31:

And tell the believing women to lower their glances and guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; they should let their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers; sons, their sisters sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no sexual desire, of children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper.

This particular ayah commands all women to be modest. In the footnote of the translation, M.A.S Abdel Saleem assigns the definition of *modesty* to the following statement: “lower their glances, guarding their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal.”

It has to be noted that modesty is not solely obligated to women. The ayah preceding the one quoted above commands men to be modest: “[Prophet], tell the believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do” (An Nuur 24: 31). Modesty in this case, for

both men and women, has to do with a certain style of clothing, of “guarding private parts” and, especially for women, covering their “charms.” Islam basically acknowledges physical and physiological differences between men and women: . . . And the male is not like the female...” (Quran 3: 36). However, these differences do not exempt men from the obligation to be modest, even though the areas they have to cover are not the same as what women owing to their physical differences.

Interpretations for the ayah primarily differ on what “modesty” really means and what kind of dress that should be considered “modest.” The debate is even more heated when it comes to assigning modesty to women because of the ambiguity of what can be considered women’s charms. As is the case with translated scriptures, it is hard to transfer the exact concept from one language to another. Especially when it comes to a certain style of dressing, each culture has different concepts of dressing and a multitude of labels to name the clothes people wear. Thus, what is considered to be a modest dress is subject to debate. Marnia Lazreg attests to this difficulty: “Since full details of how women dressed in the heroic period of Islam are not known with accuracy, the terms used for their clothing remain open to various interpretations as does ‘modesty’” (21). Lazreg goes on to mention that some recent Quran translations have avoided the use of the word “modest” or “modesty,” a choice that she refers to as “a more enlightened translation” (21). Regardless of the fluidity of the word “modesty” and its meaning, this is still a key term used in most widely accepted translations and in discussions on veiling.

Recent scholars tend to define modesty more loosely, arguing that it is subject to individual choices. Thus, more and more variations in modest dress code disregarding veiling are born. The widely accepted translation for this particular revelation, though,

consults the hadith narrated by Aisha as compiled by Abu Dawud. According to Aisha Y. Musa, “*The Hadith* are the only vehicle through which, according to the vast majority of Muslims, we can access the Prophetic Sunna: that which Muhammad said and did, and of which he approved or disapproved” (1). Since questions seem to revolve around what exactly need to be covered, the hadith gives definite answer on which parts of a woman’s body were approved by the Prophet to be shown and which parts were not:

Narated By 'Aisha, Ummul Mu'minin: Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Apostle of Allah (pbuh) wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of Allah (pbuh) turned his attention from her. He said: O Asma', when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to her face and hands. (27: 4092)

Asma,' to whom the Prophet specifies how women should embody modesty, does not belong to “Mothers of the Believers,” a term referring to the wives of the prophets; in other words, she represents women in general. Because the revelation of veiling in the form of body covering has women in general as its intended audiences, the use of the hadith demonstrating Asma’s experience as a clarification is widely accepted.

Furthermore, hadiths are considered second in importance to the Quran because one of their main functions is to clarify any ambiguity found in the Quran.

Comparing the revelation of head covering with the ones commanding women to observe seclusion and segregation, it is clear that the two revelations have two different intended audiences. The context in which the ayahs were revealed further proves that in

addition to the fact that these ayahs were intended for the Prophet's wives only, the immediate situations of the wives prompted the revelations:

Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other woman. If you are truly mindful of God, do not speak too softly in case the sick at heart should lust after you, but speak in an appropriate manner; stay at home, and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past; keep up the prayer and give the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet's] House, and to purify you thoroughly. (Al Ahzab 33: 32-33)

The ayahs above make it clear that seclusion is obligated to the prophet's wives only, as proven by the summon to the wives of the Prophet in the beginning of the first ayah, followed by an explanation of their special status compared to other women in general. After all, the Prophet's wives are "Mothers of the Believers"; they are not ordinary women. According to Nabia Abbot, the situation of the neighborhood in which the Prophet and his companions lived necessitated the revelation to insure the safety of the Prophet's wives: "Traditions associating the institution of seclusion with family honor and social prestige refer to insults offered Mohammed's wives by the *munafiqun*, or "hypocrites," who, on being taken to the task, excused themselves by saying they had mistaken Mohammed's wives for slaves" (24). Ironically, this tradition is still practiced even though no longer necessary.

The same intended audiences can be seen in the ayah commanding the rise of the curtain to segregate men and women:

Believers, do not enter the Prophet's apartments for a meal unless you are given permission to do so; do not linger until [a meal] is ready. When you are invited, go in; then, when you have taken your meal, leave. Do not stay on and talk, for that would offend the Prophet, though he would shrink from asking you to leave. God does not shrink from the truth. When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen: this is purer both for you hearts and for theirs. It is not right for you to offend God's Messenger, just as you should never marry his wives after him: that would be grievous in God's eyes. (Al-Ahzab 33: 53)

Historically, this revelation was induced by a couple of incidents, ultimately by one during the Prophet's and Zainab's wedding reception: "The most widely accepted story is that some of the wedding guests overstayed their welcome, thus causing Mohammed both inconvenience and annoyance. This brought on the revelation of 'The Verse of the Curtain'" (Abbott 20). Veiling or the setting of a screen or curtain to separate men and women here is more about a code of ethics and less about segregating the sexes. Furthermore, again, a specific context necessitated the revelation, and yet some religious leaders ignore the context and the particular intended audiences of the revelations on this kind of veiling mostly known as hijab. As a result, many women fall victim into patriarchal institutions of seclusion and segregation.

In the same fashion, the ayahs that are often cited to support the obligation of the observation of burqa are addressed to all believing women in a particular situation in which it was dangerous for them to go outside without the company of men:

Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful. If the hypocrites, the sick at heart, and those who spread lies in the city do not desist, We shall rouse you [Prophet] against them, and they will only be you [neighbors] in this city for a short while. (Al-Ahzab 59-60)

The phrase “make their outer garments hang low over them” is most often interpreted as covering the whole body from head to toe, thus resulting in women wearing burqas. On the other hand, the aim of this covering “that they should be known (as such) and not molested” is often dismissed. The context of this revelation still related to the revelation on seclusion whose main function is to protect the Prophet’s wives from both verbal and sexual assaults by the hypocrites. The hypocrites molested the Prophet’s wives and other Muslim women excused themselves by pretending to have mistaken the women for the slaves. Thus, to distinguish the Muslim women from the slaves and preventing the molestation by the hypocrites, they were instructed to cover their body.

In most Muslim societies in which veiling is not enforced by the state’s laws, burqas, segregation, and seclusion are no longer practiced, while head covering remains the norm. However, even though not enforced by the state laws, seclusion and segregation and the observance of burqa are still practiced by some Muslim communities or families, as exemplified by the three novels under discussion. India and Pakistan, the settings of the novels, do not enforce veiling on their citizens. Nevertheless, veiling in the two countries has been the cultural and religious tradition inherited from one generation

to another, with families as the most important entity in a society that bear the obligations of preserving such traditions.

Families and Patriarchal Manipulation of Veiling

Patriarchal manipulations of veiling in the three novels under study manifest most conspicuously in families. Families, the smallest unit of patriarchal systems, are where the patriarchs, fathers or husbands, have direct controls over their women. Even when states do not impose veiling on women, for instance, families may do so because of the power of the patriarchs that are impenetrable even by the states' laws. As Jan Goodwill observes, "[The] majority of Muslim women still find their lives controlled by their closest male relative . . . Even though Islam states that a woman has the right to refuse a husband selected for her, in reality, familiar pressures can be so strong, they may result in her death if she is not acquiescent" (32). Goodwin's observation highlights the power of patriarchal families in dominating their female members by abusing Islamic regulations.

The principles of *izzat* and *sharam* further justify the manipulation of veiling in patriarchal families. These two interrelated concepts entail the position of women as the family's honor. Jenny Sharpe explains, "As a Muslim code of conduct, *izzat* and *sharam* reproduced the gendered role of female passivity, withholding from women other definitions of femininity. *Izzat* is the family honor that must be upheld, particularly through *sharam* as the sign of women's purity" (2). Sharpe adds that women's honor in the case of *sharam* "is but an extension of her husband's or father's. A woman who submits to feelings of shame is one who does not step out of line. If she should behave without shame, that is, shamelessly, then family honor is restored only by punishing the transgressor" (2). Women's entitlement to the status of family's honor should be a

privilege for women. Unfortunately, the entitlement only further justifies the patriarchs in the family to impose seclusion and segregation to their female members.

It is these patriarchal family's impositions on veiling upon the female members in the name of protecting family's honor that Rushdie portrays in his novels. The analysis of the three novels will start with *Midnight's Children* (1981), as the earliest novel published among the three works under study, followed by *Shame* (1983), and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). The chronological order is not the only reason for the order of analysis; rather, as the discussion moves from one novel to another, it will show how the patriarchal manipulations of veiling escalate from secluded daughters to secluded prostitutes. The absence of the literary representation of "the generally commanded" form of veiling, head covering, in the three novels renders the portrayals of burqa, seclusion, and segregation more salient, calling attention to their vulnerability to be made tools of women's oppression, and their appeals to contestation and debates among critics.

Midnight's Children

In *Midnight's Children*, veiling is observed by four generations of women, starting with Doctor Aziz's mother, Naseem Aziz, Amina Sinai, and ending with Jamila. For Doctor Aziz's mother who has to unveil because of her financial situation, unveiling inflicts unbearable shame in her, resulting in physical illnesses that even her doctor son cannot cure. Her son, Doctor Aziz, knows the only medicine for her is to re-veil. Ironically, though, when Doctor Aziz gets married to Naseem, he forces her to unveil. Naseem, who has been used to seclusion as it is imposed upon her by her father Ghani, has to come out of purdah because of Doctor Aziz's pressure. On the other hand, Amina Sinai (Mumtaz Aziz) has to secretly marry a man who is secluded by his father in her

house. When finally the family finds that she is still a virgin even after three years of marriage, Mumtaz is divorced by her husband who cannot bear the shame of being unable to operate as a husband. Mumtaz, then, remarries to Ahmed Sinai, a boyfriend of her sister Alia, and changes her name into Amina Sinai. Her daughter, Jamila, is the last generation in the family to be tangled in the web of patriarchal manipulation of veiling. On the condition that she has to sing from behind a perforated sheet, Jamila enters the professional career of a singer, even though it is never clear whether this path is her own choice or her father's.

Veiling and Seduction: Veiled Women as Sexual Objects

Through the perforated sheet, Rushdie evinces that veiling in the form of physical segregation by means of a curtain or purdah is failing to fulfill its religious functions: to create boundaries between men and women, to maintain women's chastity and modesty by protecting women from men's gaze, and to liberate women so as to freely interact with their sexual counterpart. The novel subverts the religious function purdah and demonstrates that this form of veiling is in danger of enticing erotic desire. Indeed, Daphne Grace contends that "within the narrative of *Midnight's Children*, the veil itself is an image of both erotic allure and conversely of woman's unassailable purity" (187). The contradictory nature of segregation and seclusion is more apparent as the representation of these kinds of veiling unravels in each of the three novels under study.

The highly comical and exaggerated episode of the perforated sheet that opens up *Midnight's Children*, symbolizes the failure of segregation, an "extreme" interpretation of veiling that is highly patriarchal in nature. The perforated sheet is the literal interpretation of *hijab*, which means "curtain," which is supposed to create boundaries between Doctor

Aziz and Naseem and thus protect her chastity and honor from the gaze of the doctor. This kind of veiling by use of a curtain is called purdah in the novel, a tradition mostly practiced in India and Pakistan, which are the settings of *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie subverts the function of purdah from that of protecting Naseem's honor and chastity to that of promoting her as a sexual object that will in turn promote seduction as a means of communication between her and Doctor Aziz.

Literally, the perforated sheet held by the three female servants successfully fulfills the function of veiling as a barrier between Naseem and Doctor Aziz. The sheet is supposed to facilitate the health examination while protecting Naseem from the gaze of the doctor. Ironically, it fails miserably in protecting Naseem's body from the erotic scrutiny of Doctor Aziz because, in fact, the perforation enables him to see her bare body in fragments, inciting erotic desire and the urge to see even more of these fragments: "[H]e could feel in his fingertips the softness of her ticklish skin or the perfect tiny wrists or the beauty of the ankles . . . but she was headless, because he had never seen her face" (22). The erotic desire creates an illusion of love whereby Doctor Aziz is haunted by Naseem's fragments: "So gradually Doctor Aziz came to have a picture of Naseem in his mind . . . this phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams. Glued together by his imagination, she accompanied him on all his rounds, she moved into the front room of his mind" (22). Doctor Aziz unconsciously develops a sexual fantasy about Naseem, falling prey into Ghani's plot of seducing him with his daughter's fragments. Doctor Aziz has been successfully seduced by Naseem's fragments and mistakenly perceives his feelings as love.

