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Decoding Gender in the Selected Works of Salman Rushdie

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Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this thesis is my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution.

I further declare that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy operate within language by providing a detailed analysis of five of Salman Rushdie's novels, *Midnight's Children, Shame, The Satanic Verses, The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence*. It is concerned with the changes in Rushdie's use of language and the effect of this on the way gender is constructed in the selected texts. His novels offer a critique of contemporary Western culture's understanding of gender, identity, politics, philosophy and religion. Although Rushdean scholarship is often concerned with identity politics, this thesis expands the discussion by critically engaging with the gender politics in his texts. Language is a powerful and flexible tool of communication; it is changeable in nature and is ideologically driven. It can be used to oppress and liberate both the speaker and those spoken for. Language and ideology share a profound relationship. By looking at how ideologies operate within language we can call attention to some dominant cultural discourses that make up a culture's norms, values and attitudes.

Rushdie's novels are an uncomfortable meeting place of patriarchal and anti-patriarchal sentiments. Critics have acknowledged the ambiguity and ambivalence found in Rushdie's female characters to the point where some of the characters become destructive towards the male protagonists. This thesis concerns itself with the ways in which his use of language exhibits patriarchal norms and values in our discourse. Despite his best efforts Rushdie's experimentation with language reveals how deeply ingrained patriarchal ideology is in language. As such, it is not surprising to find characters such as Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa in *Shame* and Ayesha the Prophetess in *The Satanic Verses* who seemingly reinforce patriarchal ideology. These characters are masculinised as powerful and strong women who become destructive towards the male protagonists and

eventually themselves and those around them at the conclusion of their narratives. Yet, Rani Harappa and Zeeny Vakil from the aforementioned texts are represented in such a way that they reject patriarchal stereotypes and proceed to reveal the patriarchal oppression which they are working within and against. Rushdie's writings of women's stories in the selected five texts is an attempt to portray a variety of women, depicting their strengths and struggles as well as how they cope living within the bounds of a patriarchal culture. Rather than pigeonholing Rushdie's texts and his female characters as portraying sexist tropes, it is more useful to approach his works by examining how feminist and patriarchal ideologies operate within the language he uses.

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Introduction

Language plays a strong part in the way communities build their social structures and systems. It is a tool used to build and represent a community's values, norms and attitudes. Arimbi and Kwary note that 'it is through language that our understanding of the world is perceived and it is through language too, that our conceptual framework of how we see the world is built.'[1] Language gives us the ability to create meanings and comprehend reality. It is dynamic, constantly moving and changing. Theorists and philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida have argued that language is not a stable medium of communication.[2] This lack of stability means that language is in a constant state of flux as it adapts to its social environment. The way language was used in the 1970s, for example, is not the same as the way language is used now in 2020. This is a result of cultural products such as values, norms and attitudes changing and developing with language and discourse.[3] Understanding discourse to be elements that make up our social world, theorist Michel Foucault argues that 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed.'[4] This can be taken a step further by adding that the production of discourse is also hierarchical and that the dominant group in any given society manages how language and discourse is utilised, prioritised and serves their purpose. Those in control are responsible for deciding the inclusions and exclusions of discourses that serve their socio-economic interest. As such, language and discourse are ideologically driven.

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[1] Diah A. Arimbi and Deny A. Kwary. "Linguistic Turn and Gendering Language in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary," *English Language Teaching* 9, no. 10 (January 1, 2016): 167, doi: 10.5539/elt.v9n10p166.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P.M.S Hacker, 4th ed. (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009). Jacques Derrida, 'From *Of Grammatology*', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001).

[3] Discourse in this thesis refers to interrelated elements that contribute to the understanding of our social reality as it produces, distributes and move to remain in existence. Unlike language which is a system of communication, discourse is defined by the context in which meanings are generated through the use of language.

[4] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader,* eds. Phillip Rice & Patricia Waugh, 3rd ed. (London: Arnold, 1996), 239.

Indeed the term 'ideology' is politically motivated in that it brings to surface the theoretical understanding that our views on language are inscripted by political and economic concerns and intrinsically by its relationship with domination and subjugation.[5] Some linguists such as Newmeyer have argued that language is non-ideological and value-neutral.[6] However, other linguists such as Joseph and Taylor have challenged this argument by mapping political history ranging from the fifteenth to the twentieth century and demonstrated how language was used then.[7] Feminist linguists such as Dale Spender have also written about the way language creates and maintains power.[8] Moreover, this is noticeably different when one observes and compares two different languages. In English-speaking countries, the English language will tend to incorporate not just grammatical conventions but also the norms, values and attitudes of the dominant culture. As a fluent bilingual speaker of Malay and English, this is similarly observed in the Malay language whereby our traditions and values are embedded within our language and it too is driven by ideologies. In the English language, Walsh notes that 'any linguistic item or structure has the potential to become ideologically charged, depending on the way it is coloured by the surrounding context.'[9] With the rise in English publication of works by writers of colour, one can observe that the English language has been stretched, moulded and shaped to include these writers' cultural values, norms and traditions. Salman Rushdie is one such writer who has taken advantage of the malleable nature of language by experimenting with words and stories to shape new meanings.

[5] Susan U. Philips, 'Language Ideologies in Powerful Institutions', in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A.Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 211-225.
[6] Frederick J. Newmeyer, *The Politics of Linguistics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 79.
[7] John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor, 'Introduction: Ideology, Science and Language,' in *Ideologies of Language*, ed. John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-5.
[8] Dale Spender, 'Is there an app for where we are at?' *Redress* 3, no. 2, (2014): 2, EBSCO.
[9] Clare Walsh, *Gender and Discourse: Language and Power in Politics, the Church and Organisations* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 33.

Rushdie's works challenge the way language and literary conventions operate. His novels demonstrate how the 'english' language can be constructed in such a way that it embeds the middle-class Indian diaspora's values, norms and lived experiences.[10]

Since language is flexible enough to incorporate many different cultures' values as described above, it is reasonable to assume that it has the capacity to include ideological discourses such as feminism. Feminism is, as cultural critic bell hooks puts it, 'a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.'[11] Feminism exposes the institutional workings of patriarchy or sexism whether through language, discourse, actions or legislation. To understand feminism, one must understand how patriarchy manifests in our everyday lives. Patriarchy or as it is literally known, 'the rule of the father', refers to a system of belief that women are inherently inferior to men and 'thus open to control and domination, or discrimination and exclusion.'[12] The notion of hierarchy, that is one group dominating another, is a strong driving force of patriarchy. Patriarchal ideology socialises both men and women to believe in 'sexist thinking and values…the difference being that males benefitted from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege.'[13] To put this into a localised context, in Australia the concept of sexism permeates social structures where barriers exist limiting women's full and active participation in society. This is manifested in many ways some of which include the wage

[10] English with the capital "E" often implies the imposing conventions of Standard English used by many novelists in the Victorian era. Now, however, we have writers such as Rushdie exploiting the english language (with the lower case "e") by not being overly concerned with the traditional conventions of language but by appropriating it in such a way that is best suited to the Indian vernacular. From here on when referring to Rushdie's use of the english language, lower case 'e' will be applied.

[11] bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 1, Proquest Ebrary.

[12] Kathy E. Ferguson, 'Patriarchy,' In *Women's studies encyclopedia Volume 2*, ed. Helen Tierney (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1999), 1048. Sherry B. Ortner, 'Too Soon for Post-Feminism: The Ongoing Life of Patriarchy in Neoliberal America,' *History & Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (August 2014): 533, EBSCO.

[13] hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 7.

gap: women are paid 17.5% less than men and only 36.6% of Australian parliamentarians are made up of women.[14]

Feminism as a collection of ideologies and movements has developed over periods of time and space. Many would agree that feminism became extremely popular in the early 1970s especially among white women. Since then, it has gone through phases of popularity and unpopularity in both the academic and public sphere. In addition, some women have not been able to relate to dominant feminist discourses that have historically depicted white middle class women's struggles. In discussing feminist theory, bell hooks argues that 'bourgeois white women interested in women's rights issues have been satisfied with simple definitions for obvious reasons. Rhetorically placing themselves in the same social category as oppressed women, they are not anxious to call attention to race and class privilege.'[15] Indeed, there are multiple sites of disadvantage experienced by women on top of patriarchal oppression such as race, class, sexuality, nationality and religion. On writing about gender and acknowledging this problematic history, feminist journalist Laurie Penny makes it clear that her writings can never succinctly capture every woman because 'not all women's struggles are the same…women of colour, indigenous women, trans women, poor and working-class women are never asked to speak for 'all women' – even though they have more right to do so.'[16]

[14] Anna Hough, 'Composition of Australian parliaments by party and gender: a quick guide,' Parliamentary Library, published July 1, 2019.
https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3681701/upload_binary/3681701.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/3681701%22.
[15] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 19, ProQuest Ebrary.
[16] Laurie Penny, *Bitch Doctrine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 12.

Discussing gender and oppression can be uncomfortable for many people and this discomfort lies in the somewhat privileged position(s) that they may occupy. At other times, the discomfort lies in what people are being told about feminism. hooks captures this sentiment when she clearly states that 'their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media.'[17] The historical dominance of patriarchy, as an ideology and a norm, played a significant role in the Western world. In her chapter titled 'Feminist Criticism', Tyson looks at ways of getting beyond patriarchy suggesting that we must constantly be aware and resist patriarchal discourse and the way it 'dictates our lives.'[18] Spivak too notes that 'part of the feminism enterprise might well be to provide "evidence" so that these great male texts do not become great adversaries, or models from whom we take our ideas and then revise or reassess them. These texts must be rewritten so that there is new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature within the general production and determination of consciousness and society.'[19] As a literary theory academic, Tyson agrees that feminism is a dynamic philosophy. She argues that 'one of feminism's strengths is the freedom with which it borrows ideas from other theories and adapts them to its own rapidly evolving needs.'[20] One can observe that feminism in the 1970s looked quite different to present day feminism. Online newspapers, blogging and the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have contributed to feminist activism and raising awareness of the subtle and insidious workings of patriarchy within our society. Like feminism, patriarchy, too, has developed and changed. Nowadays, oppressive attitudes towards women come in different shapes and forms. Most notable is the power of oppression in language. The tendency to

[17] hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 1.
[18] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2006), 93.
[19] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 108, ProQuest Ebrary.
[20] Ibid., 94.

underestimate the power of language means that when a sexist joke is made, humour may be seen to contribute to reinforcing an oppressive ideology. This was the case in 2016 when Eddie Maguire, a well-known, powerful Australian public figure who hosts a TV show and owns a football club, made a controversial comment about drowning a noted Fairfax journalist, Caroline Wilson, for charity within a perceived humorous context.[21] Law academic Kate Seear cited the national peak body Our Watch when she said, 'language matters. As Our Watch points out, there are important links between the use of disrespectful language towards women, the language of violence, and the occurrence of violence. When prominent men with a major media platform use disrespectful language towards women, it risks reinforcing the notion that women are inferior to men.'[22]

Recognising the structural and systemic role that language and ideologies play in creating meanings, this thesis demonstrates the gendered nature of language by applying a gendered lens to five of Salman Rushdie's novels; *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence.* Admittedly this study is limited by not including all fourteen of his novels. However, this is due to the need to rigorously examine the five texts by allocating a chapter to each to examine in detail its use of language and its treatment of gender. The depth required to uncover the ambiguity of Rushdie's treatment of gender would be difficult and lacking in rigour if all fourteen novels were to be utilised in this dissertation. Spanning nearly three decades, these five popular and widely researched novels are chosen specifically to track the development of Rushdie's use of language and on the ways he constructs gender. These texts demonstrate how patriarchal and feminist ideologies operate within language through character construction. Rushdie's

[21] Deborah Gough & Chloe Booker, "Eddie McGuire in hot water over Caroline Wilson ice pool gibe," *The Age*, June 20, 2016, https://www.theage.com.au/sport/afl/eddie-mcguire-in-hot-water-over-caroline-wilson-ice-pool-threat-20160619-gpmp1x.html.

