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 parallelto 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. Nilűfer 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 Sufiya 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 explains 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 Hayyam 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 beasty 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 refugee 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

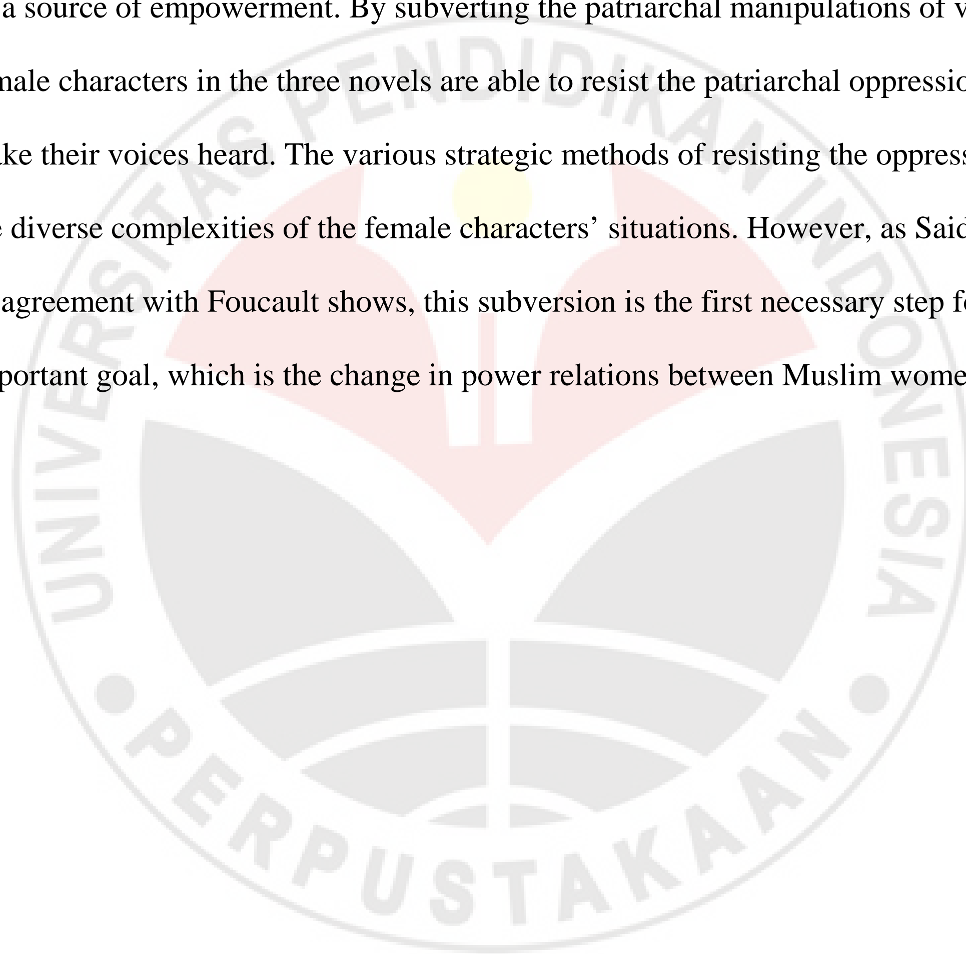
> discovered without surprise that her love for him had refused to die, but had become, instead, a thing of quietness and strength. . . . Rani had subsided into a sanity which made her a powerful, and later on a dangerous, human being. (157-8)

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.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