Indeed, segregation, which takes the form of purdah in this novel, is prone to promoting seduction. Fatima Mernissi explains the idea behind segregation: “In order to prevent sexual interaction between members” of different sex, “seclusion and veiling . . . were developed. But paradoxically, sexual segregation heightens the sexual dimension of any interaction between men and women” (492). The perforated sheet demonstrates that in Naseem and Doctor Aziz’s case, seduction has been the ultimate language between the segregated couple. Ghani, the master mind behind the plot of the perforated sheet, abuses purdah by making a perforation on the curtain. Through this perforation, he flaunts his daughter’s body to seduce Doctor Aziz. Thus, Ghani has not only literally perforated the curtain, but he has also metaphorically tainted and abused the religious function of purdah to protect women from men, turning them into a fatal seduction.

As the love story between Doctor Aziz and Naseem unravels, it becomes clear that such love induced by curiosity and fantasy over fragments is unreal. It is the fragments of Naseem that Doctor Aziz loves or has loved, not her as a whole. Doctor Aziz comes to the realization that the fragments have lured him into a “false” love, one that once complete is no longer interesting. In fact, he fails to love Naseem as a whole:

Waiting for him in the courtyard filled with malevolent geese were the disapproving features of my grandma, Naseem Aziz, whom he had made mistake of loving in fragments, and who was now unified and transmuted into the formidable figure she would always remain, and who was always known by the curious title of Reverend Mother. (40)

The fragments of Naseem create the image of unassailable beauty, while the wholeness of her generates a very frightening figure—the Reverend Mother moniker meant to convey

this quality of Naseem as a whole that is frightening and ugly, compared to her beautiful and sexually attractive fragments. The ending of love built on seduction instigated by the rigid sexual segregation proves to be disadvantageous for both couple. The segregation has saved Naseem from the lascivious gaze of Doctor Aziz, but the gaze is soon replaced by an erotic desire that incites the sexual fantasy in which Naseem is its sole object because “male sexual fantasy conjures up an eroticized picture of ‘woman’ as object of desire” (Grace 188).

Veiling and Family’s Honor

As have been previously mentioned, *izzat* and *sharam* or the concepts of women as the symbol of family’s honor prompt and justify the patriarchal manipulation of veiling. These concepts give birth to a belief that women need to be protected by the patriarchs to make sure that they are not tainted or bring shame to the family. The underlying belief is that a daughter’s honor is paralleled to the family’s honor. Once tainted, the honor of the whole family is consequently tainted: “With the first drop of her menstrual blood, every Muslim girl becomes a temple of her family’s honor” (Minai 100). To be the “honor” of the family or the society is not always a privilege; instead, in some society, it makes women fall prey to the patriarchal institution of seclusion. Rushdie cleverly alludes to this patriarchal practice of secluding female members of a family. Using satire, Rushdie shows how the patriarchs in *Midnight’s Children*, Ghani, Doctor Aziz, Ahmed Sinai, and Uncle Puff, manipulate veiling for their own benefits in the name of family tradition of protecting their daughters and wives.

Naseem’s father, Ghani the landowner, does exactly what the stereotype of a traditional patriarchal Muslim father does: secluding his daughter and mechanizing a plot

to marry her to a qualified man like Doctor Aziz: “Doctor Sahib, my daughter is a decent girl, it goes without saying. She does not flaunt her body under the noses of strange men. You will understand that you cannot be permitted to see her, no, not in any circumstances; accordingly I have required her to be positioned behind that sheet. She stands there, like a good girl” (19). Ghani proudly declares the chastity of his daughter that he keeps with all his might, even though, in fact, he “flaunts” his daughter’s body in fragments in order to seduce Doctor Aziz and trap him to marry his daughter. Thus, Ghani succeeds in finding a good husband for his daughter, but he fails miserably in protecting the honor of his family.

Naseem’s father is ambivalent. On the one hand, he worships the patriarchal tradition of secluding his daughter; on the other hand, his house is full of European arts that he loves, and he desires Doctor Aziz, a Europe-educated man born from an intermarriage between a German soldier and an Indian woman, to be his son-in-law (17). When Doctor Aziz comes to check on the physical illness of Naseem, he reminds the European-educated Doctor of the need to preserve the Indian/Muslim culture: “You Europe-returned chappies forget certain things . . . You will understand that you cannot be permitted to see her, no, not in any circumstances” (19). He reprimands Doctor Aziz for not being aware of the traditional patriarchal culture of seclusion. Nonetheless, he desires Doctor Aziz to marry his daughter, thereby making sure the legacy of his well-to-do family is preserved. In other words, Ghani is at best conflicted and at worst a hypocrite.

Throughout his plots of luring Doctor Aziz to fall in love with his daughter, Naseem’s voice is unheard. Only her “helpless laughter coming through the sheet” (21),

and when she is embarrassed during the examination of her bottom, she can only express it through “a shy, but compliant blush” (23) of her bottom. When eventually she can face the doctor and voice her mind for the first time by bursting into a laugh and shrieking, “But Doctor, My God, what a *nose!*” (24), it is Ghani who seems to be the happiest: “Ghani, who had stood blindly beside the sheet for three years, smiling and smiling and smiling, began once again to smile his secret smile, which was mirrored in the lips of the wrestlers” (24). The repetition of “smile,” emphasizes Ghani’s happiness and implies the success of his three-year seduction plot undertaken with the help of the three servant-wrestlers.

Several decades apart from Naseem, the patriarchal tradition of secluding a daughter as a means of protecting family honor is repeated by Ahmed Sinai, Naseem’s son-in-law. When asked by Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif to grant permission for Ahmed’s daughter to start a professional singing career, we are told, “Our daughter,” Ahmed said—he always the more old-fashioned of the two beneath the surface—“is from a good family; but you want to put her on a stage in front of God knows how many strange men . . .?” (357). It turns out that Alauddin Latif shares the same view with Ahmed Sinai; he, too, has daughters whom he believes to be the honors of his family:

The Major looked affronted. “Sir,” he said stiffly, “you think I am not a man of sensibility? Got daughters myself, old man. Seven, thank God. Set up a little travel agency for them; strictly over the telephone, though. Wouldn’t dream of sitting them in an office-window. It’s the biggest telephonic travel agency in the place, actually. We send train-drivers to England, matter of fact; bus-wallahs, too. My point,” he added hastily, “is

that your daughter would be given as much respect as mine. More, actually'; she's going to be a star!"

Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif, or more popularly nicknamed Uncle Puffs, assures Ahmad Sinai that Jamila will be as strictly confined as his own daughters, seemingly never questioning his denial of their agency as he ensures his own.

Alauddin Latif also treats his daughters as a commodity that needs to be quickly sold, so that his burden as a father will be removed. He asks or more exactly urges Saleem to "pick" one of his daughters to marry with the promise of a certain amount of unimaginable dowry: "Playing hard to get, eh? Darn right. Okay my boy: you pick one of my girls, and I guarantee to have all her teeth pulled out; by the time you marry her she'll have a million buck smile for a dowry!" (358). At another moment, Uncle Puffs forces Saleem—again—to pick one of his daughters: "Hey, boy—choose! Take your pick! Remember: the dowry!" (360). The Major clearly sees his daughters as objects that he can change into anything that will suit his and their suitors' desires. His funny remark of "[having] all her teeth pulled out" highlights the passivity of his daughters whose voice are never heard.

Jamila's own voice is never heard as well; in fact, she is never involved in the discussion of her future. Her absence marks the silence of daughters whose lives are in the hands of patriarchs. As the honor of the family, she needs to be protected to the extent that seclusion is a must: "In my daughter,' Ahmed Sinai told Uncle Puffs proudly, 'it is my side of the family's noble features which have prevailed'" (360). Contrary to her singing voice that is heard all over the nation, her own voice, her own desire is never heard: "Jamila Singer's voice was on Voice of Pakistan Radio constantly, so that in the

villages of West and East Wings she came to seem like a superhuman being, incapable of being fatigued, an angel who sang to her people through all the days and nights” (359). Her singing voice is the bitter irony of her life because, although she sings out loud in front of her massive audience, her own voice is never heard in front of her family members, especially her father.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Sinai indulges in the fame and fortune of his daughter:

Ahmed Sinai, whose few remaining qualms about his daughter’s career had been more than allayed by her enormous earnings (although he had once been a Delhi man, he was by now a true Bombay Muslim at heart, placing cash matters above most other things), became fond of telling my sister: ‘You see, daughter: decency, purity, art and good business sense can be one and the same things; your old father has been wise enough to work that out.’ Jamila smiled sweetly and agreed. (359)

Not once does he inquire into Jamila’s own desire. He decides what is best for her, and what is best for her is basically what is best for the family and for him financially.

Jamila, whose nickname of Brass Monkey indicates her active or even wild behavior as a child, has totally changed her personality as soon as she enters teenagehood, the point in a young woman’s life when she has to embody the honor of her family: “So, she was growing into the sweetest-natured of girls, always obliged” (358). Jamila and Naseem show that veiling in all of its forms can become not so much a religious practice as a tool for the patriarchs in their families to control them, to exert their power over them. The fault is not with the veiling itself but with the men who have determined how to subvert a woman’s goal of modesty into a complete denial of self.

Veiling and Social Status

Veiling in the form of seclusion in a place called zenana is depicted by Rushdie as the privilege of women from middle- to upper-class social and economic status. To seclude women in a total physical confinement and bar them from being able to access public areas is to deny their responsibilities of generating income. Thus, only women from wealthy families can “enjoy” such physical confinement, while those who come from lower economic status have to expose themselves in public in order to survive. Fatima Mernissi’s memoir *Dreams of Trespass* gives an account of how men are respected because of their ability to seclude the women in their families:

All respectable men provided for their womenfolk, so that they did not have to go out into the dangerous unsafe streets. They gave them lovely palaces with marble floors and fountains, good food, nice clothes, and jewelry. What more did a woman need to be happy? It was only poor women like Luza, the wife of Ahmed the doorkeeper, who needed to go outside, to work and feed themselves. Privileged women were spared that trauma. (46)

Women’s seclusion, in Mernissi’s memoir, is made a standard measure of *men’s* economic and social status—the woman’s preference is irrelevant. Indeed, women under confinement are presumed to be fortunate because, in contrast to women from lower social and economic status, the women in zenanas do not have to unveil themselves in public to “work and feed themselves.”

Naseem’s seclusion, for example, is made possible by Ghani’s wealth. Her seclusion is a stark contrast to the three female slaves who guard her in the zenana. When Ghani proudly declares his daughter’s chastity in front of Doctor Aziz, he implicitly

shows off his wealth by showing Doctor Aziz how he is able to afford seclusion for his daughter. His wealth is already indicated by the attachment of the title “the landowner” into his name; indeed, he is repeatedly called “Ghani the landowner.” Land-ownership in rural countries denotes not only economic but also social status. Some landowners may still work on their lands, but wealthy landowners usually do not work on their own lands or involve their family members, especially women. Women from wealthy landowning families are veiled, secluded at their homes. Daphne Grace explains, “In rural Hindu India . . . women from high-class families have traditionally veiled, to indicate that the wealth of the family does not require its women to help in agricultural labour” (162).

In line with Grace, in her study of *Muslim Women of the British Punjab*, Dushka Saiyid remarks, “Purdah was a luxury which only the shurafa women could observe” (4-5). *Shurafa* is a term referring to “those belonging to respectable classes, mainly middle and upper classes” (xviii). Thus, Ghani makes his wealth clear to Dr. Aziz by showing him how he is able to confine his only daughter in his own home with three female slaves attending to her needs.

In the same fashion, Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif or Uncle Puffs brags about his extravagant seclusion for his seven daughters. He even goes as far as planning to invest his wealth in his daughter’s body by replacing their teeth with gold (358). He shows that his extravagant zenana is his pride as a man. Unlike the majority of society, he can provide for the women without having to make them contribute financially. Graham-Brown reports that “patterns of sexual segregation varied greatly from one community and region to another, but seclusion could be [practiced] only among richer families where women did not work” (505).

Both Ghani and Uncle Puffs represent two different regions, India and Pakistan, but they share similarities in terms of what type of families can afford seclusion for their female members. It is the male members of the family who are able to provide seclusion that are entitled to higher social status, not the secluded women. For the secluded women, the social status only signifies their subjugation to the patriarchal imposition of seclusion.