[22] Kate Seear, "Eddie McGuire, Caroline Wilson and when 'playful banter' goes very, very wrong," *The Conversation*, June 20, 2016, https://theconversation.com/eddie-mcguire-caroline-wilson-and-when-playful-banter-goes-very-very-wrong-61271.

body of work concerns itself with hybridity, migration, globalisation and literary experimentation. His work often celebrates progressive ideas related to newness and cosmopolitanism, yet his characterisation of women in the novels does not reflect this. This is problematic but not unexpected. As Spivak reflects, 'the category of language…embraces the categories of world and consciousness even as it is determined by them.'[23] Both the 'category of language' and the 'categories of world and consciousness' depend on one another in order to create and circulate meanings. The structure of language within dominant discourse is highly gendered and operates by upholding institutionalised modes of thinking that protect the status quo. Because of the ways patriarchal and feminist ideologies function within discourse, Rushdie's female characters dance between the two binaries. At best, the women in the five chosen texts are portrayed ambiguously and at worst, their characters revert back to sexist tropes. The female characters discussed in this thesis highlight the gendered nature of language and illustrate the limitations in Rushdie's representation of women.

Being a contemporary writer, Rushdie's ideas often touch heavily on some of the concerns we face in the twenty-first century. His novels are concerned with identity, politics, philosophy and religion. The gender debate, however, has not been given the attention it deserves. His ideas on politics and religion can seem more significant but the task of examining gender issues in detail has only been dealt with by a handful of critics. This is evident in the recent publication of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* where a special issue which focused on new approaches to Rushdie's works failed to incorporate gender into the agenda.[24] Recently, many unpublished undergraduate and postgraduate research theses

[23] Ibid, 103.
[24] Ana Cristina Mendes and Charlie Wesley, 'New Directions in Rushdie Studies,' *The Journal Of Commonwealth Literature* 52, no. 3 (September 2017): 417-421, EBSCO.

have identified the ambiguity and ambivalence in Rushdie's female characters and how some of these characters have played a part in the male protagonists' destructive behaviour in his novels.[25] Critic Timothy Brennan has observed that Rushdie's construction of the female in *The Satanic Verses* is 'strangely demeaning.'[26] Vijay Mishra, too, has observed in the diasporic narrative of *The Satanic Verses* that 'gender relations…get repositioned in the diaspora, and women begin to occupy a different, though not necessarily more equitable, kind of space.'[27] This would seem to counter most of Rushdie's ideas and politics. Rushdie himself has insisted that in his writing 'I have repeatedly sought to create female characters as rich and powerful as those I have known. The men in my books are rarely as flamboyant as the women. This is as it should be: or at least in my experience, how it has been, more often than not.'[28] For him to construct his female characters with such ambiguity to the point where they become destructive (as the thesis demonstrates) seems puzzling.

Writers and artists play a key role in interpreting the contemporary world in which they live and, to some degree, Rushdie's novels contribute to this. He has won numerous awards including the prestigious Booker Prize in 1981 and Booker of Bookers in 1993 for *Midnight's Children.* He was the President of PEN American Centre from 2004 to 2006 and has given numerous lectures at universities around the world. He is currently the Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University's Journalism Faculty, a role he also took with Emory University in 2007. Furthermore, Emory University procured and

[25] Kristiane Rivedal, 'Female characters and counter-discourse in Salman Rushdie's Shame' (Master's diss., University of Oslo, 2004). Sui-sum-grace Wong, 'Courting Controversies: Salman Rushdie, the Novelist and Intellectual Complicities' (PhD diss., University of Queensland, 2008). Norjahan Binte Makmon, 'Deceptive Feminist: The Failure of Feminism in Salman Rushdie's Fiction' (Honours diss, Nanyang Technology University, 2010).
[26] Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (NewYork: St Martin Press, 1989), 126.
[27] Vijay Mishra, 'Postcolonial Differend: Diasporic Narratives of Salman Rushdie,' in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 74.
[28] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 375.

housed Rushdie's archives including his old Macintosh computer as a way to attract students and researchers to its library. His influence spreads further than academia and this is evident in the cameo roles he played in Hollywood films such as *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Then She Found Me*.

One of the roles of an author is to provide commentary on society's past, present and future. The role of a contemporary writer has become, to a large extent, more varied. As a writer and public intellectual, Rushdie's comments on art, film and politics often make news in English speaking countries. He has written pieces for reputable and widely read newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times.* It can be argued that popular writers such as Rushdie and Margaret Atwood occupy an interesting space where their interaction with the reader has reached a more profound level. Utilising social media platforms such as Twitter has brought the connection of writer and reader even closer. In the past, for Rushdie to defend his novels when they came under political attack would require him to publish an article in a newspaper or appear on television or in interviews. Now he is able to respond instantly to any criticism thus bridging the gap in time and space for both himself and his readership.

Rushdie is not shy of controversy. Arguably he thrives on it. This we have seen in the publications of *Midnight's Children*, *Shame* and even more so, *The Satanic Verses* with the first two texts resulting in book bannings and the third a Fatwa. The Western-influenced ideas that Rushdie propagates in his novels often oppose the 'Eastern' culture to which he belongs and which he writes about in his novels. Rushdie's approach to literature requires that purity and absolutism be challenged. His article, 'In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again' argues for the importance of hybridity in the novel genre: '(the novel) is part social inquiry,

part fantasy, part confessional. It crosses frontiers of knowledge as well as topographical boundaries.'[29] This is further extended to Rushdie's experimental use of the English language. Like many postcolonial writers, Rushdie attempts to reclaim the coloniser's language and 'chutnify' it to create a language that best reflects the daily experience of his urban Indian protagonists.[30] Some critics, however, have argued that Rushdie's use of language can only be understood by the privileged and the elite in India who are a small minority.[31] At best, his portrayal of the daily experience of Indian people is limited to those who are educated and from a privileged background. Following from Timothy Brennan's *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* argument, critic Andrew Teverson also agrees that 'Rushdie cannot be said to speak from the perspective of "Third World" citizens because his fiction is addressed primarily to a metropolitan intellectual elite.'[32] Although this argument may have some truth to it at the time of its publication, it does not necessarily reflect nor capture the varied and diverse understanding and status of the so-called "intellectual elite" in modern day India. Indeed, his texts often deal with middle class Indians living in capital and/or metropolitan cities. His protagonists, be it Saleem Sinai or Ormus Cama, enjoy middle class privilege. As such, Rushdie's texts may only be accessible to a particular readership group in India. This is certainly not the case for readers in the West where his novels are widely read and celebrated.

Rushdie was born into a middle class Indian Muslim family in Bombay just two months after India received independence from the British. This proved to be quite a significant moment for him as illustrated in *Midnight's Children*. Released from British colonialism, India was

[29] Rushdie, *Step Across This Line*, 52.
[30] 'Chutnified' or 'Chutnification' are terms used to describe Rushdie's use of the English language as inclusive, that is, incorporating Hindi, Latin and Arabic words within context.
[31] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 'After *Midnight's Children*: Some Notes on the New Indian Novel in English,' *Social Research* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 203, JSTOR Journals.
[32] Andrew Teverson, *Salman Rushdie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 23.

still at the time grappling with notions of national and cultural identity. What does it mean to be an Indian? Does being an Indian mean being a Hindu or a Muslim? Punjabi or Gujurati? These are questions that Rushdie himself asked in his novels. Spending his childhood in Bombay, Rushdie enjoyed the multiplicity and secularity he experienced in the metropolitan city. However, after migrating to England to further his education, Rushdie encountered racist aggression especially during his time at Rugby, a prestigious public school. Despite this, his lived migrant experience led him to become an outspoken anti-racist advocate. He supported community based anti-racist programs in the 1980s and spoke against many of then-Prime Minister Thatcher's racist policies. The diasporic experience is one lived by many as a result of globalisation and has been known to occur in various spaces within and outside of one's country of origin. The act of migration and at times displacement, the uprooting and settling in a new place, can result in an identity crisis for many immigrants. For many the purpose of intentional migration is simple: to seek a better and for some, a safer existence. In doing so, one's personal and cultural identity is challenged. Hence, Rushdie's novels bring to light the damaged and questionable concept of home and how it can impact the gender dynamics and relationships of the family unit, the community and the individual.

One important feature of diasporic generations is that they do not necessarily physically return to their roots or country. It is not a means of rejecting where one comes from, but the desire for an improved future becomes a stronger driving force. From a historical standpoint, the term diaspora was used to describe the Jewish experience of leaving their homeland involuntarily. William Safran notes that '*the Diaspora* had a very specific meaning: the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands,

signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implied by that dispersion.'[33] However, the term diaspora has now expanded to include 'expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities.'[34] In *Imaginary Homelands,* Rushdie mentions how writers of the diasporic generation create imaginary homelands, that is, the recapturing in our mind of what our roots look like. The India that Rushdie remembers is not the same as the India that currently exists for Indians living in India. This diasporic experience is one that is familiar as having lived in Australia for fifteen years, the Singapore I remember and reimagine is not the same for those living in Singapore. To a certain extent, first generation migrants place their cultural identity in a time capsule; sheltered from the dynamic and changing forces that culture is ultimately subjected and exposed to. Memories of the past are used 'to reclaim, to look back.'[35] Rushdie suggests that we must look back at our roots and our past even if we risk losing the very thing we are reclaiming or recapturing in our mind. Taking a Lacanian approach, one observes that this process of reclamation through the exploration of past childhood experiences is an attempt to recapture the lost object of desire. Lacanian theory on the lost object of desire relates to the 'preverbal fantasy union with our mother' which is commonly referred to as *objet petit a*.[36] Specific events in our past or childhood moments can link themselves to this fantasy union. Therefore, when writers such as Rushdie seek to illustrate the diasporic experience, it can be seen as reclaiming the lost object of desire, that is, the desire to comprehend the meaning of home, identity, and furthermore, to be at one with the mother before the period of Symbolic Order, which is a time when disappointments and adult challenges and responsibilities begin to take place. This notion of loss and desire within a diasporic

[33] William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 83, EBSCO.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 10.
[36] Tyson, 28.

experience will be revisited and expanded in chapter four when the thesis uses *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* to extrapolate the inequitable gender dynamics that unfolds as a result of multiple migrations.

The theoretical framework from which this thesis developed stems from postmodern thinkers, including Cixous, Lacan and Jauss. These thinkers are associated with particular schools of thought such as Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Reader-Response and Discourse analysis. In combining these varied lenses, the dissertation demonstrates - much like Rushdie's own writing - that multiple perspectives can generate newness and ultimately unearth some of the ways that conflicting ideologies such as patriarchy and feminism operate in language and dominant discourse. Although this may be seen as trivialising of the interpretation of critical analysis, I argue that the combination of multiple theories provides a complementary understanding to Rushdie's texts by bringing to the surface the complexities and nuances that exist in language and discourse. Rather than confining the thesis to one or two particular theories, the theoretical framework of this thesis deliberately employs a process whereby language and discourse are examined through multiple lenses.

For instance, psychoanalysis helps give readers a perspective on understanding human behaviours and to a certain extent, fictional characters. Rushdie is infamous for caricaturing his characters. This does not necessarily mean that it would be impossible to use psychoanalytic principles for an in depth understanding of the character. Characters reflect human behaviour and real life experiences. Thus, they are essentially representations of human beings. Additionally, Freud claims that sexuality or *eros* as well as the death drive or

thanatos are two of the biggest drives in human beings.[37] Although many of Freud's ideas have proven to be deeply problematic, analysis of Rushdie's novels benefits greatly when we consider how the concept of the sexual drive in human beings relates to the analysis of the female characters in his novels. Classical psychoanalysis also concerns itself with the notion of the importance and complexity that exists in familial relationships. This proves to be helpful in unpacking Rushdie's novels since the portrayal of the protagonist's family and the power struggles in their relationships seem to shape the kind of people these characters become. In addition, psychoanalytic theory can provide us with an understanding of how the unconscious operates.

Many critics find psychoanalysing an author to be objectionable. In Rushdie's case, however, the revelations of his own memoir, *Joseph Anton*, as well as his many interviews and essays, strengthen the argument for this approach.[38] Julia Kristeva's ideas on psychoanalysis, language and feminism prove particularly useful in understanding Rushdie's texts. Refusing to be called a feminist, Kristeva distances herself by focusing more on how language functions in literature by drawing on Lacanian concepts. Kristeva is concerned with patriarchy's prevailing influence. However, she does regard language and especially the semiotic to be of crucial importance, particularly if one is trying to find a way beyond this approach. Her article 'Women's Time' criticises traditional feminist discourse as becoming totalitarian and institutionalised, which is the very thing that feminism should not be.[39] Feminism has to be fluid, diverse and inclusive. If Kristeva's theoretical framework was applied to Rushdie's novels, one might find that his idea of feminism is more profoundly

[37] Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' in *On Metapsychology*, ed. Angela Richards (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1991), 316.
[38] Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton* (Toronto: Random House, 2012). Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003). Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).
[39] Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 187-213.

and unconsciously institutionalised than Rushdie realises. However, one can argue that this form of traditional middle-class white feminism is a result of his educational and intellectual environment.

Language and the semiotic have become important criteria in understanding patriarchy. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein made significant observations on language. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein stated that 'our language can be regarded as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, of houses with extensions from various periods, and all this surrounded by a multitude of new suburbs with straight and regular streets and uniform houses.[40] It is appropriate to describe language and to a certain extent, patriarchy in this way. Language is an old system of communication and like a city, it is constantly growing and expanding making space for new and emerging discourses. Patriarchy too is an old social system that is expanding and adapting to its changeable environment. Wittgenstein believed that philosophical problems stem from the lack of clarity in language. Philosopher and theorist, Jacques Derrida, agrees that there is a lack of clarity in language. He coined the term Deconstructionism found in many Literary Theory classes in academia, which demonstrates the flexibility of language. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* explores a deconstructionist notion of language as being an unstable medium of communication.[41] His claim of instability is based on the observation that meaning making and interpretations are subjective and thus never fixed. A Deconstructionist approach to a literary text reveals and makes explicit the structures of language and the meanings associated with the signifiers. Although often mistakenly accused of being destructive or nihilistic in its foundation, to deconstruct a text is to bring to surface the

[40] Wittgenstein, 14.
[41] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

contradictions and ambiguities. By applying a Derridean understanding of Deconstruction, this thesis brings to surface the ambiguities and contradictions that occur in Rushdie's treatment of gender.

Theorist Roland Barthes takes language and, in particular the text, one step further by stating that 'the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules)…the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of discourse.'[42]Thus the structure of language and the meanings attributed to it are shaped by contemporary discourse. Like Rushdie, Barthes too cautions his audience against singularism of thinking or the "ultimate meaning" in language and literature.[43] He understands the context of a literary piece to be made up of 'multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestations.'[44] Although Barthes' theoretical focus is on the text's independence from its author, as seen in 'From Work to Text' and 'The Death of the Author', this thesis draws on some of Derrida and Barthes' ideas on language and interpretation to explore how Rushdie uses language to reinforce patriarchal notions and beliefs.In dismantling absolutes and certainties in systems of thought, Barthes paved the way for the reader to be in control of the meaning-making process.

The focus on the reader in creating new meanings came about with reception aesthetics derived from Reader-Response theory. Robert Jauss' pivotal work, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' brings to the forefront the role of the reader and how they

[42] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001), 1471.
[43] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001), 1469.
[44] Ibid.

contribute to a literary piece.[45] Reader-Response theory sees the text, the author and the reader as contributors to societal discourse. Articulating the relationship between the reader and the text, Jauss exploration of reception aesthetics points to how a text can be understood and appreciated for its aesthetic quality and its impact within the historical milieu in which it was published.[46] The reader has the potential to actively participate in the way meaning is created in the text – through 'simple reception to critical understanding' – and this in turn can help the writer use the reader's reception to produce new work.[47] This process is familiar to Rushdie as his work and the author himself are continuously engaged in public spaces whether it be at literary festivals in cosmopolitan cities such as Melbourne or Jaipur or at public lectures in universities around the world. Critical reception of his texts has arguably contributed to Rushdie pushing and challenging his own work to produce and create newness.

Indeed, this is demonstrated in the development of his female characters as elaborated further in chapters four and five. As such, applying the concept of reception aesthetics to Rushdie's texts contributes to the thesis' understanding of the improvement seen in his characterisation of women. Central to this thesis are the strong female characters that inhabit Rushdie's writing. To explore this further theorist Helene Cixous' demonstrates how these characters can be deconstructed. Cixous' is concerned with the psychological impact of oppression on women. In her ground-breaking article 'The Laugh of the Medusa'. Cixous insists that 'there is such a thing as *marked* writing', one that she characterises as controlled by the – at times hidden – masculine power and it is this form of writing that suppresses women.[48] Like

[45] Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History* 2, (1970): 7.
[46] Ibid, 23.
[47] Ibid, 8.
[48] Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001), 2042.

Derrida, Cixous believes that language possesses the ability to create change. The flexibility of language allows writing to be shaped by women to construct 'female-sexed texts' for 'a transformation of social and cultural structures.'[49] Within this lies the thinking that the act of writing or language has the ability to empower and offer agency to women. This will be expanded in chapter three's analysis of *Shame*, but it is worth noting here that Rushdie struggles to create a female-driven narrative. Informed by Cixous' ideas, this thesis is able to uncover the limitations of Rushdie's use of language as he attempts and at times fails in creating novels that interrogate patriarchal ideology. Certainly this article, and other works of Cixous, such as 'Newly Born Woman' and 'Coming to Writing,' aid in establishing a foundational understanding of women's oppression in language and literature.[50] On the other hand, one must note that there are limitations within Cixous' writings that exclude understandings of how patriarchal oppression often intersects with other forms of disadvantage such as race, class and sexuality. Cixous' writing enriches our understanding of patriarchal ideologies within language: Rushdie's texts benefit greatly when they are analysed and contextualised with other forms of oppression.

Patriarchal ideology can be seen as a form of power that asserts its masculine dominance over women. This form of power is something that needs to be interrogated especially in relation to experimental contemporary literature such as Rushdie's, which has been hugely influential with both a popular and a specialised readership. Michel Foucault discusses the issue of power at great length in his works. His article 'Truth and Power', for example, examines the politics and status of truths.[51] The production and circulation of truth are often

[49] Ibid.
[50] Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, *Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Helene Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).
[51] Michel Foucault, 'From *Truth and Power*', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001).

determined by the 'systems of power which produce and sustain it.'[52] Building on Foucault's work in understanding the circulation of discourse and power in institutions, discourse analysis, much like deconstruction itself, is concerned with the 'processes of social construction (that) lead to a social reality that is taken for granted and that advantages some participants at the expense of others.'[53] Dominant culture and ideologies often hold the power in society and this is then institutionalised to the extent that it becomes part of everyday norms and values. For example, western societies such as Australia offer power to white people who are seen as the dominant group with a strong patriarchal ideology governing the systems and policies that ultimately reflect and benefit the dominant group. Foucault believes that in order to understand present society, one must consider the forces that have put us where we are today and by doing so, one would hope to 'uncover the struggles among contending forces.'[54] Arguably then, in western societies where patriarchal ideologies dominate, the struggles of feminist ideologies in structures such as education and policies in workplaces, can be uncovered. Foucault's interpretation of power is explored further in his scholarly book, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*.[55] Here Foucault makes the observation that power will attempt to suppress behaviours it finds unfathomable and undesirable. This thesis applies a discourse analysis underpinned by Foucault's thinkings around language and discourse with the understanding that they are implicated in both comprising as well as constructing our social reality. This approach enables an analysis that highlights how patriarchal and feminist ideologies negotiate spaces and position each other in language and discourse.

[52] Ibid, 1669.
[53] Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis Investigating Processes of Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 12.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Michel Foucault, 'From *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001).

By using different theoretical lenses, this dissertation explores the many ways in which women are represented, be it positively or negatively. Derrida and Spivak's ideas on deconstructionism lay the theoretical groundwork for this thesis insofar as language is an unstable semiotic tool. Language is used to make meanings and is thus ideologically structured. Informed by the writings of Cixous, a gendered reading of the five novels illustrates how language creates a system of hierarchy that upholds institutionalised modes of thinking that privilege men, specifically white men who hold the greatest power in society. Subject to such structural limitations, Rushdie's characterisation of female characters is ambiguous and at times blatantly sexist. Lacanian and Foucauldian concepts of desire and power complement a gendered reading of Rushdie's texts as this thesis looks into how diasporic generations cope with the changing family dynamic post-migration.