Shame

In *Shame*, the theme of patriarchal figures secluding their wives and daughters for the sake of family's honor recurs. The multigenerational seclusion also reappears in this novel, with the sisters Shakil as the first generation to be secluded by their patriarch, Mr. Shakil. Omar Khayyam Shakil, their secluded son who finally can break free from the seclusion and pursue a career as a psychiatrist, marries Sufiya Zinobiya Shakil, who has to be secluded for her shameful mental problem and violent personality. Sufiya's mother, Builquis, is also secluded by her husband, Raza Hyder, and Builquis's cousin-in law, Rani Harappa, is also abandoned and secluded in a huge mansion by her husband Iskandar Harappa.

In this novel Rushdie focuses on the principles of *izzat* and *sharam* (or *shame* as the title of the novel itself indicates). As author-in-text, Rushdie appears in the novel, reciting the real story of a Pakistani girl who had sex with a white boy and was then murdered by her father in London. Sufiya Zinubia Shakil is secluded for being the "shame" of the family: born as a daughter instead of a desired son, mentally retarded, and using violence as her means of expression. Through Sufiya, Rushdie subverts the principles of *izzat* and *sharam* and evinces how a repressed woman can turn to violence when the shame inflicted in her is no longer bearable. Through the sisters Shakil, Rushdie

also reverses the position of women as the one gazed on and fantasized about to that of gazing and fantasizing.

Covering the Shame of the Family

The case of women receiving punishment for being the transgressor of *sharam* is found in *Shame*. The author-in-text, Rushdie, recalls a true incident in England involving a Pakistani father who murdered his daughter for violating *sharam* by having sex with a white boy: "Not so long ago, in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain" (123). This real story becomes the basis of the fictional story of *Shame*. In *Shame*, Rushdie demonstrates how fathers, as well as husbands, manipulate the tradition of protecting the family honor or *izzat* for their own benefits.

Quite different from the real incident that the author quotes, Raza Hyder does exactly the opposite to his second daughter, Naveed or Good News, who violates *sharam*. Rather than murdering her for having dishonored the family by eloping with Captain Talvar Ulhaq and losing her virginity to him, Raza Hyder marries the two: "At three a.m. Raza Hyder relents. There must be a wedding, the girl must be handed over to a husband, any husband. That will get rid of her and cause less of a stir than kicking her out. 'A whore with a home,' Raza summons Bilquis to announce, 'is better than a whore in the gutter'" (174). Raza's decision is political; he has to save his face for the sake of his political career. Having a daughter who is no longer a virgin is not only dishonoring the family honor, but also endangering his political career. He cannot "kick her out" because that will cause rumor, so he has to wed his daughter to cover up the shame. The way Raza

calls Naveed a whore demonstrates how low the status of a woman is who has violated *izzat* and *sharam*.

It is also to save his political career that Raza Hyder secludes his daughter, Sufiya. Since her birth, Sufiya has been the shame of the family: “Genitalia! Can! Be! Obscured!” In his desperation, he shrieks, “A bump! . . . Is it not, doctor, an absolute and unquestionable *bump?*” (89). Raza Hyder sees Sufiya’s sex as a shame for his family. The first child should be a son; a daughter only brings shame to the family. As Sufiya grows to be a mentally challenged girl, the family inflicts more and more shame on her. When the inflicted shame grows into a beast that renders Sufiya violent, Raza Hyder justifies this situation to seclude Sufiya. More than just seclude her, Raza Hyder even chains her and puts her into a prolonged sleep:

Hyder and Shakil agreed that Sufiya Zinobia was to be kept unconscious until further notice. She was to enter a state of suspended animation; Hyder brought long chains and they padlocked her to the attic beams; in the nights followed they bricked up the attic window and fastened huge bolts to the door; and twice in every twenty-four hours, Omar Khayyam would go unobserved into that darkened room, that echo of other death-cells, to inject into the tiny body lying on its thin carpet the fluids of nourishment and of unconsciousness, to administer the drugs that turned her from one fairy-tale into another, into sleeping-beauty instead of beauty-and-beast. “What else to do?” Hyder said helplessly. “Because I cannot kill her either, don’t you see.” (250)

Clearly, Raza's main reason to seclude his first daughter, and the only daughter he has after Good News died, is not for Sufiya's sake. He treats Sufiya as no more than an object, a thing whose voices and desires need not be heard. She is a hindrance that needs to be eradicated, to be put into sleep, transformed into the classical figure of a submissive daughter, "The Sleeping Beauty."

Blaming his wife, Builquis, for having given birth to shameful children—Good News, who acts like a "whore," and Sufiya, who gives shame to the family by being their first son, instead of their first daughter—Raza Hyder also secludes his wife:

In the following years he persuaded himself that by locking up his wife, by veiling her in walls and shuttered windows, he could save his family from the malign legacy of her blood, from its passions and its torments (for if Sufiya Zinobia's soul was in agony, she was also the child of a frenzied woman, and that, too, may be an explanation of a kind). (210)

It is Builquis's malign legacy of her blood that has brought shame to Raza's family.

The Reversed Gaze

Through the characters of the sisters Shakil, Rushdie cleverly alludes to the Western tradition of Orientalizing and fantasizing veiled Muslim women as disclosed by Edward Said. Women confined in *zenana* are especially more vulnerable to the tradition: "But evil tongues will say anything, especially about beautiful women who live far away from the denuding eyes of men" (6). This allusion also accentuates the failure of veiling in the form of *zenana* to fulfill its religious function because, instead of protecting women from the "denuding eyes of men," it provokes eroticism. *Zenana* is the Indian or Urdu

term that is equivalent to *harem*,¹ a term that is usually associated with Islam and polygamy. Geeta Patel clarifies the difference of these two seemingly equal terms, noting that “zenana and harem both suggest enclosure, but both are exchanged in slightly overlapping but differentiated literary circulatory systems. The valence of zenana moves toward the domestic—the local use of women’s spaces within particular indigenous communities (3). Both *harem* and *zenana* signify women’s space, femininity, and domesticity; however, harem “has long been colonized, used as a traveling trope that collapses into odd folds in the localities from which it ostensibly comes” (Patel 3). By using the local term of zenana, it can be argued that Rushdie is calling attention to the patriarchal tradition of secluding women that basically has the same root as that of harem. Even though not as famous as the “colonized” harem, zenana and harem share the same idea of women’s domestication, and thus men’s patriarchal domination.

The eroticized veiled women in *Shame* enact the eroticization of what they cannot see and experience from inside their seclusion, particularly of the “unseen” males:

[T]hey were imprisoned in the zenana wing where they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed, imagining, during the pre-pubertal years, bizarre genitalia such as holes in the chest into which their own nipples might snugly fit, ‘because for all we knew in those days,’ they would remind each other amazedly in later life, ‘fertilization might have been supposed to happen through the breast.’ (6)

¹ Alev Lytle Croutier explains, “The word *harem*, derived from the Arabic haram, means ‘unlawful,’ ‘protected,’ or ‘forbidden.’ . . . In its secular use, *harem* refers to the separate, protected household where women, children, and servants live in maximum seclusion and privacy” (17).

Implicit in this two-directional act of eroticism is the reversal of subject-object of erotic fantasy; the often eroticized zenana women, in fact, fantasize about their fantasizers. Rushdie gives these secluded women a voice and offers an image that tells something about their life. The voice given may not be an ideal one, especially because it comes from the perspective of Rushdie as a male author. Nonetheless, giving the voice for secluded women calls attention to their nature of being silenced and fantasized. As Laura Mulvey argues:

The [sexualized] image of woman says little or nothing about women's reality, but is symptomatic of male fantasy and anxiety that are projected on to the female image. In this sense the image of woman that had circulated as a signifier of sexuality could be detached from reality, from referring to actual women, and become attached to a new referent, the male unconscious. The direction of the gaze shifted, satisfyingly, from woman as spectacle to psyche that had need of such a spectacle. (xiii-xiv)

Rushdie's play with the reversal of the subject-object binary or the fantasizer and the fantasized not only reverses the active/passive roles of the men as the ones who fantasize and the secluded women as the fantasized ones, it also demonstrates that men fantasize about the women behind seclusion because men are veiled from the reality of these women. In the same fashion, Rushdie shows how the sexualized image of men that the sisters Shakil fantasize "says little or nothing about [men's] reality" because the seclusion of the sisters Shakil inhibits them from any interaction with men.

Veiling and Economic Disempowerment

Women who are financially independent are women who can empower themselves and have more opportunities to be free from patriarchal domination. Unfortunately, women who are in the confinement of zenana are not able to be financially independent; instead, by design, they are totally dependent on men. Consequently, their financial dependence makes these women even more vulnerable to oppression from their patriarchs. For instance, the Shakil sisters in *Shame* are denied their rights of access to education, thus to economic empowerment as well: “The three girls had been kept inside that labyrinthine mansion until his dying day; virtually uneducated, they were imprisoned in the zenana wing” (6).

Being in a total seclusion with no access to education at all severely damages the lives of sisters Shakil who are easily beguiled by the creditors of their father:

Because they had been raised to think of money as one of the two subjects that it is forbidden to discuss with strangers, they signed away their fortune without even troubling to read the documents which the money-lenders presented. At the end of it all the vast estates around Q., which comprised approximately eighty-five percent of the only good orchards and rich agricultural lands in that largely infertile region, had been lost in their entirety; the three sisters were left with nothing but the unmanageably infinite mansion stuffed from floor to ceiling with possessions. (7)

The implication here is that had the sisters Shakil been educated, they would not have lost all the inheritance left by their father.

However, even though confined in their zenana and without any external source of income, the sisters Shakil are able to maintain their household and keep their servants by selling all the inheritance left from their father:

The continual passage of items from living quarters via dumb-waiter to pawnshop brought concealed matter to light at regular intervals. Those outsize chambers stuffed brim-full with the material legacy of generations of rapaciously acquisitive forebears were being slowly emptied, so that by the time Omar Khayyam was ten and a half there was enough space to move around without bumping into the furniture at every step. (27)

The sisters Shakil's way of surviving is effective but ironic. They support and empower themselves financially by being highly dependent on their father's inheritance. Years of physical seclusion have made them unable to live outside their confinement and interact "normally" with the society, and yet they find a means by which to survive.

The Satanic Verses

The subversion of the religious function of veiling under the control of patriarchal institution culminates in *The Satanic Verses*. Through the character of Mishal and her husband zamindar Mirza Saeed Akhtar, Rushdie portrays zenana as no more than a place capable of inducing seduction. The danger of erotic fantasy instigated by seclusion and segregation is also portrayed in Rushdie's depiction of the brothel named the Curtain, an allusion to the practice of hijab or purdah.

Veiling, Seduction and Polygamy

The desire to gain sexual excitement encourages Mirza Saeed Akhtar to seclude his wife, Mishal, in his huge mansion called Peristan. Secluding his wife not only

titillates his sexual appetite but also opens up more rooms for the zamindar to approach Ayesha with whom he has fallen in love. Veiling in the form of zenana for the zamindar Mirza saeed Akhtar is clearly a form of patriarchal domination that is undoubtedly advantageous for him. The seclusion is admittedly a way of spicing his relationship with his wife because he believes that by placing her in a zenana, his sexual experience will have a new adventure. The seductive nature of a total physical seclusion is apparent here. Interestingly, Mirza does not exert the seclusion upon Mishal; instead, his wife finds that the idea of secluding her in a zenana will help her conceive a baby:

[H]is strange request that from now on, whenever they came to stay at Peristan, she should adopt the 'old ways' and retreat into purdah, was not treated by her with contempt it deserved . . . 'Would it not be sort of delicious, Mishu, if we tailored our behavior to fit this old house,' she should have laughed in his face. Instead she replied, 'What you like, Saeed,' because he gave her to understand that it was a sort of erotic game. He even hinted that his passion for her had become so overwhelming that he might need to express it at any moment, and if she were out in the open at the time it might embarrass the staff; certainly her presence would make it impossible for him to concentrate on any of his tasks. (234)

The modern couple views seclusion as an outdated game that will rekindle their romance, thereby clearly dismissing any religious values attached to it. The husband manipulates veiling for his sexual excitement and hidden intention of practicing polygamy in the knowledge that his wife will not refuse his demand, especially because Mishal cannot give him children, a disadvantage for her position that renders her an unproductive wife.

As the story unravels, it becomes clear that Mirza intentionally puts Mishal in zenana to accommodate his approach to Ayesha, another important allusion to Islam and polygamy: “Had he been sincere in the reasons he gave his wife, or was he simply finding a way of leaving the coast clear for his pursuit of the Madonna of the butterflies, the epileptic Ayesha?” (235). This questioning of “the real reason” behind the practice of seclusion implies a questioning of the practice of zenana in general. The repeated use of the adjective “old” attributed to the observance of zenana as “old ways” and “old behavior” indicates that such a tradition of secluding women in a zenana is so old that modern people should leave it behind, even though, contradictorily, these modern couples are rekindling their romance through this old patriarchal tradition.