Chapter one will discuss Rushdie's first successful novel, *Midnight's Children*. As a text that is concerned with the idea of nationhood and cultural identity, gender analyses are starting to gain traction by Rushdean scholars. The novel contains female characters from diverse socioeconomic background and thus this chapter deconstructs concepts of Mother India and its relationship to the female characters in the text. By deconstructing Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother, Durga the washerwoman and Mary Pereira, the text reveals the ideologically conflicted dialogism operating within language. When using the text as a case study one finds that women, especially mothers, are revered in Indian culture. Yet, the portrayal of women in *Midnight's Children* and India's historical policies that disadvantage women tell a different story. Magic realism is used to tell the story of injustices in Parvati-the-Witch but it is also used to reinforce sexist tropes in the characterisation of the Widow. However, the text manages this tension in binaries – feminist and sexist – through the characterisation of Padma the co-narrator as she lays bare Saleem's narrating strategy

through her interruptions and interjections thus cautioning the reader of Saleem's interpretation of history.

Chapter two discusses Rushdie's third novel *Shame* and interrogates the label given by some critics and even the author himself of being a feminist text. Like many of Rushdie's novels it is concerned with politics, specifically Pakistani politics. When politics mixes with a culture that prioritises religious traditions above all else, it creates a monster and that monster is personified in the shape of the mentally disabled Sufiya Zinobia. Framed within a fairytale motif, the text explores and experiments with the notion of beast within beauty and in that process highlights the injustice faced by Zinobia. Although Rushdie puts a conscious effort into creating strong, intelligent and opinionated female characters such as Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa, the language (sexual and otherwise) used by the narrator can be seen as reinforcing patriarchal fear of powerful, strong women. This chapter also applies psychoanalytic theory to unravel not only the unconscious aspect of Rushdie's method of characterisation but also to gain an understanding of how sexuality in language, such as the use of the word 'ironpants', is used to degrade a woman.

Chapter three will focus on exploring Rushdie's successfully controversial text *The Satanic Verses*. Gender issues took a backseat when it came to this novel and one can make concessions for it in this instance when the subject matter of contention in the public arena became quite dangerous with book burnings, riots and assassination attempts made on the author and those who were involved in publishing the novel. The Fatwa has since been rescinded for nearly two decades and its episodes are only now remembered in our history books. This chapter will discuss the relationship between women and religion in the context of literary experimentation and demonstrate the success (and failure) of this venture.

Diasporic narratives are also explored as a way of questioning and interrogating how gender dynamics change during and after the process of migration in the characterisation of the Sufyan family. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the characters of Allie Cone and Zeeny Vakil also provides an understanding of their relationship with and the treatment they received from the two fallible male protagonists.

Chapter four focuses on Rushdie's 1999 novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. At the centre of the novel lies two men's obsession with a woman. Vina Apsara is constructed in a way that follows the tragic heroine formula found in many films, novels and artwork. As mentioned previously, family is an important aspect in Rushdie's writings and in Vina's case, the novel seems to suggest that her lack of family and constant disappointment in her childhood led to her ultimate downfall. It can be argued that it is from this point that we can see a slight improvement in Rushdie's treatment of gender and more importantly, the characterisation of his women characters. This chapter examines how globalisation and popular culture have impacted our understanding of gender and sexuality through the characterisation of three central characters: Vina, Ormus and Rai. The three central characters' personal and cultural identities are further challenged as none of them feel a sense of belonging and as such, have a sense of rootlessness towards their country of origin and destination. It is interesting to note that, although characters such as Antoinette Corinth and Lady Spenta reinforce the familiar Rushdean pattern of strong female characters who revert back to sexist tropes, the general gist of central female characters such as Vina Apsara and Mira Celano indicates an attempt in constructing positive and varied representations of women and feminism.

The final chapter will explore Rushdie's 2008 novel *The Enchantress of Florence*. Similar to *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and to some extent, *The Satanic Verses*, this novel is concerned with one particular woman, Qara Koz. Although the text deals with issues of the diaspora as well as the power and significance of storytelling, there still remains some form of sexist representation in not just Qara Koz but also in the characters of the prostitute Skeleton and the Emperor's imaginary wife, Jodha. Sitting between the lines of strength and destroyer, the female characters in this text illustrate that language and social norms are intricately linked (as one cannot exist without the other) to patriarchal domination. This is further demonstrated as the chapter traces the development of Rushdie's treatment of gender from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*. This exercise helps to explore the development of Rushdie's ideas. Admittedly, this text is set in the Mughal period thus binding Rushdie to patriarchal conventions of that particular historical period. Nevertheless, this chapter reveals differences when compared to earlier Rushdie novels.

This thesis demonstrates the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology. By looking into how ideologies operate within language, we can then extract the popular, dominant and powerful ideologies that govern our society and thus bring to the surface the oppression it causes those on the margins. In the fictional societies that Rushdie creates in his texts, patriarchal ideology is often in conflict with feminism. Similarly, this conflict reflects our current reality in twenty-first century. Language can be a powerful tool of empowerment. It can also be a tool to oppress those who are marginalised by patriarchal structures and systems. In applying the abovementioned theoretical concepts and frameworks in Rushdie's texts, we can bring to light the conflicting dialogism in his body of work and reveal discourses that shape the society we live in.

Chapter 1: Mother India

The story of *Midnight's Children* is arguably semi-autobiographical. Rushdie himself has admitted on countless occasions that the book comes from his experiences of growing up in Bombay. In Rushdie's first successful novel, he had 'wanted for some time to write a novel of childhood, arising from my memories of my own childhood in Bombay.'[56] As a result we see resemblances of characters such as Saleem Sinai, Ahmed Sinai, the Brass Monkey and even Evie Burns to Rushdie, his father, his sister Sameen, and his first childhood crush Beverley Burns.[57] This is not the only time Rushdie has included his own personal experiences in his texts. Later in chapter three, we find that *The Satanic Verses'* Saladin Chamchawala has a similar kipper-eating episode that Rushdie himself was subjected to at Rugby. Familiarising oneself with the subject creates a space for issues to be explored and understood. In Rushdie's case, this familiarity earned him the prestigious Booker Prize in 1981 as well as the Booker of Bookers in 1993 and again in 2008. The novel gained such popularity that it was produced as a film in 2012.[58] In addition, the text attracts numerous critical analyses and this chapter contributes to this body of criticism by applying a gendered lens to the text.

Although Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is known as a postcolonial text, it is highly celebrated for its experimentation with the english language. Commonly known to many readers as the 'chutnification' of english, Rushdie stretches the flexibility of language in order to accommodate Indian values, norms and attitudes within it. Although some critics have questioned the 'ability of English to convey the nuances of the Indian experience', one

[56] Salman Rushdie, 'Introduction', in *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.ix.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Deepa Mehta, dir. *Midnight's children.* 2012; Canada: Hamilton Mehta Productions, 2013. DVD filmstrip, 146 min.

finds that Rushdie's use of english revived the 'Indian English literary scene which had (arguably) been stagnant for a while.'[59] Dwivedi sees Rushdie's use of english as 'prompted by a desire to capture the spirit of Indian culture with all its multiplicity and diversity.'[60] Indeed, the language of *Midnight's Children* echoes that of the Indian middle-class with Hindi-Urdu-English melding into the narrative. Rushdie does not take pains to explain what a Hindi word means since he manages to put it succinctly into context so the flow of the narrative makes it relatively easy for a non-Hindi speaking reader to understand the word. Feminist scholar Vrinda Nabar too writes about 'the frequent demand for the creation of a special Indian English both to reflect the language as it is actually spoken in the country and to transliterate the idiom of a particular Indian language.'[61] Indian writers in the past such as Raja Rao and R.K Narayan have stuck to formal English to represent Indian life. Indeed this form of writing has played a significant role in contributing to Anglo-Indian Canonical Literature and has been a great influence on the writings of contemporary writers such as Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. Ron Shepherd, too, acknowledges that he does not 'wish to denigrate a body of fine Indian-English writing presented in the older established forms of realistic fiction, suitably adapted to local requirements.'[62]

However, one can argue that Rao and Narayan's approach to writing the Indian experience in english has become less relevant especially in depicting modern contemporary times. Certainly, *Midnight's Children* is not only reserved for Western readers but it is also widely read in India albeit among the educated middle class. Dwivedi argues that when one

[59] Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Introduction', in *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings*, ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), 10.
[60] O.P.Dwivedi, 'Linguistic Experiments in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', *Transnational Literature* 1, no. 1 (1 November 2008): 1, EBSCO.
[61] Vrinda Nabar, 'Arun Kolatkar: A Bilingual Poet', *World Literature Written in English* 16, no. 2 (1977): 369, EBSCO.
[62] Ron Shepherd, '*Midnight's Children* as Fantasy', in *The Novels of Salman Rushdie*, eds. G.R Taneja and R.K Dhawan (New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1992), 33.

compares the use of english between Rao and Rushdie, one finds that 'Rao's English remains Sanskritised, whereas Rushdie's English is an example of the hybrid discourses of a cosmopolitan writer.'[63] Catherine Cundy too has observed that when it comes to using the english language within an Indian context, 'Rushdie tended to dissociate himself from the early Indo-Anglian writers' who see the English language as a 'split manifested…between the areas of intellectual and emotional life.'[64] For Rushdie, the use of English by Rao and Narayan does not reflect the layers of difference found in a cosmopolitan city such as Bombay where people of diverse class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion come together to share both space and time, thus demonstrating the everyday realities of Indians in India. One can also deduce that Anglo-Indian writers have had a dissenting history where the English language was, through the eyes of the colonised, oppressive. Thus, by rejecting and decolonising english, contemporary writers such as Arundhati Roy and Rushdie have used language as a tool of empowerment. Their interpretation of english centres on reversing the colonisation experience through hybridising and chutnifying the language as a means to describe the Indian experience. Indian English Literature, now a popular undergraduate course in universities worldwide, is enjoyed by both Indian and non-Indian readers. The adaptability of language makes it possible for new meanings to be created thus grounding diverse lived experiences. Rushdie himself has observed how new interpretations can be found in audiences from different cultures where 'in the West people tended to read *Midnight's Children* as a fantasy, while in India people thought of it as pretty realistic, almost a history book.'[65] Because *Midnight's Children* deals with the transition and early years of

[63] Ibid, 2.
[64] Catherine Cundy, *Salman Rushdie* (Glasgow: Manchester University Press, 1996), 6. The term Indo-Anglian often refers to the body of literature by Indian writers who write in English whereas Anglo-Indian refers to an individual with mixed British and Indian ancestry or an individual who is of Indian descent but lives in Britain. Writers such as Hanif Kureishi (born in London and half English and half Pakistani) and Rushdie (born in India but lived in England and writes in English) are labeled as Anglo-Indian writers.
[65] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, xv.