The Curtain: The Subversion of Seclusion

In another fragment of the story, the veil is misleadingly utilized by a brothel to render the prostitutes more sexually attractive for their customers. The idea of veiling as liberating is clearly satirized here. Veiling is supposed to protect women from men’s gaze, so that women can freely do their activities without fear of being seen by men. The prostitutes inside the brothel are totally “liberated” in doing their business without fear of getting punished for their prostitution because the brothel’s adoption of a harem succeeds in protecting their business by being impenetrable by the authorities. However, the prostitutes are obviously not being protected from men’s gaze—quite the contrary.

Adopting the practice of veiling observed by the wives of the Prophet and mimicking their lifestyles, even their personalities as well, the Curtain flourishes, titillating more and more men who love to fantasize the Prophet’s wives into this brothel. This brothel not only satisfies the wildest fantasy of the men who love fantasizing the

Prophet's wives, but also satisfies the fantasy of the harlots themselves who long to live a different life. As I will show later, this "extreme" subversion of veiling in the form of seclusion conveys a special concern of women's in Islamic society regarding seclusion and polygamy.

In his collections of essays and criticism, *Imaginary Homeland*, Rushdie explicitly associates veiling in the form of seclusion with women's chastity. The association is exemplified by the Prophet's wives in the story that he juxtaposes with the harlots of the Curtain in *The Satanic Verses*. In denying the accusation that he impersonates the Prophet's wives through the juxtaposition, in his essay Rushdie asserts, "The 'real' wives are clearly stated to be 'living chastely' in their harem" (401). He further explains the reason for such "shocking" juxtaposition between the lives of the Prophet's wives and the harlots in their respective harems:

Throughout the novel, I sought images that crystallized the opposition between the sacred and profane worlds. The harem and the brothel provide such an opposition. Both are places where women are sequestered, in the harem to keep them from all men except their husband and close family members, in the brothel for the use of strange males. Harem and brothel are antithetical worlds . . . The two struggling worlds, pure and impure, chaste and coarse, are juxtaposed by making them echoes of one another; and finally, the pure eradicates the impure. (401)

Harem or zenana in the story is the shelter of women's chastity. The juxtaposition does not only work in contrasting the chaste life of the Prophet's wives with the impure life of the harlots, but it also eliminates the association between harem and eroticism. The

statement of “The pure eradicate the impure,” may also be read as Rushdie’s metaphor of religious purity. As have been discussed previously, Rushdie harshly criticizes religion’s impurity as it is hijacked by political dictators. In regards with veiling, this metaphor can be read as meaning to “eradicate” the impure veiling as manipulated by patriarchy and render it Muslim women’s pure choice.

Although Rushdie’s defense against the accusation that he insults the Prophet’s wives by comparing them with the harlots is well-argued, it has to be noted that by paralleling the Prophet’s wives with the anonymous harlots who are dehumanized for living an impure life, Rushdie seems to be hinting at the fact that the wives of the Prophet are also dehumanized, thereby highlighting the subordinate position of women in Islam. This juxtaposition can also be read as Rushdie’s critique towards the existent practices of seclusion and polygamy that are always justified as following the example of the Prophet. By showing that the harlots of the Curtain fail miserably in mimicking the lives of the Prophet’s wives, it shows that such a justification is not valid.

Veiling and Piety

A discussion that seems to be dismissed by many critics concerning veiling is the fact that many women veil because of religious reasons. One may argue that even the interpretation of the commands in Quran regarding women’s veiling has been dominated and steered by men for the sake of protecting the institution of patriarchy, which is partially true. Nevertheless, veiling, especially the head covering, has been acknowledged among Muslim women as a sign of piety. In addition, a discussion of veiling cannot dismiss women’s own voices and experiences. For many women for whom veiling is not

forced by the coercive patriarchal institution, the decision of taking the veil is highly personal. Women, who are used to veiling, feel naked once they are stripped of their veil.

For example, Doctor Aziz's mother veils and unveils without any external force. Her veiling and unveiling are her means of survival. She is forced to come out of her purdah by the financial situation of her family. She has to be the breadwinner and support Doctor Aziz's school. She sacrifices her modesty and honor by revealing what she used to cover for the sake of building trust in her customers: "Just think, son," Aadam's mother is saying as she sips fresh lime water, reclining on a takht in an attitude of resigned exhaustion, how life does turn out. For so many years even my ankles were a secret, and now I must be stared at by strange persons who are not even family members." (13). What provokes her psychological distress is not society's opinion about her coming out of purdah, as will be the case for a society that holds strongly onto the practice of purdah. Rather, the anxiety comes from within; she feels she has been robbed of her chastity and honor by not covering. In other words, she is no longer able to commit to her piety.

The psychological distress caused by leaving the tradition of purdah manifests in physical illnesses: "See, my son, "Aadam's mother is saying as he begins to examine her, "what a mother will not do for her child. Look how I suffer. You are a doctor . . . feel the rashes, these blotchy bits, understand that my head aches morning noon and night. Refill my glass, child" (14). Being a professional physician, Doctor Aziz is aware that the various illnesses suffered by his mother suffers is not so much physical as it is psychological. Therefore, he suggests that his mother come back to purdah, which he believes to be the "right medicine" for her illnesses:

Aadam refills his mother's glass and continues, worriedly, to examine her. "Put some cream on these rashes and blotches, Amma. For the headache, there are pills. The boils must be lanced. But maybe if you wore purdah when you sat in the store . . . so that no disrespectful eyes could . . . such complaints often begin in the mind . . ." (15)

Doctor Aziz's mother has a hole inside her caused by her unveiling. The hole is embodied in psychological distress that transforms into physical illnesses. Indeed, almost every character in *Midnight's Children* has a hole inside him or her. Her hole is equivalent to Doctor Aziz's, who finds this when he decides to abandon the prayers, to disbelieve what he used to believe: "This decision, however, made a hole in him, a vacancy in a vital inner chamber, leaving him vulnerable to women and history" (4). The same hole is manifest when Naseem is forced to come out of purdah.

In order to fill this hole, the emptiness and guilt for leaving her means of expressing her piety, she turns to concentrate her power on her household and transforms into a formidable matriarch. As Saleem Sinai remarks, "It was perhaps the obligation of facial nudity, coupled with Aziz's constant requests for her to move beneath him, that had driven her to the barricades" (40). For Naseem, having to bare her face makes her feel naked and puts her in despair. Just like women in general would prefer to cover their bodies in various standards of modesty, as a Muslim woman, Naseem has the urge to protect and cover her body in her own standard of modesty.

Rushdie, in line with his style of writing in fragments, represents the literary stereotypes of veiling in fragments as well. Unlike the usual bias of representing the veil as if it is always associated with polygamy, seclusion, and other practices that prove the

“backwardness of Islam,” Rushdie represents each form of veiling separately into fragments. El-Guindi remarks, “It is analytically unproductive to connect the several institutions *veil-harem-eunuchs-seclusion-polygamy*, because each element may have had its own history, role in society, and cultural meaning” (3-4). Rushdie’s fragmented satire of veiling can be interpreted as a critique towards the practice of veiling that is coercive in nature and disadvantages women. Rushdie may have either purposefully or accidentally omitted the inclusion of veiled women that are not secluded, like the sisters Shakil, or not frightening, like Naseem the Reverend Mother. Of all the veiled female characters in the three novels, only Doctor Aziz’s mother, whose veiling does not go beyond the body covering, does not observe any segregation and seclusion. She even leaves the tradition of purdah and takes off her burqa in order to survive in her business selling diamonds and other jewelry. In other words, Rushdie’s critiques can be taken as an “idealistic” view of how the veil should be observed—without any coercion. After all, feminism is all about the freedom to choose. In this case, women should be free to decide whether or not to observe veiling.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF VEILING AND UNVEILING

In chapter two, I have discussed how the perforated sheet, a metaphor of veiling, is used to highlight the manipulations of the religious functions of veiling into patriarchal tools of oppression. In this chapter, I will first show how Rushdie uses veiling as a political metaphor. Then, I will move on to a more important discussion on how Rushdie depicts his female characters as being able to find strategic means of gaining their agency by subverting the patriarchal imposition of veiling. Rushdie's portrayal of Muslim women's different ways of coping with oppression proves that women's diverse experiences as a consequence of their different current political, economic, social, and cultural situations will result in different means of agency. Although unveiling or veiling works as a means of agency for one woman in her current situation, it may fail for another woman in a different situation.

Colonization witnessed the dichotomy of veiling and unveiling as part of a struggle movement. A very famous example of this dichotomy is the history of Women of Algeria recorded by Frantz Fanon in his book *A Dying Colonialism*. Although this history of women's veiling and unveiling in war is romanticized, and, to some extent invites debates especially among feminists who accuse Fanon as being sexist, it happened and is a part of history. As El Guindi remarks, "the role of the veil in liberating Algeria

from French colonial occupation is popularly known, idealized, romanticized, ideologized, and fictionalized, but nonetheless real” (169). Fanon observes how the Algerian women veiled and unveiled in their struggle of independence:

There is thus a historic dynamism of the veil that is very concretely perceptible in the development of colonization in Algeria. In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier *was bent on unveiling Algeria*. In a second phase, the mutation occurred in connection with the Revolution and under special circumstances. The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle. (63)

In the first case, veiling was used as a resistance against the invasion of the colonial culture and the force of the French colonizers to unveil. In the second case, the women of Algeria unveiled to join the revolution; unveiling here was employed as a disguise to accommodate the women in their task of spying on the enemy. Later on, when the colonizers discovered that the unveiled Algerian women had aided the revolution, the women resumed their veiling to continue their involvement in the struggle to gain independence. The struggle of the Algerian women proves that both veiling and unveiling can be means of agency, depending on the current political, economic, social, and cultural situations.

In the same fashion, some of the female characters in Rushdie's novels gain agency through veiling, while some through unveiling. Their means of agency, whether to veil or unveil, is similarly determined by the particular situation they face. It is important to note that all humans have agency, even if the expression of that agency is prohibited. Lyn Parker defines agency "as a capacity for identity- and meaning-making, a capacity for pragmatic response, and, in some contexts, as the ability to act. Agency can derive from many sources, but usually is deployed using the cultural resources at hand" (9). The "cultural resource at hand" for many female characters in the novels is the veil.

In most cases, veiled women in the novels are able to manipulate their relative freedom to gain their agency. They resist colonial invasion towards their body and find their voices through veiling and unveiling. As stated by Michel Foucault, "Power is everywhere . . . it comes from everywhere . . . is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attribute to a complex [strategic] situation in a particular society" (93). Foucault's theory of power is promising for any oppressed Muslim woman in any oppressive situation because it acknowledges the ubiquity of power which opens more possibilities for resistance. However, as Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia observe, Edward Said sees Foucault's theory as lacking the commitment to "[try] to change power relations in society" (66). While Said's argument is valid that ultimately power relations need to be changed, Foucault's theory of power recognizes the necessity of resistance as the first step for that change to occur. Rushdie's female characters subvert the male domination using any available source of power, from their bodies to their households, thus exemplifying how power can be generated from any "complex strategic situation."

These “complex strategic situations” and different experiences of the Muslim women resulting in different modes of resistance and means of agency are mostly ignored by Western feminists. Seriously considering Muslim women’s consciousness of their own roles and how this contributes to their identity and meaning in particular, Third Space Feminists acknowledge women’s subjectivity in their struggle to resist the patriarchal domination. Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* introduces “differential consciousness,” a strategy that stresses the ability to transgress against the oppressor from within the oppressive situation. Sandoval explains, “To deploy a differential oppositional consciousness, one can depend on no (traditional) mode of belief in one’s own subject position or ideology; nevertheless, such positions and beliefs are called up and utilized in order to constitute whatever forms of subjectivity are necessary to act in an also . . . constituted social world” (30.1). Acknowledging women’s different experiences and strategic ways of coping with patriarchy, Emma Perèz acknowledges that Sandoval’s differential consciousness can be considered as Third Space Feminist practice. She notes, “Sandoval employs differential consciousness to critique hegemonic feminists who appropriate and assimilate third world women’s feminism into hegemonic feminist theories, and therefore third world feminist voices disappear into an interstitial space that third world women occupy” (xvi).

Using this Third Space Feminist framework, I will analyze the means by which female characters in Rushdie’s novels find their voices, focusing on their subjectivity. Consequently, the organization of this chapter will be based on the strategies the female characters deploy to gain their agency. I will start with unveiling as a strategy that most (Western) hegemonic feminists assert to be the only solution by which Muslim women

can subvert the patriarchal domination. The discussion will move to veiling as the most frequently used strategy in the three novels. Before analyzing each of the strategies, I will discuss Rushdie's use of veiling as a political metaphor in his novels to prove that as "the personal is political," a woman's body is political; consequently, a Muslim woman's veiling is also political.