Independent India, the text highlights subtle and sometimes not so subtle effects of colonisation on the people.

A significant motif used in *Midnight's Children* is the idea of fragments and understanding history through a pair of cracked lenses. Fragments are explored and decentred throughout the narrative as Saleem Sinai's autobiography becomes entangled with Indian political history. Starting the narrative with how his grandfather meets his grandmother whilst India is preparing for its road to independence, this epic tale seeks to link important political events in Indian history to the lives of the Sinai family. Saleem's birth is tied to India's moment of achieving Independence whilst his son's birth, Aadam Sinai, is linked to the moment when Indira Gandhi announced the start of one of the bleakest moments within Indian history: the 1975-77 Emergency period. Moreover, the linkages made to Saleem's interpretation of history accentuate Rushdie's concern for ambiguity and ambivalence in the text. This dissertation shows that in taking into account the ambiguity found in Rushdie's construction of his characters, one finds that language has the ability to absorb two binary ideologies such as patriarchy and feminism.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Rushdie has been accused by critics such as Cundy and Spivak of constructing his female characters within the patriarchal nurturer/destroyer dichotomy. Arguably, this is a pattern seen throughout Rushdie's novels analysed in this thesis. The construction of strong female characters is immediately demeaned to the point of being destructive either to themselves or to those around them. This pattern of reverting back to sexist tropes suggests that the structure that binds Rushdie's use of language to meaning-making is gendered and this is further demonstrated later in the chapter. The first part of this chapter explores the concept of Bharat-Mata or Mother India. In taking into consideration

the motif of fragments, one can argue that Rushdie has attempted to represent the concept of Bharat-Mata in fragments through characters such as Mary Pereira, Durga the washerwoman and Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother. For Rushdie, the 'multiple faces of Bharat-Mata' bring together not a set of fixed attributes of the ideal Indian woman but the differences of socio-economic as well as differing religious influences in the modern Indian woman.[66] Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother represents the conflict that exists when a religious past is affecting progress and development while entering a secular state. On the other hand, Durga the washerwoman is a perfect example of how the lives of women in the lower working class move towards achieving a primal form of economic independence through strength and determination. The second part of this chapter exemplifies how Rushdie utilises the supernatural elements in highlighting the tyrannical power of women through the characters of Indira Gandhi (commonly known in the text as the Widow), Naseem Aziz and Parvati-the-Witch. The use of supernatural elements taken from stereotypical construction of witches from fairy tales suggests that the text insists on an ambiguous representation of women.[67] Clear definitions of good and evil (as is usually the norm in fairy tales) are then thwarted when the use of magical or fantastical elements creates an ambiguous language that is rife with ideologies. This is especially the case when questioning representations of good and evil in the characters of the Widow and Parvati-the-Witch. The last part of this chapter focuses on the importance of Padma's role as the designated listener to Saleem's narrative in order to lay bare the narratorial ambiguity that exists within the text. Padma's contribution to the text allows for Saleem's flawed narrative to be brought to the surface so that as readers we can conclude that the narrator's obsession with the destructive nature of the women in

[66] Ibid, p.567.

[67] Magic realism as defined by Wendy Faris, 'combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed.' Wendy B. Faris, 'Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction', in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora & Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 164.

his life is a result of him internalising a victimhood position. Consequently, this chapter not only demonstrates Rushdie's commitment to his literary philosophy of cultivating multiple interpretations but also highlights, unintentionally perhaps, the ambiguities in how he constructs women in the text.

As a means of communication, language is flexible and organic in its nature. Accordingly, it has the capacity to absorb a culture's norms, values and attitudes. Gillespie and Cornish have observed that language and dialogism have 'a range of distinctive assumptions, most notably: an emphasis on the constitutive power of social interaction that also acknowledges the importance of situation-transcending phenomena (such as discourses, institutions, relationships and identities), and also an emphasis on the historicity of human action that also acknowledges human agency.'[68] This is rightly seen in popular discourse found in television programs, magazines and even newspaper articles. As someone who has grown up bilingual with a Singaporean Malay-Indian Muslim heritage, I can appreciate the subtle and not so subtle differences found in the norms, values and traditions within the Malay and English languages. This can include how we speak as well as, for example, the way we communicate with our elders. One can even argue that customary behaviours are often found within the Malay language itself: for example, conventions in the Malay language ensure respect for those older than us is practised. To address someone older than myself by their name is looked upon as being rude and ill-mannered regardless of their relations to me. Therefore, one often addresses older siblings or those perceived to be older as 'big sister'/'big brother' or 'auntie'/'uncle'.[69] Hence, if language has the capacity to absorb

[68] Alex Gillespie and Flora Cornish, 'Sensitizing Questions: A Method to Facilitate Analyzing the Meaning of an Utterance,' *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science* 48, (2014): 436, EBSCO.
[69] Addressing someone as 'big sister' or 'big brother' also applies to extended family members such as cousins and even strangers.

cultural norms and values, then we can certainly find ideologies embedded in language and discourse.

Arguably, a powerful ideology found in language is patriarchy. Patriarchal ideology, that is, its values, beliefs and attitudes have been absorbed into our culture for a lengthy period of time and accordingly into our language and discourse. It is important to reiterate that patriarchy occurs around the world but operates differently from country to country and even within communities themselves. Indeed, the concept of women's rights in Western countries has arisen and received widespread popularity in the last century. Feminism is largely understood as concerns for women's social, economic and political advancement. Both patriarchy and feminism, conflicting ideologies that they are, are conceivably present in our use of language and discourse today as well as embedded in the socio-political structures of our society. The gender pay gap, unequal female representation in politics and the under-representation of women in corporate boards are some examples of the pervasiveness of patriarchal values that protect white male power and privilege.[70] Language plays an important role in the way we make sense of the world. However, hooks identifies that it can also be used to 'describe and define experiences in a language compatible with existing images and ways of knowing, constructed within social frameworks that reinforce domination.'[71] Henceforth, by applying a gender lens to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, we begin to see the dialogical nuances of language and its ability to be contradictory as it interrogates and reinforces patriarchal ideology.

[70] 'Selected highlights: differences between australian men and women', Gender Indicators, Australia, Sep 2018, Australian Bureau of Statistic, last modified September 24, 2018, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202018~Main%20Features~Selected%20Highlights~2.

[71] bell hooks, *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 37, ProQuest Ebrary.

Salman Rushdie's Booker Prize winning novel, *Midnight's Children*, is best known for its experimentation with language. As a narrative that revolves around the story of a post-independent India, Rushdie's narrator, Saleem Sinai, insists on linking his personal autobiography with the history of India. Born on the stroke of midnight on India's Independence Day, Saleem believed himself to be 'handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.'[72] Saleem's personal history as well as his recount of the national history is littered with minor female characters who have a significant impact on the narrative. Various critics such as Catherine Cundy, Goonetilleke and Charu Verma believe that Rushdie's representation of gender is constructed rather poorly.[73] More often than not, they argue that the female characters seem to adopt a nurturer/destroyer dichotomy that ultimately emasculates the male protagonist.

The concept of Mother India is understood to be a postcolonial concern.[74] Needham argues that 'in anticolonial struggles, the oppressed nation was figured as a "female" body, violated by colonial occupation, waiting to be avenged, and thus redeemed by (potent) nationalist men.'[75] Gayatri Gopinath has noted that in recent critical works written by feminist scholars, it has been identified that 'the figure of the woman in nationalist discourse acts as a primary marker of an essential, inviolable communal identity or tradition.'[76] The discourse of the gendered nation is then used to secure and justify nationalist rhetoric. A great concern for

[72] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Vintage, 2009), 1.
[73] Catherine Cundy, 'Rushdie's Women', *Wasafiri* 9, no. 18, (September 1993): 13-17, EBSCO. D.C.R.A Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Charu Verma, 'Padma's Tragedy: A Feminist Deconstruction of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', in *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, ed. S. Singh (New Delhi: Prestige, 1991), 154-162.
[74] Postcolonialism is an approach that analyses and explains the effects of colonisation by interrogating preconceived ideas on cultures that were colonised by European superpowers. A postcolonial approach can reveal the politics of knowledge and how it was used to oppress and control the colonised.
[75] Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, 'Multiple Forms of (National) Belonging: Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 1 (1993): 97, EBSCO.
[76] Gayatri Gopinath, 'Nostalgia, desire, diaspora: South Asian sexualities in motion', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 468.

figuring the nation in the form of a female body is the nonsensical belief that women would have to abide by these fixed acceptable traits.Rushdie's text, however, proves it to be otherwise. The concept of Bharat-Mata is represented in various forms, as characters from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds are made to reflect what it means to be an authentic Indian woman. Rushdie's use of extreme stereotypes in his characterisation, from strong feminist characters to those who reinforce patriarchal norms and attitudes, invokes ambiguity and challenges societal norms, values and attitudes. By stereotyping the female characters with some degree of irony, Rushdie is in fact challenging established preconceived mindsets of ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy. By invoking the polarities of these two ideologies, Rushdie decentres fixed principles of feminism and patriarchy and ultimately destabilises established 'truths'. Rushdie's experimentation with language portrays the diversity in his female characters to represent various aspects of Bharat-Mata. By deconstructing the characters of Mary Pereira, Durga the washerwoman and Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother we bring to the surface the process of hybridising the multifaceted concept of Mother India.

The concept of gendering a nation has been around for centuries. Interestingly, the nation has for most of its time been personified as female. The anthropomorphising of a country, specifically attaching the role of 'mother' to it, implies that a country's role is to nurture and care for its people. On the other hand, one might argue that men had initially created the institution of the state thus personifying the country as mother would justify the state's protection and more importantly, control over it. Furthermore, this control is extended to include the national figure of mother as embodying values pertaining to the nation. This is clearly seen in *Midnight's Children*. However, the ambiguity found in the text in its portrayal of women signifies the importance of the problematic singular interpretation of Bharat-Mata.

Because of this, we can see that the female characters in *Midnight's Children* encapsulate the idea that the figure of Bharat-Mata is diversified. This is strongly suggested in the text when Saleem questions the enormous role that women play in his life, 'how are we to understand my too-many women? As the multiple faces of Bharat-Mata?'[77] The text, too, seems to use religion to impose on a character's interpretation of what Mother India means. Goonetilleke observes that through the representation of the religiously conservative Naseem Aziz, 'India can be seen, and understood, only in fragments.'[78] Thus, like that of a puzzle, the representation of Mother India can be found in pieces through characters such as Mary Pereira, Durga the washerwoman and Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother.