Unveiling

For most Western people to whom veiling remains the sign of Muslim women's backwardness and inferiority, unveiling seems to be the definite solution to end Muslim women's oppression. However, this does not always prove to be the most strategic solution. Dr. Aziz's mother's physical and psychological distress in *Midnight's Children* exemplifies this situation whereby unveiling, instead of liberating her, oppresses her. Doctor Aziz's mother's distress is due to her newly acquired status as a working woman, who, instead of hiding behind the curtain, has to bare herself to face her costumers. As her financial situation aggravates because of her husband's illness, she loses her access to seclusion. Not only does she lose her social status, but she also feels dehumanized because she has to flaunt her body in front of strangers.

Similarly, Naseem has to unveil or come out of purdah to survive her married life with Doctor Aziz who forces her to be a modern wife. Doctor Aziz continuously asks "her to come out of purdah" (32). When his constant nagging does not sway Naseem's determination to keep observing purdah, he goes so far as burning "his wife's purdah-veils from her suitcase" (32). Finally, Naseem succumbs to Doctor Aziz's imposition. Leaving her tradition of purdah behind transforms Naseem into a "formidable figure she would always remain, and who was always known by the curious title of Reverend

Mother” (40). Although subjugated first to Doctor Aziz, Naseem will eventually find her own ways of coping with her “modern” husband, including using the domesticity associated with the role of a “true woman” to starve him, almost to death

Naseem’s and Doctor Aziz’s mother’s unveiling, rather than an act of resisting the patriarchal domination, is better read as their subjugation to patriarchy. Even though Doctor Aziz’s mother unveils to be the breadwinner of the family, replacing her sick husband, it is not her desire to do so, as proven by her distress over her newly acquired position that sacrifices her veiling. Interestingly, Doctor Aziz’s mother and Naseem are the only female characters who are forced to unveil in the three novels under study. Other female characters are forced to observe veiling. The fact that they embrace veiling as a way of subverting the patriarchal domination demonstrates that veiling/unveiling is not inherently transgressive or submissive; it is the woman’s intention in veiling/unveiling that reveals her transgression or submission.

Veiling and the Metaphor of Nation

Veiling as a metaphor for political satire is effective because, as Daphne Grace puts it, “due to the volatile and highly interpreted nature of veiling, the rhetorics of veiling have also proved a versatile political tool” (11). *Midnight’s Children* begins with the history of the perforated sheet, a curtain that veils women from men’s gaze, indicating the significance of veiling for Rushdie’s whole satire. The perforation of the veil marks the first meeting of Doctor Aadam Aziz and Naseem that the personal histories of Saleem Sinai and other characters unravel. Through the same perforated sheet, Doctor Aziz sees Naseem’s body in fragments and falls in love with her. The body of Naseem that is seen through the perforated sheet equals the body of India as a fragmented nation, first

fragmented into states and later on “fragmented” into two new nations: Pakistan and Bangladesh. D.C.R.A Goonetilleke opines that “Naseem appears to represent Bharat-Mata (Mother India)—that India can be seen, and understood, only in fragments (22). Like Doctor Aziz who can only understand and love Naseem in fragments, India cannot be understood as a whole. Rather, it should be understood in its fragments, its diverse religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Nonetheless, just like the fact that Naseem’s fragments should not prevent Doctor Aziz from loving her as a whole, the diversity of India should not be made as an excuse for hate and intolerance among the people.

The novel makes it clear that the personal history of Saleem and his family is paralleled and loosely connected to the history of India. Not only is the body of Naseem associated with the body of India, but it is associated with the history of the family. Her fragmented body is what unites her and Doctor Aziz. In Grace’s words, “the body of history, like the body of evidence, of narrative and of text, is juxtaposed with the body of the Indian female” (185). Thus, Naseem’s body, and indeed any woman’s body, is political. The body of a woman in Rushdie’s novels is, indeed, highly politicized; its veiling and unveiling are political acts. As the next discussion shows, these female characters are aware of their bodies as a site of contestation and use its veiling and unveiling as their means of gaining their agency.

Veiling: Covering the Shame

In the previous chapter, I showed how patriarchs have imposed seclusion upon the female members of their family for their own benefits. Raza Hyder in *Shame* secludes his wife and daughters for fear that the shame they bring to the family will endanger his political career. On the other hand, Iskandar Harappa secludes his wife, Rani Harappa, so

that he can continue his affair with his mistress, Pinky Aurangzeb. In this section, I will demonstrate how female characters (the sisters Shakil and Naveed Hyder or Good News in *Shame*), aware of the tradition of *izzat* and *sharam*, subvert veiling to achieve their own goals and to counter the patriarchal dominations.

It is partly to cover the shame for having children outside a marriage that the sisters Shakil choose to continue their seclusion even after the patriarch, Mr. Shakil, dies. After the death of their father, the three sisters violate the principles of *izzat* and *sharam* by acting shamelessly in the knowledge that they are no longer under the strict regulations of their father. They deliberately taint the family's honor or *Izzat* by holding a "wild party":

All night, they say, the dancing continued. The scandal of such an event would have placed the newly orphaned girls beyond the pale in any case, but there was worse to come. Shortly after the party ended, after the infuriated geniuses have departed and the mountains of uneaten food had been thrown to the pie-dogs—for the sisters in their grandeur would not permit food intended for their peers to be distributed among the poor—it began to be bruited about the bazaars of Q. that one of the three nose-in-air girls had been put, on that wild night, into the family way. Oh shame, shame, poppy-shame! (9)

When the villagers find out that the sisters Shakil have tainted their *Izzat* by throwing a "wild" party, shamelessly mingling with men and later on conceiving a baby without a father, instead of letting the villagers shame them through punishment, the sisters subvert the shaming culture by locking themselves up/locking the community out: "But if the

sisters Shakil were overwhelmed by any feelings of dishonour, they gave no sign of it. Instead, they dispatched Hashmat Bibi . . . and also purchased the largest imported padlock to be found in God-Willing Ironmongery Store” (9). They subvert the function of zenana from that of preventing the tainting of *Izzat* and *Sharam* to that of covering their shame. They lock themselves inside, making the zenana impenetrable from the outside. The sisters are safe from the shaming culture of the society inside their own zenana.

In the previous chapter I also discuss Raza Hyder’s strategic action in saving the honor of his family or *izzat* by forcing a marriage between Good News and “whichever man available.” On the surface, it seems that Good News is oppressed by her patriarchal father by being forced to marry and, to thereby, cover her lost virginity. Actually, the wedding is apparently what Naveed aims at by eloping with Talvar Ulhaq. She manipulates the traditions of protecting the family’s honor to reach her goal of marrying the man she loves. She falls in love at first sight with the Captain and desires to end the arranged marriage with Haroun Harappa: “Naveed tells her mother the name: not without pride, she says clearly to one and all: ‘It must be Captain Talvar Ulhaq. Nobody else will do’” (174). In the knowledge of *izzat* and *sharam*, Good News runs away with Talvar Ulhaq and “shames” herself by losing her virginity to a man who is not her husband, thus tainting the family’s honor or *izzat*. By manipulating *izzat and sharam*, Good News kills two birds with one stone: she ends the arranged marriage and marries the man whom she loves. Good News unveils from the control of *izzat* and allows herself to be veiled again later after tainting her family’s honor only to reach her main goal.

Good News’s strategic solution of subverting the principles of *izzat* and *sharam* liberates her from the arranged marriage and allows her to unite with the man she loves.

In the same fashion, the subversion of the patriarchal manipulation of veiling in the sisters Shakil's case evinces that veiling can liberate the sisters Shakil from the imposition of society's code of honor and conduct. Even after the patriarch dies and the sisters are automatically granted freedom to choose whether to veil or unveil, they decide to remain veiled and strengthen the bond between the three of them by sharing motherhood.

Jamila's Flirtation with Christianity: Exchanging Agency in Invisibility

The previous chapter reveals that veiling was not invented by Islam. It has existed since the pre-historic times and, in fact, the practice of veiling is shared by the three big world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Through the character of Jamila, or the Brass Monkey, Rushdie not only shows that veiling does not exclusively belong to Islam, but also demonstrates how veiling, which is always regarded as a form of invisibility, can be a means of agency regardless of which religion practices it. In short, invisibility can be liberating rather than oppressive.

In order to be in total exclusion from the outer dangerous world and to remain celibate, Jamila seeks sanctuary in a church. Through the narration of Saleem, it is revealed that Jamila has fled from the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad, to Karachi, and seeks sanctuary in Santa Ignacia:

I dreamed that she, in the shadows of darkness and the secrecy of a simple veil, not the instantly recognizable gold-brocade tent of Uncle Puffs but a common black burqa, fled by air from the capital city; and here she is, arriving in Karachi, unquestioned unarrested free, she is taking a taxi into the depths of the city, and now there is a high wall with bolted doors and a

hatch to which, once, long ago, I received bread, the leavened bread of my sister's weakness, she is asking to be let in, nuns are opening doors as she cries sanctuary, yes, there she is, safely inside, doors being bolted behind her, exchanging one kind of invisibility for another. (453)

Unlike Saleem who seeks sanctuary "in the midnight shadow of the mosque" (391), Jamila goes to the Catholic church from which she used to get her favorite bread. As stated by Saleem, her change of veiling, from the instantly recognizable "gold-brocade tent of Uncle Puffs" to "a common black burqa," symbolizes a transformation that in essence does not change anything. Saleem asserts that Jamila Singer is merely "exchanging one kind of invisibility for another." The "invisibility" given by the gold-brocade tent is now replaced by the invisibility created by the walls of the church—the nunnery.

The walls of the church's veiling also protect Jamila from the raging war. As Saleem recalls, two bombs wipe out all members of his family in Pakistan: "Who survived? Jamila Singer, whom bombs were unable to find" (391). Jamila survives because of her decision to convert from Islamic veiling to Christian veiling. Her seclusion in the church is impenetrable by the deadly bombs that kill almost her entire family.

This parallel between Islamic veiling and Christian veiling based on their invisibility calls attention to the general conception of veiling as originating from Islam and solely practiced by Muslim women. However, Jamila's "exchange of invisibility" from Islamic veiling to Christian veiling indicates the similarity of this practice between the two religions. Fadwa El Guindi attests to the existence of veiling in Christianity: "Veil' in the religious sense means seclusion from worldly life and sex (celibacy), as in

the case of the life and vows of nuns.” She adds that “this Christian definition of the ‘veil’ is not commonly recognized. Although evidence shows that the veil has existed for a longer period outside Arab culture, in popular perception the veil is associated more with Arab women and Islam” (6). However, as El Guindi points out, Islamic veiling and Christian veiling differ in a way that “Christianity chose the path of desexualizing the worldly environment; Islam of regulating the social order while accepting its sexualized environment. The moral standards of Islam are designed to accommodate enjoyment of worldly life, including a sexual environment. It posed no tension between religion and sexuality” (31). Jamila, then, decides to embrace the Christian veiling because she desires to totally detach herself from the enjoyment of worldly life. For the first time, then, readers witness Jamila making her own decision.

Jamila’s “coldness” to men, her resistance to any man approaching her since she is a Brass Monkey, signals her desire to remain chaste. However, it is not the chastity of a Muslim woman behind the veil that she desires, in which she can present her chastity to her husband. Rather, it is chastity in the form of celibacy as practiced by Catholic nuns. One must wonder why nuns are perceived of generally as pious and selfless in their veiling whereas veiled Muslim women are perceived of generally as oppressed.

Interestingly, Jamila’s sanctuary in her Christian veiling is parallel to Naseem’s or the Reverend Mother’s purdah and household: “There is another Reverend Mother now, as Jamila Singer who once, as the Brass Monkey, flirted with Christianity, finds safety shelter peace in the midst of the hidden order of Santa Ignacia” (453). Saleem sees Jamila as the embodiment of Naseem. Even though they are two generations apart, they both find their agency in veiling. Naseem finds it in Islamic veiling, while Jamila discovers it

in Christian veiling. In both cases, these two characters turn to the veil in an effort to protect themselves from men. Jamila and Naseem are thus the agents of their own protection from patriarchal oppression, not helpless victims. Unfortunately, the body of a woman is frequently made a site of contestation for political forces. Nilüfer Göle explains, “Women’s bodies and sexuality [appear] as a political site of difference and resistance to the homogenizing and egalitarian forces of Western Modernity” (1).

Veiling as a Means of Resistance

In *Midnight’s Children*, Naseem, whose life has been steered by her patriarchal father, has to face another patriarchal figure, Doctor Aziz. Having been forced to veil and put into seclusion by her father, in her marriage Naseem is forced by Doctor Aziz to unveil. Veiling and unveiling for Naseem have both been determined by the patriarchs for their own benefits. Ghani’s main intention in secluding Naseem is to guard Naseem’s chastity that is linked to the family honor. He secludes her to make sure that she is not tainted until she is officially wedded. In contrast, Doctor Aziz forces her to come out of purdah because he wants her to be a modern wife who can especially gratify his sexual pleasure and play a more active role in the business of the family. He remarks, “forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking being a modern Indian woman” (32). For Doctor Aziz, what constitutes a good wife is one who lives out of purdah and can “move a little” (31) during sexual intercourse. Ghani and Doctor Aziz both force Naseem to veil and unveil for their own advantage, without recognizing her own desires.

Naseem gives up her purdah, but she manages to keep her head-covering. Since the purdah burning accident, she begins to resist the patriarchal domination by veiling her body and her household, guarding both from the invasion of colonial/patriarchal values.

Naseem, who initially makes an impression as a passive daughter subjugating to her father's plot, finds her freedom and voice after her marriage. Unfortunately, free from her father's seclusion, Naseem has to face a bitter fact that her husband repeats the same act of imposing his own desires on her. After marriage, Doctor Aziz forces Naseem to be modern and to totally detach herself from any traditional values. At first, Naseem resists; she cannot detach herself from the tradition of purdah that her father used to impose on her. Her persistence in observing purdah, then, is an act of resisting her husband's force as well as the colonial values that try to invade her body. Naseem resists the Western Modernity precisely by veiling her body, guarding it from the invasion of Western/colonial Modernity.

While it is true that Naseem's persistent observation of purdah can also be read as her inability to detach herself from the tradition imposed upon by her father, her decision to keep observing purdah goes beyond the level of preserving the traditional culture. She strategically uses it to resist her husband's coercion, even though eventually she submits to her husband's desire, after he burns her purdah. Naseem's persistence ends right after Doctor Aziz uses violence to make her subjugate to him. Knowing that she cannot resist Doctor Aziz using the same tool he employs, violence, Naseem strategically deploys other means of resistance. She exerts her power over any household matter and veils herself in silence when Doctor Aziz tries to force his desires on her.

As the matriarch of the family, Naseem resists the western values Doctor Aziz introduces to her and to their children. While Doctor Aziz diligently introduces western values to the family, Naseem works similarly hard to counteract those values with traditional Islamic values. Naseem, for instance, refuses to be photographed while Doctor

Aziz insists on having a family photograph (42) because the traditional Islamic value is opposed to animate photography. At another instance, Doctor Aziz teaches his children with western education, while Naseem hires a “stragglebearded wretch” who teaches the children “to hate Hindus Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians” (42). Naseem’s resistance against western/modern values often proves to be what is best for her children, especially her daughters, in at least two instances. When Doctor Aziz asserts that the teacher Naseem appoints will make their children “hateful children,” she responds, “Will you have godless ones?” (42). When her husband forces her to allow a male stranger, Nadir Khan, to live under the same house, she protests, “The house is full of young unmarried girls, whatitsname; is this how you show your daughters respect?” (55). Doctor Aziz, who bases his decision on his modern/western viewpoints, insists, “Be silent woman! The man needs our shelter; he will stay” (55). Consequently, Naseem is silenced by the angered Doctor Aziz. However, she continues to resist against the housing of Nadir Khan by veiling herself in silence: “Very well. You ask me, whatitsname, for silence. So not one word, whatitsname, will pass my lips from now on” (55). In addition to sealing her mouth, Naseem veils her kitchen—one of the territories on which she exerts her power—so that Doctor Aziz has to ask her for food because she will not offer any to him with her mouth.

Eventually, time proves that her resistance against her husband’s decision to house a stranger in their house is better for one of her daughters’ future, Mumtaz Aziz. Continuous encounters between Mumtaz and Nadir result in an affair that a wedding is unavoidable. Unfortunately, Nadir proves to inflict dishonor to their family by not being able to treat Mumtaz as a wife properly. Had Doctor Aziz listened to Naseem, their

daughter would not be disgraced by Nadir Khan. Naseem's resistance against Doctor Aziz's modernization regains more strength, especially since she has become a mother. Her maternal instincts empower her to resist against any modern/western cultural invasions that she believes will endanger her children. In short, Naseem comes to embody a matriarch who overrules and overpowers the patriarch of the family, Doctor Aziz. Her veiling or unveiling is far from the central marker of her agency.

Naseem's resistance and her role as a matriarch render her monstrous in the eyes of Saleem Sinai, on whom the story relies for its narration. Her resistance, according to Saleem, has made her "now unified and transmuted into the formidable figure she would always remain, and who was always known by the curious title of Reverend Mother" (39-40). Her monstrosity even reifies in her outward appearance: "She had become a prematurely old, wide woman, with two enormous moles like witch's nipples on her face; and she lived within an invisible fortress of her own making, an ironclad citadel of tradition and certainties" (40). Saleem's point of view, the point of view of a male narrator, indicates how men see an empowered woman as a monster, a non-human. Putting it another way, a woman can only be empowered if she turns into a monstrous character, a case that is also exemplified by Sufiyya Zinobia in *Shame*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In guarding her household against the invasion of colonial/modern cultures, Naseem exercises her power and control over any household matters, from the family's dinner to the children's education. Her animosity takes its toll in her relationship with Doctor Aziz, but she continues on with her act of resistance. Sara Upstone remarks, "maintaining this home against colonial infiltration could be, for the colonized wife, an

act of anticolonial resistance” (267). Naseem, who is uneducated and is not financially independent as the Rani of Cooch Naheen, can only be empowered in her household. Furthermore, the division between the public and private spheres between men and women inhibits Naseem from being engaged in any public activities, including getting politically involved in the fight against colonization. However, since “basic to feminist thought ‘the personal is political,’ [thus] what goes on in the household is political” (Turpin & Kurtz 149), women like Naseem, who by choice become housewives, can share an equal role with men in de-colonizing their nation by protecting their homes against colonization.

This division of public and domestic spheres also implies a discourse of shared responsibilities between wives and husbands. Weickgenannt argues that, “According to the division of spheres, Indian men go on the mission of mimicking western ways in the knowledge that their women will look after the culture and keep their children Indianized” (70). Even though Naseem and Doctor Aziz seem to be poles apart and show no cooperation in the maintenance of their household, they both fit into this concept of shared responsibilities between Indian wives and husbands. Through constant negotiation between Doctor Aziz who imposes modern/western beliefs and practices in her household and Naseem who resists against these colonial cultural invasions, the mutual roles are fulfilled. Doctor Aziz mimics the modern/western ways of thinking and acting, and whenever he tries to impose those ways upon his children, Naseem is always ready to resist him.

Veiling and Sisterhood Power

The western dichotomy of public and domestic spheres cannot be generally applied to all society and tends to disregard the fact that a household, just like a woman's body, is political. Such a dichotomy is rigid and simplistic because "families and domestic groups cross-culturally do not all carry out the same activities nor attach the same meanings to these activities. The concept of the 'domestic sphere' created boundaries in many cases where none existed" (Blackwood 9). Even if this dichotomy is applicable to some extent, this does not necessarily mean that men who occupy public places are superior and women are inferior because they are confined in their household. As shown by Naseem, whose role is a housewife, and therefore, can be said to occupy domestic space, her space does not disempower her. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that women confined in a "domestic space" are powerless because they cannot access the public space where power is supposed to exist. As Foucault asserts, power is everywhere and can be generated by anybody in any "strategic complex situation" (93). Thus, women confined in zenana can find their power through any strategic means they employ.

Fatima Mernissi's memoir of her childhood life in a harem, *Dreams of Trespass*, exemplifies how women who are confined in their harems are able to strategically use any available resources for their agency: "The women on the terrace . . . talked heatedly, long into the night, about fate and happiness, and how to escape the first and pursue the second. Women's solidarity, many agreed, was the key to both" (143). The strong bond between the confined women can be so empowering that rules can be overruled and what is taboo can be unmade.

It is precisely this strong bond that unites and empowers the sisters Shakil from *Shame*. The bond is so strong that they are difficult to distinguish from each other: “The sisters, by virtue of dressing identically and through the incomprehensible effects of their unusual, chosen life, began to resemble each other so closely that even the servants made mistakes” (12). Their sisterhood is one of the keys of their survival living inside seclusion. Their bond grows stronger when the seed of maternal instinct is planted:

But who was pregnant?

Chhunni, the eldest, or Munnee-in-the-middle, or ‘little’ Bunny, the baby of the three? –Nobody ever discovered, not even the child that was born . . . and as it proceeded, the sisters, understanding that unkept secrets always manage to escape, under a door, through a keyhole or an open window, until everyone knows everything and nobody knows how . . . the sisters, I repeat, displayed the uniquely passionate solidarity that was their most remarkable characteristic by feigning—in the case of the two of them—the entire range of symptoms that the third was obliged to display. (12)

Their loyalty to each other, solidified by their maternal instincts, makes it possible for them to live inside seclusion, give birth to two sons, and raise them; these are all done without ever stepping out of the zenana. By doing so, they are also able to survive society’s condemnation for their “shameful” way of life.

It is also from behind zenana that they mechanize a plot to avenge Raza Hyder for having “indirectly” murdered their second son, Babar. His death in the hand of Raza Hyder’s troops, has planted a seed of hatred: “They had been feeding it for years, handing it morsels of themselves, holding out pieces of their memoirs of dead Babar to their

hateful pet. Who gobbled them up, snatching them greedily from the sisters' long bony fingers" (296). Using Omar Khayyam as "a rod," they snare Raza Hyder to their zenana and murder him for their lost son. As Clemens remarks, "The women, though often shut away or held captive, orchestrate much of the text's action, relegating stories of overt political action enacted by the men to the periphery to be viewed through the lens of the women's stories" (167). These zenana women are, indeed, peripheral characters. Their story is marginal to that of the male characters, but throughout the story they mechanize a brilliant plot from the periphery. Even though shut away in a zenana, the sisters Shakil manage to orchestrate their main plot that leads to the death of Bilquis and Raza Hyder and to the end of the story as a whole.

The theme of zenana as a source of power recurs in *The Satanic Verses*. Ayesha the butterfly girl gains her agency by "letting" herself be taken in by the zamindar Mirza Saeed Akhtar into his zenana. Ayesha's seductive act in devouring butterflies that swarm her body successfully titillates the zamindar and lures him into inviting her to his big mansion that has changed its function to be a zenana in which he keeps his wife, Mishal: "Soon after the story of the miracle got out, the girl Ayesha summoned to the big house, and in the following days she spends long hours closeted with the zamindar's wife, Begum Mishal Akhtar, whose mother had also arrived on a visit, and fallen for the archangel's white-haired wife" (232). Ayesha receives the prophetic message from the Archangel Gibreel that instructs her to lead the whole village to take a pilgrimage to Mecca by foot. Implicitly, to gain more trust and supports from the villagers, Ayesha strategically approaches the zamindar whose position in the village will make it easier for her to be heard. After sheltering herself in the zenana, Ayesha approaches Mishal and

invites her to join the pilgrimage; their bond is so strong that even Mishal's husband cannot break it. It is from behind the walls of zenana that Mishal and Ayesha, then, arrange their plan to drive all the villagers to conduct a pilgrimage to Mecca by crossing the sea on foot, a plan that is strongly opposed by Mishal's husband.

By strategically entering the zamindar's zenana and building a strong sisterhood with Mishal, Ayesha gains her power that can drive the whole village to conduct an impossible pilgrimage to Mecca by crossing the sea on foot: "The story of the village that was walking to the sea had spread all over the country . . . When they saw the host of chameleon butterflies and the way they both clothed the girl Ayesha and provided her with her only solid food, these visitors were amazed" (502). Ayesha becomes a girl whose power surpasses people's expectation of an orphaned girl. Her strategic veiling in her political movement is a theme that recurs in veiled women's involvement in wars.

Rushdie's decision to use the name of Ayesha as the butterfly girl whose prophetic confession is able to influence and move the whole village to take a pilgrimage in a Haroun-and-the-sea-parting manner must have been based on the historical accounts of the most favorite wife of Prophet Muhammad, Aisha or Ayesha. The significance of Ayesha is apparent in the statement of the Prophet: "Trouble me not about Aishah. She is the only woman in whose company I receive any revelations" (Abbott 46). In *The Satanic Verses*, Ayesha is not a companion of the receiver of prophetic messages; rather, she is the one who receives it directly from the Archangel of Gibreel. The fact that Rushdie creates a powerful character, Ayesha, who resembles the youngest, the most favorite, and the most influential wife of the Prophet proves that women's position of Islam are not

supposed to be inferior to men. Muslim women are and should be given the same opportunity in the field of politics if they wish to do so.