Since language contains patriarchal values, one can easily come to the conclusion that Rushdie's postcolonial attempt at using english to recover the narratives of the colonised will still manage to marginalise another minority: women.[79] Certainly, we find that the protagonist has strong feelings about the women who have entered and exited his life, 'I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex.'[80] Such statements give readers an indication that Saleem Sinai is a misogynist. Women in *Midnight's Children* are at the mercy of the protagonist's interpretation. This can often lead critics such as Verma to conclude that in a postcolonial narrative there can be no other way but to reinforce patriarchal stereotypes, thus conclusively finding Rushdie's construction of gender as being problematic. Goonetilleke has noted when comparing *Midnight's Children* to *Grimus* that the representation of female characters in '*Midnight's Children* marks a

[77] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 567.
[78] Goonetilleke, 22.
[79] English with the capital 'e' often implies the imposing conventions of Standard English used by many novelists in the Victorian era. Now, however, we have contemporary postcolonial writers such as Rushdie exploiting the english language (with the lower case 'e') by not being overly concerned with the traditional conventions of language but by appropriating it in a way that is best suited to the Indian vernacular.
[80] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 565.

mixed kind of advance. His (Rushdie) portrayal offers a greater range and positiveness yet incorporates a curious negativity as well.'[81] The strange mixture of positiveness and 'curious negativity' can be appreciated as Rushdie invokes both feminist and patriarchal ideologies to destabilise fixed stereotypes and revel in the ambiguities.[82]

The character of Mary Pereira is an excellent example of how the interplay between postcolonial identity, language and sexuality operates in the narrative. Known as Saleem's ayah or nanny, Mary Pereira is first introduced as a nurse working in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home where Saleem was born. She is also responsible for swapping baby Saleem and Shiva after birth. For Mary, this was an act of love for her rebellious Joseph D'Costa who she had hoped would have seen it as a revolutionary act. 'Two babies in her hand – two lives in her power – she did it for Joseph…she changed name-tags…giving the poor baby a life of privilege and condemning the rich-born child to accordions and poverty.'[83] This revolutionary 'act of social adjustment' gives a baby born into poverty an opportunity that would be denied if they were to be brought up within the confines of the lower class, thus highlighting the economic struggle that is still prevalent in India today.[84] It also points to the fact that luck plays a significant role in whether one is born into privilege or poverty. The construction of Mary Pereira represents an aspect of Bharat-Mata that believes in an independent and socio-economically egalitarian society for its people. This revolutionary act, though cruel in some respects, highlights the powerful role that women play in society. In Mary Pereira's case, her powerful act changed the destinies of two individuals dramatically.

[81] Goonetilleke, 42.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 157.
[84] Goonetilleke, 27.

As an experimental writer, Rushdie draws on polar principles, feminism and patriarchy, in order to challenge established truths and more importantly, confront settled modes of thinking. The ambiguity detected by Goonetilleke can be seen in characters like Mary Pereira. As a result of her misdeed, Mary decided to make amends by offering her services to Amina to be Saleem's ayah and from then on resort to pampering ('so thin you got, baba, the wind will blow you away')[85] and indulging him ('come, let me kiss you, let me give you cake')[86] even when he is an adult. Since the narrative is from Saleem's perspective, we are told of Mary's actions and the impact of it through the protagonist's point of view. Saleem regards Mary as his second mother who is always there to take care of him, especially during his short period of exile from home as a teenager. Mary's nurturing aspect is also arguably a reflection of Bharat-Mata or Mother India.

In contrast, the character of Durga the washerwoman is seen to reinforce patriarchal stereotypes. She is Aadam's wet nurse who nurtured the baby through his tuberculosis days with 'the daily benefit of her inexhaustibly colossal breasts.'[87] Although a minor character and only introduced towards the end of the novel, Durga is arguably a victim of Saleem's sexist castigation but admired strongly by the highly esteemed magician Picture Singh. Portrayed as a gossip-mongering succubus 'whose biceps bulged; whose preternatural breasts unleashed a torrent of milk capable of nourishing regiments,' Saleem blames her for the shrinking and decrepitude of Picture Singh.[88] In the space of two pages, the construction of Durga invokes the nurturer/destroyer dichotomy. Her nurturing of baby Aadam to health

[85] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 333.
[86] Ibid, 639.
[87] Ibid, 622.
[88] Ibid.

is offset by her destructive effect on the admired Picture Singh. She is a 'monster' as well as a provider who 'possessed the boundless energy common to all practitioners of her trade; as she thrashed the life out of shirts and saris on her stone.'[89] This portrayal of Durga echoes Cixous' é*criture féminine* highlighting the importance for women to write their own stories and the danger of having narrators like Saleem controlling stories about women.[90] Saleem, aware of the power of the pen, uses his narrative space to vilify Durga by eroticising her body and thus reducing it in his persistent use of the imagery of her breasts. Nicole Weickegennant argues that the character of Durga exemplifies the 'epitome and culmination of the monstrous women who seem to dominate the nation and reduce men to shadows of their former selves.'[91] Indeed, Durga's character brings a particular form of anxiety out of Saleem as he sees her relationship with Picture Singh echoing that of his grandparents.

It can also be said that when Durga is first introduced to Saleem's life, he is by then a cynical and disillusioned man. Since Durga is a representation of 'novelty, beginnings, the advent of new stories events complexities,' Saleem finds it troublesome to include her in his narrative.[92] It is only due to her intended engagement with Picture Singh that Saleem warrants her space in his story and not to mention the fact that she provided much needed nutrition to Saleem's baby, Aadam. Although on the surface readers find Saleem's representation of Durga as misogynistic, one finds that his lack of interest in newness, be it characters or stories, has contributed to his interpretation of the washerwoman. On the verge of depression, it seems that Saleem's outlook on life is highly contrasted with that of Durga who, as noted by Hassumani,'is not besieged by history…(and) is a positive, life-giving

[89] Ibid.
[90] Cixous, 879.
[91] Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara, *Salman Rushdie and Indian Historiography: Writing the Nation into Being* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 73.
[92] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 623.

force' representing resilience and strength.[93] It should be noted that *Midnight's Children* experiments with the novel form where novelistic devices are laid bare for readers to examine. Therefore, a reader can easily recognise Saleem's chauvinistic tirade against Durga as a result of the many disappointments experienced by him in all of his thirty-one years. Durga's strength and to a large extent liveliness makes her a threat to Saleem's darkened and negative future outlook.

When comparing Mary Pereira and Durga the washerwoman, one begins to understand that Rushdie's attempt at portraying different elements of the Indian woman is a reflection of Bharat-Mata. On the one hand we have Mary Pereira who is blamed for the life-changing baby-swapping incident but eventually forgiven, and on the other we have the destructive Durga with her awe-inspiring mammary glands. For a country so diverse in language and religion, the qualities perceived for the new Indian woman are unstable and lack absolutism. What we find instead are fragments of Bharat-Mata in each of the female characters. Weickgennant has observed that in a typical 'nationalist discourse Indian women were invested with the role of representing the essence of Indian culture and the core of the authentically Indian nation.'[94] In a typical Rushdean approach to a nationalist discourse, he displays multiplicity and variety in his characterisation of women paralleling the plurality found in Indian culture. Just like Mother India, the women in the text are diverse in qualities, behaviours and attitudes. Each of them represents an aspect of Bharat-Mata and neither one symbolises the national symbol fully. One can easily mistake Rushdie for reinforcing sexist attitudes in his texts when deconstructing the characters of Mary Pereira and Durga. Yet,

[93] Sabrina Hassumani, *Salman Rushdie: A Postmodern Reading of His Major Works* (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2002), 43.
[94] Weickgennant, 66.

these characters offer a complex and ambiguous representation of Mother India and ultimately, what it means to be a modern Indian woman post colonisation.[95]

National identity encourages belonging thus making one feel at home. Rushdie's portrayal of Indian national identity is arguably unstable. Amrita Chhachhi explains that women have been 'crucial markers of identity – of the nation, community, caste group and religious group. They have been objects as well as agents.'[96] On the surface we can see his female characters as both objects and agents resisting and reinforcing patriarchal myths in the text. As we have already seen in the analysis of Mary Pereira and Durga the washerwoman, one finds that Rushdie abolishes certainties and absolute truths in the construction of female characters. This is arguably an extension of what Rushdie normally propagates in his texts: celebrating plurality and reiterating the dangers of singularity and absolute truths. Hence, by destabilising character representations, Rushdie creates complexity and flexibility in *Midnight's Children*. In the case of the female characters, Rushdie seems to invoke the universally familiar binarisms such as good/evil and feminine/masculine so that he can challenge and decentre preconceptions of connotations already attached to them. Ambreen Hai has noted that 'the shifting grounds of his (Rushdie's) self-asserted feminism become more complicated and ambivalent in different ways with each text.'[97] This is clearly evident in *Midnight's Children* where characters succumb to patriarchal stereotypes and are also interrogated and destabilised in such a way that confronts our initial conclusions on their actions, values and beliefs.

[95] It should be noted that the portrayal of the modern Indian woman is limited to a heteronormative identity and as such glaringly excludes queer, trans and lesbian women from this narrative.
[96] Amrita Chhachhi, 'Identity Politics, Secularism and Women: A South Asian Perspective', in *Forging Identities: Gender Communities and the State*, ed. Zoya Hasan (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 86.
[97] Ambreen Hai, '"Marching in from the Peripheries": Rushdie's Feminised Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism,' in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K Hall & Co, 1999), 18.

The notion of a gendered nation has been around for centuries and it is found most commonly in literature and popular culture. In order to build a strong national identity that ensures loyalty and instils patriotism in its people, it would seem that the best way is to anthropomorphise a country. Nationalist rhetoric post colonisation would often evoke feminine traits as a way of winning back a country portrayed to be oppressed by the colonial power. Nalini Natarajan too agrees that the figure of Mother is embodied in the concept of land 'which gives shelter and "bears"…she is eternal, patient, essential.'[98] When applying a discourse analysis to *Midnight's Children* it can be observed that Saleem Sinai's grandmother, Naseem Aziz, represents an aspect of Mother India. The construction of Naseem's character suggests that her personal identity is reflected against the national identity construed in the ideal concept of Mother India. Her transformation into the 'figure of melodramatic narrow-mindedness' and labelled by Saleem as Reverend Mother is a testament to her robustness in making decisions for her family. Although her patriarchal values and beliefs are constrained to fit the Islamic model that she has been brought up in, she has in later life extended the model to fit the modern lifestyle of being self-sufficient thus exemplifying strength and resilience to a changing world. This is evident in the episode where Reverend Mother moves to Pakistan to open a successful petrol pumping business with her daughter-in-law after the death of Doctor Aziz as a way of providing for her family.[99]

The characterisation of Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother has been met by negative criticisms in the past. This is especially the case when one applies a gendered lens to the text. Ambreen Hai has observed that *Midnight's Children* 'teems with misogynist stereotypes of malignant

[98] Nalini Natarajan, 'Women, Nation and Narration', in *Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Book of Readings,* ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003), 174.
[99] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 380.

women…(such as) "Reverend Mother," whose angry, punishing silence smells like a "rotting goose-egg."'[100] Naseem seems to fit the pattern that is seen in many of Rushdie's female characters in later texts such as *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. Catherine Cundy sought to argue this point, albeit briefly, in her essay titled 'Rushdie's Women'. Observing Rushdie's fictions as a whole, Cundy points out that 'it is a recurring feature of his work that women are invoked to prove a point about social injustices and inequities, and then effectively demeaned by the writing itself.'[101] And indeed it is the gendered nature of Rushdie's language that compels the writing to revert back to sexist tropes. The construction of Naseem Aziz and her transformation into the formidable Reverend Mother suggests that Rushdie's avowed feminist characterisation of Naseem as one that is subjected to patriarchal control becomes ineffectual since Reverend Mother reinforces the patriarchal myth of how powerful women can lead to the emasculation/destruction of men seen in the weakening of Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Sinai. Moreover, the text seems to highlight the patriarchal suppression of women's sexuality when readers are told of how Naseem is kept in purdah by her father physically and socially. Guarded by three women 'built like professional wrestlers', Naseem's father justifies her social purdah by claiming that she needs protection from the town's 'many good-for-nothing[s].'[102] Her physical purdah is accounted for her being 'a decent girl…(who) does not flaunt her body under the noses of strange men.'[103] In this way, Naseem's character fluctuates between feminist strength and patriarchal submission. This is of course the reality for many Indian women, as the struggle for economic independence is often conflicted with the constraints of a patriarchal culture.