Veiling: The Power of Disguise

History records how women's veiling has been one of the most strategic tools in war. During the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, veiled women have been said to be involved directly in war. In *Midnight's Children*, Jamila's singing from behind the veil helps raise a sense of patriotism among soldiers who go to war in defending Pakistan: "Jamila Singer was called north, to serenade our worth-ten jawans . . . Some certainties: that the voice of Jamila Singer sang Pakistani troops to their deaths; and that muezzins from their minarets—yes, even on Clayton Road—promised us that anyone who died in battle went straight to the camphor garden" (388). Jamila's participation mimics the historical involvement of women in war during the early Islamic period. Leila Ahmed explains:

War was one activity in which women of pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia participated fully. They were present on the battlefield principally to tend the wounded and to encourage the men, often with song and verse. A number of women became famous for their poems inciting warriors to fight fiercely, lamenting death or defeat, or celebrating victory. (69-71)

Rushdie's satire of Jamila and her patriotism-encouraging song fits perfectly into the history explained above. Veiled women continue to be actively involved in war, as exemplified by Fanon's historical accounts of the Algerian women who strategically veil and unveil in their disguise to penetrate the fortress of the enemy.

Instead of portraying women disguised in the veils, the novels show how men strategically use veiling to disguise themselves and escape from war or other forms of dangers. In *The Satanic Verses* for example, Baal, the most wanted poet searched by Mahound and his disciples, finds a perfect place to hide in “The Curtain, hijab, . . . the name of the most popular brothel in Jahilia” (388). In the same fashion, Raza Hyder and Omar Khayyam Shakil in *Shame* can escape from the coup de eta plotted against Raza Hyder by his generals because of the idea that comes to Omar, which is to take a disguise of a woman by wearing burqa:

Burqas, Omar Khayyam realizes, as hope bursts inside him; head-to-toe cloaks of invisibility, veils, ‘Put these on.’ Shakil seizes, rushes into his womanly disguise; Bilquis pulls the black fabric over her husband’s unresisting head. ‘Your son became a daughter,’ she tells him, ‘so now you must change shape also. I knew I was sewing these for a reason.’ The President is passive, allows himself to be led. Balck-veiled fugitives mingle with escaping servants in the darkened corridors of the house.
(278)

The disguise is perfect because “Nobody questions women wearing veils. They pass through the mob and the ring of soldiers, jeeps, trucks” (278). In this case, Raza Hyder and Omar Khayyam Shakil become effeminate because of the burqa they wear. Here, Rushdie attributes burqa to femininity, yet the invisibility of burqa at the same time neutralizes the gender, making the wearer genderless. Burqa facilitates gender fluidity that Omar Khayyam Shakil and Raza Hyder are able to “don” another gender and deceive the enemy.

Ironically, the burqa that saves him also becomes the symbol of the end of his glory: “How Raza Hyder fell: in improbability; in chaos; in women’s clothing; in black” (278). The emphasis on how Raza Hyder fails “in women’s clothing” is ironic because he used to employ veiling in secluding his wife and later his daughter, especially Sufiya Zinobia:

In the following years he persuaded himself that by locking up his wife, by veiling her in walls and shuttered windows, he could save his family from the malign legacy of her blood, from its passions and its torments (for if Sufiya Zinobia’s soul was in agony, she was also the child of a frenzied woman, and that, too, may be an explanation of a kind). (210)

The enforced veiling has confined his wife and daughter, and but at this moment, he is saved from violence precisely by the patriarchal tool he employs. In the opposite manner, Sufiya Zinobia “saves” herself by means of violence with veiling as its medium, as will be shown later in the discussion.

The scene of Raza Hyder and Omar Khayyam Shakil wearing burqas to escape dangers implicitly shows the power of veiling as a disguise. In this case, burqa gives both men and women equal invisibility, anonymity, and even genderless identity. Whereas many critics regard invisibility as the evidence of Muslim women’s oppressed nature, here, Rushdie subverts that notion and gives power to invisibility.

Veiling, Violence, and Women’s Voice

The three novels demonstrate that veiled women have to struggle against the patriarchal silencing of their voices. To get their voices heard, the female characters deploy any possible means of agency in hand. In *Midnight’s Children*, Jamila who at first

uses her voice to approve war retreats from singing to flee from violence and finds her sanctuary in a church, while Sufiya in *Shame* finally speaks through violence. On the other hand, Rani Harappa and Bilquis Hyder revert to silence as a way of getting their voices heard. Their silence and invisibility behind the veil is more conspicuous than their unheard voices and visibility.

Jamila Singer in *Midnight's Children* sings from behind the veil. Jamila's singing has become so much the center of attention that the reigning President Ayub invites her to sing in his home. He praises how well Jamila sings, but most importantly he believes that her "voice will be a sword of purity; it will be a weapon with which we shall cleanse men's souls" (361). Starting at this point, Jamila, "Through the hole in a perforated sheet . . . dedicated herself to patriotism; and the diwan-i-khas, the hall of this private audience, rang with applause, polite now, not the wild wah-wahing of the Bambino crowd, but the regimented approbation of braided gongs-and-pips and the delighted clapping of weeping parents" (361). For Jamila, veiling plays a significant role in her life. Not only does it allow Jamila to sing in public, it also raises her position into that of bearer of "a sword of purity." Her singing also eventually leads her to find her truthful voice regarding the raging war in Pakistan.

When Jamila finds the true voice of her heart, she turns from singing for the soldiers who go to war to singing against its perpetrators. Her true voice does not encourage the shedding of blood in war, but it condemns it: "Jamila, the Voice of Pakistan, Bulbul-of-the-Faith, had spoken out against new rulers of truncated, moth-eaten, war-divided Pakistan . . . my sister was reviling him [Mr. Bhutto] in public; she, purest of the pure, most patriotic of patriots, turned rebel" (452). Even Naseem Aziz or

the Revered Mother who formerly was really against Jamila's career as a singer, "secretly . . . may have been impressed, because she respected power and position and Jamila was not so exalted as to be welcome in the most powerful and best-placed houses in the land" (375). When the war increasingly becomes too violent, Jamila decides to flee from the battlefield. She also takes President Ayub's words literally, that her voice is "a sword of purity." In her escape, she decides to be literally "a sword of purity"; she seeks for sanctuary in a nunnery and resolves to remain pure for the rest of her life. Veiling has been her sanctuary, especially after she reaches puberty. It enables her to be a professional singer and take part in the war. Finally, veiling saves her from "the grip of police who kick beat starve" (453). Her veiling in the end, not only protects her from the harassment of war but also from anything that might make her impure.

In *Shame*, Sufiya Zinobia is silenced since her birth into the world by the shame that her parents inflict on her for being a daughter instead of a son they expect. His father's disappointment with her sex is apparent immediately after her birth, when he remarks, "Genitalia! Can! Be! Obscured!" In his desperation, he shrieks, "A bump! . . . Is it not, doctor, an absolute and unquestionable *bump*?" while pointing to the genitalia of the baby. Then, "at this very instant the extremely new and soporific being in Raza's arms began—it's true! — to blush! . . . Then, even then, she was too easily ashamed" (89). The shame she has to bear since her birth is accumulated as she grows up being a mentally-challenged girl. It creates a beast inside her that comes out once in a while in the form of unimaginable violence, such as when she tears off the necks of the turkeys owned by Pinkie Aurangzeb, a woman with whom her father has fallen in love (143). The beast inside her grows even more unbearable once she is married to Omar Khayyam

Shakil, where, “She was his wife but she was not his wife” (222). This statement entails the fact that Sufiya is denied her rights as a woman and as a wife who by laws has all the rights to be sexually satisfied by her legitimate husband. She, once again, feels the shame for being a wife but not exactly functioning as one.

There is no law prohibiting her from having a sexual gratification with her husband. However, her conditions seem to be the real hindrance. The people around her, especially her father and even her ayah, deny her sexual pleasure just because she is mentally challenged. In other words, Sufiya is sexually repressed. Michel Foucault defines repression as it is distinguishable from prohibition, in that, “repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know” (4). There is no talk about sex, as if it was a taboo. Whenever Sufiya is present, the talk about sex is silenced. In other words, sex is made to be nonexistent for Sufiya whose even challenged mind understands sexual pleasure. She knows, and the knowing only makes the beast inside her even more unbearable:

There is a thing that women do at night with husbands. She does not do it, Shahbanou does it for her. *I hate fish*. Her husband does not come to her at night. Here are two things she does not like: that he does not come, that’s one, and the thing itself makes two, it sounds horrible, it must be, the shrieks the moans the wet and the smelly sheets. Chhi chii. Disgusting. But she *is a wife. She has a husband*. She can’t work it out. The horrible thing and the horrible not-doing-the-thing. She squeezes her eyelids shut with

her fingers and makes the babies play. There is no ocean but there is a feeling of sinking. It makes her sick. (227)

Sufiya is suffered from “the horrible not-doing-the-thing.” She knows that there is something a husband and a wife do that she and Omar do not. This knowledge of sexual repression feeds the beast inside her with more anger.

Sufiya finally speaks out against this sexual repression, against the shame inflicted in her since her birth and against the taboo that should not even be one, through violence that is veiled in burqa. Talvar Ulhaq is the first to notice a woman in burqa soaking with blood in the corridor of the house: “As she passed him without glancing in his direction he was appalled to see that her burqa was sodden and dripping with something too thick to be water. The blood, black in the unlit corridor, left a trail down the passage behind her” (229). Misidentifying the woman as Builquis who recently begins observing burqa, Talvar Ulhaq reports the incident to Raza Hyder who quickly dismisses the case and choose to pretend that such a case never transpires: “General Raza Hyder searched his daughter’s room himself. When he found the burqa it was crackly, starched by the dried-on-blood. He wrapped it in newspaper and burned it to ashes. Then he threw the ashes out of the window of a moving car. It was election day, and there were many fires” (232). Raza Hyder secretly knows that the woman in the bloody burqa is Sufiya; however, he is too busy with the election day that he decides to silence the case and make all the evidence disappear.

Despite all the pretension and the disbelief that his daughter can be violent, the anxiety and the guilt that Raza Hyder feels for his daughter never subside. He is haunted by his conscience as a father, but more importantly, by the fact that “in the end they

[Sufiya Zinobia's antics] would certainly terminate Raza's career" (245). Therefore, he decides to tell Omar Khayyam Shakil as Sufiya's husband and an "illustrious medical man" (248) about his plan to make Sufiya Zinubiya disappear from the world. He grounds his decision on the story of the Prophet Abraham who had to sacrifice his son. Omar, on the other hand, believes that his knowledge as a man of science can help heal Sufiya, and he advises Raza Hyder to wait and see the result of his treatment: "But what confusion swept over Raza Hyder! A man who has decided to do away with his daughter for religious reasons does not relish being told he has been too hasty" (248). Here, Rushdie emphasizes the fact that Raza abuses religion for his own benefit. His main concern is not her daughter but his own political career. The story of the Prophet Abraham who had to sacrifice his own son is manipulated and used as a reason to justify his plan to "sacrifice" Sufiya.

When Omar finally realizes that Sufiya is no longer his wife but a supernatural monstrous being that has no hesitance to attack him during his treatment, he arrives at a conclusion that Sufiya has to be totally silenced and removed from the world. Raza and Omar, then, put Sufiya into a long sleep, chain her on a bed, lock, and seal the room she sleeps in:

Hyder and Shakil agreed that Sufiya Zinobia was to be kept unconscious until further notice. She was to enter a state of suspended animation; Hyder brought long chains and they padlocked her to the attic beams; in the nights followed they bricked up the attic window and fastened huge bolts to the door; and twice in every twenty-four hours, Omar Khayyam would go unobserved into that darkened room, that echo of other death-

cells, to inject into the tiny body lying on its thin carpet the fluids of nourishment and of unconsciousness, to administer the drugs that turned her from one fairy-tale into another, into sleeping-beauty instead of beauty-and-beast. “What else to do?” Hyder said helplessly. “Because I cannot kill her either, don’t you see.” (250)

However, the severe confinement is what fully awakens the beast inside her. With the supernatural strength, she breaks free of her confinement and haunts the men with her raging violence. The inflicted shame grows outward and takes revenge on the patriarchs. The beast inside her renders her violent, monstrous, and inhuman: “Four husbands come and go. Four of them in and out, and then her hands reach for the first boy’s neck. The others stand still and wait their turn. And heads hurled high, sinking into the scattered clouds; nobody saw them fall. She rises, goes home. And sleeps; the Beast subsides” (232). In her violent attacks against the patriarchs, Sufiya goes further by subverting the polygamous marriage with four wives as well. She breaks the rule by having “four husbands”, and murders them out of rage.

By speaking out against the repression, Sufiya, to borrow Foucault’s words, “upsets established law.” Foucault remarks: “If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom” (6). Sufiya’s supernatural power is beyond the reach of the patriarchal power. She “upsets the established law” governing women’s

sexuality. She has sex with various men outside wedlock and murders them after she has gained sexual pleasure.