[100] Hai, 28.
[101] Cundy, 'Rushdie's Women', 17.
[102] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 22.
[103] Ibid, 23.

Arguably, it is simplistic to interpret the text as reinforcing patriarchal values and attitudes. On discussing the act of interpretation, Iser noted that texts as a whole can often be ambiguous as a result of their 'constant foregrounding and backgrounding in the course of which aspects of the text are both privileged and invalidated.'[104] When looking at the general gist of Rushdie's body of work from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*, it is possible to see that he seeks to destabilise singular interpretations of truths. As a postmodernist writer, Rushdie aims to destabilise, question and confront stereotypes and absolutism, be it from the right to left side of politics. Naseem Aziz/Reverend Mother is one typical example of Rushdie playing with stereotypes. Consistently placing his characters on ambiguous ground, Naseem Aziz may invoke sympathy on the part of the reader. Reverend Mother on the other hand arouses fear. Indeed, Rushdie's portrayal of Reverend Mother alludes to something akin to an evil witch in a fairy tale. From Saleem's point of view, '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 traditions and certainties.'[105] Although on the surface the imagery provokes a conclusion that Rushdie's sexism through the sexualisation of Reverend Mother's face, one cannot dismiss the detail in Naseem's contextual background coupled with his use of comedic language to suggest ambivalence and complexity in this character. Neil Kortenaar notes that in regard to Naseem and Aadam's relationship, 'the male appears to have agency and the female occupies what seems to be a more passive role, but in Saleem's world, power switches sides after marriage.'[106] Indeed power does switch sides with Reverend Mother

[104] Wolfgang Iser, 'Concluding Remarks', *New Literary History* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 235.
[105] Ibid, 47.
[106] Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* (Quebec: McGill-Queens Press, 2005), 116.

finally becoming more dominant in the relationship, thus reinforcing the patriarchal myth of the destructive force of women after marriage.

Naseem was first introduced to her future husband through a perforated sheet that displayed sections of her ailing body part. Doctor Aziz then begins to fall in love with sections of Naseem Aziz. As noted before, fragments are a significant leitmotif at constant play in *Midnight's Children*. Similar to the cracks or fragments of history found in Saleem's historical narrative, Naseem's relationship with her husband too begins in fragments. In addition, the concept of fragmentation can be taken one step further when one observes the characterisation of Naseem as a fragment or a piece of a puzzle making up Mother India. Moreover, the term Reverend Mother suggests that of Mother India.[107] Thus, she represents an aspect of Bharat-Mata. Patrick Hogan parallels the beginning of Aadam Aziz and Naseem's relationship to that of India claiming that 'Aadam's partial and discontinuous views of Naseem mirrors anyone's partial and discontinuous views of a nation, for our experience of a nation is necessarily an experience of bits and pieces only; we do not sense the whole directly, but imagine it.'[108] In view of this, one finds Naseem as being a contributing factor to the concept of Mother India fitting. Henceforth, the qualities that make up Mother India are made up of Mary Pereira, Durga the washerwoman, Naseem Aziz and many more. Rushdie himself has commented in the past that '"my" India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which their ideologies of communalists are diametrically opposed.'[109] The construction of Naseem, Durga and Mary Pereira is arguably an extension of Rushdean philosophy of a plural non-communal India.

[107] Patrick Colm Hogan, '*Midnight's Children*: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity,' *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 529, EBSCO.
[108] *Ibid*.
[109] Goonetilleke, 45.

The impact of religion on national identity is incredibly strong in India. In fact, one of the first arguments arising out of the marriage between Naseem and Aadam Aziz is to do with religion. This parallels the public tension arising between Muslims and Hindus that led to the partition that created Pakistan. Brought up with traditional Islamic values in Kashmir, Naseem represents a 'particular form of identity politics that takes shape concurrently with the incursion of European culture and modernisation.'[110] Rejecting progressive ideas that pose a threat to her culture, Naseem reiterates the fear faced by fundamentalists like her of the inevitable approach of modernisation that is distinguishably Occidental. Whilst her husband, Aadam, is embracing modernity and forces Naseem to come out of purdah, it is with utter vehemence she clings to her Islamic/Kashmiri traditions and values. In the heat of the moment, Aadam, subsumed with a new Indian but nonetheless patriarchal identity, says to his wife, 'forget about being a good Kashmiri girl. Start thinking about being a modern Indian woman.'[111] As a country that is diverse in culture, sexuality, religion and language, Naseem's character contributes to a part of our understanding of Bharat-Mata.

The veil or purdah is an interesting issue in Rushdie's texts. The veil is a topic discussed (albeit briefly in some texts) in Rushdie's body of work. A symbol of Islamic identity, the purdah has a varied interpretation. In *Midnight's Children*, the text seems to highlight the oppression faced by women born into such culture. As pointed out earlier, Naseem is kept in purdah by her father. This patriarchal assertion of power stresses the control that a patriarchal figure has over a woman's body. However, postcolonial criticisms have placed the veil as a site of contestation between the coloniser's accusation of backwardness in the

[110] Hogan, 530.
[111] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 39.

local culture and the local peoples' attempt to reclaim the veil during the process of decolonisation.[112] Natarajan puts this debate into perspective when she argues that 'in both cases, the uncovering of women's bodies is related more to the politics of men's power relations than any interest in female subjectivity.'[113] History has shown us how women's bodies have always been a site of control and power and Naseem's case certainly illustrates this argument further. After marriage, the control and power over Naseem's body is transferred to that of her husband. Weickgennant has observed how 'Aadam Aziz attempts to remould Naseem into a modern wife, while at the same time wanting to manage the parameters of that transition in order to give himself a semblance of control over his own entrance into modernity and nationalism.'[114] The idea of Aadam controlling and manipulating the shaping of Naseem's national identity demonstrates how a woman's body and mind does not belong to her. Naseem's clinging to her religion as well as her Kashmiri traditions is an attempt to reclaim control over her own body and mind. As such, Nesiah observes that the 'veil emerges as a symbol of the rejection of colonial rule, the articulation, even, of an alternative modernity.'[115]

Kortenaar, on the other hand, is of the view that there is power in the kind of passivity we see in Naseem early in the marriage. He argues that Naseem, 'with the connivance of her father, controls the representation of her body, and her calculated partial and gradual self-exposure is as responsible as the doctor's narcissism for awakening his desire.'[116] Indeed, to some extent Naseem exerts control by choosing to reveal what seems to ail her. Ultimately however, it is Naseem's father who has inherent control over her daughter's body (ordering

[112] Vasuki Nesiah, '*The Ground Beneath Her Feet*: "Third World Feminisms', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4, no. 3, (May 2003): 32, EBSCO.
[113] Natarajan, 172.
[114] Weickgennant, 67.
[115] Nesiah, 32.
[116] Kortenaar, 117.

her to place her ailing section in the hole made in the sheet), mind (the teachings of an interpretation of Islam that reinforces patriarchal beliefs and attitudes) and future (arranging a husband for her which is a luxury not available to her). Furthermore, Kortenaar believes that the episode of the perforated sheet displays how 'the man's desire creates the woman but she creates his desire.'[117] This interpretation of woman's desire and the application of it to Naseem and Aziz's relationship would arguably uphold the patriarchal stereotype of woman being the succubus that ultimately destroys man, since Naseem quickly develops into the powerful Reverend Mother after marriage. When looking at Naseem's character in isolation from the other female characters, it becomes highly evident that Rushdie has replayed and reinforced patriarchal tropes, values and attitudes. However, if one is to analyse Naseem in relation to the other female characters as illustrated earlier in the chapter, her character draws attention to the patriarchal control that exists in the culture. Hence, one can observe that the ambiguity we see here displaces absolute claims in regard to Rushdie's alleged misogynistic and feminist representations of women.

The issue of religion continues to be a struggle between Aadam and Naseem/Reverend Mother. In a particular episode, Aadam dismisses the religious maulvi or tutor on the grounds that he was teaching the children how to hate other religions. Enraged by the tutor's teachings, Aadam argues vehemently that 'he tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman?'[118] Certainly one can argue that the text here draws our attention to the sort of parochialism that some religious cultures tend to promote. However, from Reverend Mother's point of view, Weickgennant argues that she is 'unwilling to appreciate the need

[117] Ibid.
[118] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 50-51.

for religious tolerance for the good of the secular nation and starves her husband almost to death…[thus] Naseem pits her tradition against Aadam's modernity.'[119] To a large extent, religion can impinge on an individual's national identity. This is evident in India where communalism politics has led to harmful consequences for its people. Hence, the struggle for power and control of the education of the next generation of Indian nationals is illustrated clearly in this particular episode. Like the children, the text questions whether India will choose the secular humanistic identity (preached by Rushdie) or will they succumb to conservative ideas of communalism where religion and language become the forefront of identity shaping. As a result of this argument with her husband, Reverend Mother refuses to fulfil her nurturing role of feeding the family by refusing food to her husband. This reversal of gender power highlights the decentring of feminist and sexist stereotypes in the character of Naseem/Reverend Mother. The dislocation of gender stereotypes in *Midnight's Children* draws on Rushdie's philosophy of bringing everything into question, be it the self, nation or women. Mary Pereira, Durga the washerwoman and Naseem/Reverend Mother demonstrate the text's need to confront and challenge institutionalised stereotypes found in our everyday lives. By calling into question the everyday norm, be it feminist or sexist, one begins to be aware of the complex ways that patriarchal and feminist ideologies operate within language.