By transmogrifying into a beast whose supernatural power is feared by men, Sufiya is no longer a challenged child, but she has transformed into a monstrous animal that people identify as a panther. Her beastly side empowers her. Speaking through violence, she avenges men for having inflicted shame in her. According to Clemens, it is necessary for Sufiya to be inhuman or supernatural to gain her voice:

By taking Sufiya, a fictional woman whose story's genesis was the actual killing of a "shamed" girl in the name of honor, and having her act in an attempt—failed though it may be because of her death, though not at the hands of her father or husband—and transforming her into a beast, Rushdie allows the reader to see a possibility of resistance, though sadly it still ends in violence and the death of the "shamed" beast. (193)

Violence as a means of resistance and a way of speaking out against the patriarchal silencing grants Sufiya the freedom she is denied. Violence, as Clemens discloses, is not an ideal form of resistance. However, in a strictly patriarchal society, where there seems to be no way for women to free themselves, violence can be the only solution.

While Sufiya speaks out with violence, Rani Harappa and Bilquis speak out through their silences. Bilquis, who has been veiled and confined since her marriage to Raza Hyder, decides to literally and metaphorically embrace the veil imposed upon her:

One morning they all saw Bilquis putting on a black burqa, taking the veil or purdah, even though she was indoors and only family members and servants were present. Raza Hyder asked her what she thought she was

doing, but she just shrugged and replied, 'It was getting too hot, so I wanted to draw the curtains,' because by now she was scarcely capable of speaking except in metaphors. Her mumbles were full of curtains and oceans and rockets, and soon everybody got used to it, and to that veil of her solipsism. (220)

Bilquis literally veils herself; she veils her words, her actions, and her existence. She veils herself from the people around her, especially from her husband. By doing so, she subverts the patriarchal attribute of veiling to make herself impenetrable by any further patriarchal oppression: "Bilquis Hyder became, in those years, almost invisible, a shadow hunting the corridors for something it had lost, the body, perhaps, from which it had come unstuck" (220). Her silence and her invisibility speak louder and render her voice and existence more conspicuous before her husband.

On the other hand, Rani Harappa's silence is her strategic weapon in surviving the abandonment and seclusion exerted by her husband, Iskandar Harappa. Not only abandoned by her husband, after she gives birth to her only daughter, she is also imprisoned in a mansion with very unfriendly and intruding servants that dare rummage into her closets. She finds her refuge in her silence and expresses her feelings of misery by knitting a shawl engraving the story of her life, including the political maneuvers of her husband and the affair he has with Pinkie Aurangzeb:

She knew all about the end of the Pinkie affair and knew in the secret chambers of her heart that a man embarking on a political career must sooner or later ask his wife to stand beside him on the podium; secure in a future which would bring her Isky without her having to do a thing, she

discovered without surprise that her love for him had refused to die, but had become, instead, a thing of quietness and strength. . . . Rani had subsided into a sanity which made her a powerful, and later on a dangerous, human being. (157-8)

Rani's silence is political. While knitting her memorial shawl, she is waiting for the return of her husband. She waits and waits with the confidence that her husband will return because she knows the significance of a politician's household in order to secure his husband's position in the arena of politics.

Years of confinement and abandonment finally come to fruition. Despite her misery, Rani Harappa is more than just willing to accompany Iskandar Harappa during his political campaigns, even though she is aware that she is only needed to create a good image for her husband: "Isky's chauffeur Jokio . . . drove her to the town house, where Iskander embraced her warmly and said, 'Good you came. Now we must stand together before the people, our moment has come'" (176). After her husband acquires the position of a president, though, she is once again abandoned: "Rani had suffered, too, not so badly because she had seen less of him. She had been hoping, of course; but when it became clear that he only wanted her to stand on the election platforms, that her time was past and would not return, then she went back to Mohenjo without any argument" (190). Rani Harappa finally loses her hopes for her husband. She retreats to Mohenjo and continues knitting an autobiographical shawl. The shawl is "a masterpiece amidst whose minuscule arabesques a thousand and one stories had been portrayed" (111). It is her way of writing down her narrative and "immortalizing" it (221). Rani Harappa is oppressed and silenced

by the patriarchs, but in her silence she engraves her story in a shawl that will make her story of oppression and silences read and heard.

Assuming that women are powerless just because they are confined in their household is to deny the fact that power can be generated in any “complex strategic situation.” Women’s body as well as women’s domain—in this case, a household—can be a source of empowerment. By subverting the patriarchal manipulations of veiling, the female characters in the three novels are able to resist the patriarchal oppression and make their voices heard. The various strategic methods of resisting the oppression reveal the diverse complexities of the female characters’ situations. However, as Said’s disagreement with Foucault shows, this subversion is the first necessary step for the more important goal, which is the change in power relations between Muslim women and men.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Although not the main theme in Rushdie's works, veiling is consistently portrayed in three of his works under study. Mostly, Rushdie's representation of veiling adheres to, and at the same time, satirizes the literary stereotypes of veiling as being paralleled to eroticism, male sexual fantasy, and women's oppression. Underneath his satires of veiling lies the main issue of agency. Departing from the point of view of Third Space Feminism, I contend that Rushdie's novels, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses*, show how the female characters negotiate their veiling and unveiling to gain agency and resist patriarchal domination. Rushdie's novels, to some extent, satisfy the goal of Third Space Feminism in providing a medium in which women's voices and narratives can be heard.

Among the four kinds of veiling represented in the novel—head covering, burqa, purdah, and zenana—head covering is the least discussed one, highlighting the vulnerability of the rest kinds of veiling to be used as a religious patriarchal tool, in which women are also more prone to being fantasized and eroticized by men. This also calls attention to the fact that the three kinds of veiling are not obligatory for women, compared to head covering that is prescribed by Quran and confirmed by hadiths. Naseem and the daughters of Uncle Puffs from *Midnight's Children*; the sisters Shakil,

Sufiya Zinobia and Rani Harappa from *Shame*; and Mishal from *The Satanic Verses* are all veiled in zenanas by their patriarchs. Their veiling is not so much for religious purposes as it is for the sake of the patriarchs' pride and honor. As the symbol of family honor, these female characters need to be "protected" by the patriarchs. Their seclusion eventually makes them fall prey into men's fantasy of which they become its sexual objects.

Nevertheless, being secluded does not mean these female characters are not able to gain agency. In *Midnight's Children*, Naseem subverts the tradition of purdah as a religious patriarchal tool, making it her means of resisting the patriarchal husband, while in *Shame*, Sufiya Zinobia breaks free from her silencing seclusion and turns to burqa to find her voice and to avenge the patriarchs through violence. Even though these two female characters gain their power by continuing what has been used as a patriarchal force against them, their ability of subversion to empower themselves is their way of negotiate veiling to be their means of agency. Furthermore, Naseem's and Sufiya's acts should be read as a statement of "freedom [that] consists in the ability to autonomously 'choose' one's desires no matter how illiberal they may be" (Mahmood 12). In other words, it is important to avoid interpreting a woman's act of struggling for freedom from a prescriptive feminist definition of freedom because women's experiences and the so-called "feminist consciousness" are different from one woman to the other.

The female characters secluded in zenana, for instance, create and maintain a strong bond with their sisters and or female relatives, such as shown by the sisters Shakil in *Shame* and Ayesha and Mishal in *The Satanic Verses*. In the first case, the strong sisterhood empowers these characters, enabling them to not only cover their shame and

free themselves from the society's principles of *izzat* and *sharam*, but also to avenge President Raza Hyder for murdering their second son, without even stepping out of their zenana. In the latter case, Ayesha whose agency partly manifests in her strong sisterhood with Mishal inside the zenana built by her husband, Mirza Saeed Akhtar, makes zenana her political basis, showing that agency does not necessarily parallel with visibility and mobility in the so-called public or men's sphere.

On the other hand, the social status attached to women in zenana does not confirm to the egalitarian principle that Islam ultimately holds. Islam basically believes that all men and women, regardless their backgrounds, occupy the same position in front of Allah. What distinguishes them is their degree of piety. Thus, the entitlement of higher social status to secluded women is more of a product of social and cultural dynamics in society than a religious prescription.

Throughout this study, veiling and unveiling are shown to be simultaneously some of the possible resources and hindrances of women's empowerment. The subversion of the patriarchal force of veiling and the observation of veiling are both an act of agency. Naseem in *Midnight's Children* and the sisters Shakil in *Shame* resist the patriarchal oppression exactly through the same patriarchal tool that oppresses them, seclusion. Still in *Midnight's Children*, Jamila has to veil in order to be economically empowered, while Doctor Aziz's mother has to unveil—leave her seclusion—in order to be the breadwinner of her family. Jamila eventually decides to veil herself in a church, whereas Doctor Aziz's mother has to continuously suffer from her distress and presumably guilt over her unveiling. Chelsea Diffendal contends, "The veil, like many clothes for Western women, has been used to subvert patriarchal power structures, but

this subversion feeds back into and reinforces those structures” (136). Contrary to what Diffendal argues, I believe that this subversion of the patriarchal manipulations of veiling does not “feed back into and [reinforce] those structures.” For one reason, it is incorrect to liken veiling to “many clothes for women,” because veiling is not merely a kind of clothing. For many Muslim women, veiling is their identity as a Muslim and their way of showing piety by conforming to Islamic standard of modesty. Denying this signification of veiling is the same as denying the very existence of Muslim women whose experiences are different from, say, Western women. More importantly, reading this subversion as merely “reinforcing” the patriarchal structures is liken to deny the emerging awareness among many feminists, such as Hirschmann and Clemens, which begins to view veiling as not inherently oppressive. If veiling is oppressive, it is the patriarchal manipulation that has rendered it so. Third Space Feminism allows such reading because it acknowledges women’s different experiences and situations and rejects the hegemonic “white” feminist projection on the life of, especially, third world women.

As has been stated repeatedly, acknowledging the different experiences and political, cultural, economic, social situations of Muslim women is the same as acknowledging their agency. As Homa Hoodfar elaborately argues:

While for many westerners its meaning has been static and unchanging, in Muslim cultures the veil’s functions and social significance have varied tremendously, particularly during times of rapid social change. Veiling is a lived experience full of contradictions and multiple meanings. While it has clearly been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy, a means of regulating and controlling women’s lives, women

have used the same social institution to free themselves from the bonds of patriarchy. Muslim women like all other women are social actors, employing, reforming, and changing existing social institutions, often creatively, to their own ends. The static colonial image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman thus often contrasts sharply with women's lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency. (5)

The range of narratives in veiling and unveiling that Rushdie represents in the three novels recognizes the real and diverse narratives of Muslim women. The female characters in Rushdie's novels, through their different experiences with veiling and unveiling, show that veiling is not a static phenomenon; it is subject to change in accordance with the perpetual transformations of political, social, cultural, and economic situations.

Seemingly confirming to the general literary stereotypes of veiling as being attached to eroticism, the symbol of women's oppression, and patriarchal tools, Rushdie's literary representation of veiling embraces far broader issues about women's agency. Instead of merely reproducing the stereotypes, Rushdie's representation of veiling exposes and questions those stereotypes. In his collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie declares: "What I have wished to say, however, is that the point of view from which I have, all my life, attempted this process of literary renewal is the result not of the self-hating . . . but precisely of my determination to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly colonized, still disadvantaged peoples might find full expression" (394). Whether Rushdie successfully

gives Muslim women a medium for their “full expression” in his novels is subject to different opinion. However, his attempt at providing such a medium is real and needs to be appreciated.

Unfortunately, the range of Muslim women’s narratives of veiling that Rushdie portrays in his novels still fail to include some real experiences that are also frequently omitted by most critics on veiling. What Rushdie as well as many critics of veiling fails to include in the discussion is Muslim women’s experiences with veiling and unveiling where both veiling and unveiling are not enforced either by state laws or by patriarchal figures in families. This kind of experience is too often omitted or set aside by many critics and scholars of veiling. Rushdie’s omission, thus, can be read in two ways. On the one hand, this exclusion is Rushdie’s bias as a male author who fails to justly represent the real experiences of Muslim women. On the other hand, Rushdie may have deliberately omitted the narratives of Muslim women who are not oppressed by patriarchal manipulations. By doing so, he may arguably attempt to call attention to Western feminists who project their own beliefs and cultural assumptions in their view of Muslim women as generally oppressed and subjugated to patriarchy, without recognizing their different experiences and cultural backgrounds. Having said this, critics and scholars who are interested in the study of veiling should always bear in mind that veiling has remained and will always be a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced into a single interpretation, especially if the interpretation neglects the many aspects veiling is embedded in, such as religious, political, social, and cultural aspects.

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