Another way of observing how elements of feminism and patriarchy operate is through the use of stereotypes in the text. In a narrative that heavily evokes magic realism, *Midnight's Children* has surprisingly used stereotypes of monsters and witches to portray not only a patriarchal culture but has also used the very same stereotype to question patriarchal oppression of both men and women. Often one finds the nature of Rushdie's characterisation strange if not disturbing upon finishing his text. In using supernatural themes in the text,

[119] Weickgennant, 69.

Rushdie manages to experiment with traditional fairy tale concepts such as witches and magic to challenge and destabilise their meanings. Characters such as the Widow and Reverend Mother seem to reinforce the stereotypical image of the evil witch in fairy tales. As a result, these characters are often interpreted as Rushdie's failed attempt at a feminist reconfiguration of fairy tale stereotypes. Weickgennant notes that *Midnight's Children* tends to 'portray its female characters as endowed with a form of monstrosity which is in general directed against men and leaves them either dead or emasculated.'[120] Most critics would agree that the language used by Saleem in representing the women in the text could be seen as misogynistic.[121] Moreover, in borrowing elements of fairy tale language, Rushdie stirs ideas of mysticism and the fantastical in his interpretation of Indian history. It is also important to note the undeniable strength of some of the female characters in the face of misogynistic bullying that is often masked as cultural tradition or convention. When analysing female representations in *Midnight's Children* as a whole, one begins to see the complexity and ambivalence portrayed in the nature of the characters, the language used and the ideas posed in the text. Focusing on Rushdie's use of magic realism, this section highlights the ambiguity in the text as a form of postmodern experimentation of questioning and decentralising fixed meanings.

Rushdie has on occasion been accused by critics of being merely concerned for the 'aesthetic quality of the novel.'[122] This is arguably due to a lack of stability in his texts. Katherine Frank observes that Rushdie's 'penchant for hybridity, plurality, (and) multiplicity…suggests that such questions should remain unanswered and that he is not troubled by his contradictory statements regarding his intention or purpose in writing

[120] Weickgennant, 72.
[121] Cundy, 'Rushdie's Women'. Verma, 'Padma's Tragedy'.
[122] Katherine Frank, 'Mr Rushdie and Mrs Gandhi,' *Biography* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 255, EBSCO.

Midnight's Children.'[123] From Frank's perspective, it would seem frustrating for a reader to read a novel that leaves questions unanswered and contradictory statements made. Instead of celebrating the cosmopolitanism in Rushdie's writing, Frank is disheartened by the lack of certainties and the breadth of questions that destabilise rooted concepts. Nevertheless, postmodern writing demands a writer challenge and unseat fixed truths and even ideologies. For Rushdie, this would mean confronting beliefs, norms and values that affect the individual and society more broadly. Rama Lohani-Chase agrees that 'underlying Rushdie's deconstructive playfulness is a radical political spirit envisioning a humanism beyond the rigid constructions of a self/other duality, Hindu/Muslim identity, or Eastern/Western dichotomy.'[124] The point of raising binarisms in his texts is not to reinforce the hierarchy that exists within it but to decentre and disempower its rooted meaning. One can even take it a step further by arguing that it brings to light the hierarchy that still exists in in such binarisms in popular and academic discourses. Ron Shepherd understands postmodern writing as 'a literature which sets out to deliberately subvert any easy notion of objective reality, and is intent on holding reality up to constant and unremitting interrogation.'[125] This is exactly what Rushdie is attempting in *Midnight's Children*. In destabilising and decentralising established truths, Rushdie cultivates more debates and questions on issues related to women, history and politics.

One of the ways he does this is by using elements of magic and supernaturalism to uncover and decentre psychological issues found in the characters. The repetitive reference to openings of fairytales, 'once upon a time…', too suggests that the narrative is blurring the

[123] Ibid.
[124] Rama Lohani-Chase, 'Political (W)holes: Post-colonial Identity, Contingency of Meaning and History in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*,' *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross Disciplinary Inquiry* 4, no. 10 (Fall 2009): 32, EBSCO.
[125] Shepherd, 35.

lines between reality and fiction. Since *Midnight's Children* incorporates historical events together with fictional lives, the use of fairytale elements such as witches and magic as well as embracing the language and rhetoric of fairytales seem quite fitting for a novel such as this. In manipulating historical events with tabloid-style news on real figures, most of whom are politicians, the text imitates that of the non-fiction genre. Ashutosh Banerjee claims that the non-fiction novel is based on 'contemporary political events, the genre having originated in some American novelist's feeling that in the sixties real events in that country had acquired a quality of fantasy.'[126] India is a country known for its mysticism and beliefs in supernaturalism. In addition, events that occurred following independence seem to acquire a sort of dark carnivalesque theme especially in relation to the wars between East Pakistan and China as well as the Emergency period. Thus, it seems that Rushdie exploits this knowledge to the extent of mixing fact with fiction which in turn questions the truthfulness of truths. Littered with supernatural elements, the novel is filled with Hindu mysticisms and Eastern superstitions. There are characters infused with magical powers such as Parvati-the-Witch, the prostitute Tai Bibi, Picture Singh and not to mention Saleem himself. Magical moments, too, occur such as when the food cooked by Mary Pereira, Reverend Mother and Aunty Alia has the power to fill those who consume it with guilt, bitterness and other emotions stirred in by the cooks. The use of superstition, mysticism, magic, fairytale rhetoric and supernaturalism arguably highlight the dichotomy of good and evil, right and wrong, and black and white. The reinforcement of these concepts as well as interrogation through its characters illustrates the ambivalence in the text. This ambivalence is arguably a strategy to decentralise the entrenched meanings given to these established concepts.

[126] Ashutosh Banerjee, 'Narrative Technique in *Midnight's Children*', in *The Novels of Salman Rushdie*, eds. G.R Taneja and R.K Dhawan (New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1992), 28.

Widowhood in some parts of Indian cultures has quite a negative connotation attached to it. Although contemporary times has shiftedthe meaning of being a widow in India, there can be no doubt that the cultural taboo surrounding it still prevails amongst some communities. In the past, widows were often blamed for the death of their husbands. This is a long held cultural belief and some may even go so far as to call a widow a 'husband-eater'.[127] A widow's life is then 'understood as a punishment for failing to live up to the image of a good wife.'[128] Seen as a transgressor to the nationalist ideal of Indian womanhood, widows have until recently self-immolated in the ritual of sati as a way of mourning and expressing their grief for the death of their husband.[129] In parts of India some believe that it is the only way for the husbandless wives to grieve for their husbands. There are hostels established around India where widows go as a form of refuge. Many, however, are forced into prostitution where 'the heads of some ashrams use their power to force young widows into prostitution in order to earn themselves "extra" money.'[130] Goonetilleke notes how 'the widow is a figure of ill-omen in Indian culture' and since Rushdie uses the concept of the widow as a form of criticising Indira Gandhi, it is extended as a personal attack because she herself was a widow in real life.[131] Hinduism's understanding of widowhood is deeply entrenched in patriarchy and Rushdie was fully aware of this complexity. Moreover, Rushdie's portrayal of Gandhi is arguably a deep-seated criticism of what is seen as Gandhi's political movement against secularism in order to secure the dominant Hindu votes in the late 1970s. Seeing as Gandhi's father, Jawaharlal Nehru, who is one of the founding fathers of Independent India, strove to

[127] Sara Barrera and Eva Corbacho, 'The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows', blog, June 22, 2012, http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/the-ongoing-tragedy-of-indias-widows
[128] Weickgennant, 73.
[129] The practice of Sati is to self-immolate oneself at one's husband's funeral pyre. Laws passed during the British reign stopped the practice of sati and legislation has since prevailed after Independence.
[130] Barrera & Corbacho.
[131] Goonetilleke, 34.

build a nation based on principles of secularism and pluralism, Indira Gandhi was seen from Rushdie's perspective as being a threat to the future of a modern pluralist India.

The character of the Widow is hinted at for the most part in the beginning and slowly culminates in the climax towards the end of the novel where the link between the Widow and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is finally made. Weickgennant claims that 'both the derogatory connotations of widowhood and witchcraft are combined to create the phantasmagorical image of the witch-like Widow who haunts the novel but who is only disclosed at the very end as identical with Indira Gandhi.'[132] By putting her widow status in the spotlight, Rushdie manages to invoke the negative public prejudices against the word widow to be coupled with her actions and lack of actions during her government. It is important to note that the point of demonising Indira Gandhi is to criticise her actions during the Emergency period in 1975. However, when looking into the context of the word Widow and thus its application to Mrs Gandhi, one can easily deduce that Rushdie's treatment of the Prime Minister is demeaning and misogynistic. Catherine Cundy agrees 'that Indira's villainy is represented in such relentlessly misogynistic terms.'[133] When following this logic, it can be argued that if widows are labelled as destructive to their husbands, naturally one can safely assume that this label, attached to Mrs Gandhi, displays the destructive nature of her as wife and leader of a nation. On a side note, an earlier edition of *Midnight's Children* stated bluntly that Mrs Gandhi is the cause of her husband's death. However, following a libel suit at the Old Bailey it was agreed between the two parties that this one sentence would be taken out of the novel in future editions.[134] Rushdie at the time seemed puzzled by Mrs Gandhi's libel suit since he claimed that the sentence reflected what was 'much said in India

[132] Weickgennant, 76.
[133] Cundy, *Salman Rushdie*, 37.
[134] Frank, 250.

in those days, had often been in print, and was indeed reprinted prominently in the Indian press after she brought her action for defamation. Yet she sued nobody else.'[135] Nonetheless, this illustration of Mrs Gandhi in the text is also seen as an attempt to redress an earlier campaign slogan that parallels India to Indira aptly titled 'India is Indira and Indira is India.'[136] The effectiveness of this slogan is credited to the Bombay film *Mother India* released in 1957 and hence, Indira Gandhi was represented in her early campaigns as the Bharat-Mata herself. By implying the destructive nature of widowhood and Mrs Gandhi's subsequent actions during government, she cannot, from Saleem's perspective, be a true representation of Mother India.

As mentioned previously by Weickgennant, the character of the Widow is also marked with witchcraft elements in the text. Although she does not seem to possess clear magical powers, she is portrayed as witch-like with the colours attributed to her always in green, black and white. Moreover, her Emergency Declaration created a literal darkness that consumed Bombay. Even though the Widow's character is only given one episode, her presence hovers throughout the novel and is to a certain extent foreshadowing the darkness that will befall India following the Emergency period. The Widow's only appearance in the novel occurs in the episode when Saleem was ill with fever in the middle of the narrative:

> No colours except green and black the walls are green the sky is black (there is no roof) the stars are green the Widow is green but her hair is black as black. The Widow sits on a high high chair the chair is green the seat is black the Widow's hair has a centre-parting it is green on the left and on the right black…the Widow's arm is long as death its skin is green the fingernails are long and sharp and black…the Widow's arm comes snaking down the snake is green the children scream the fingernails are black they scratch the Widow's arm is hunting see the children run and scream the Widow's hand curls round them green and black.[137]

[135] Rushdie, 'Introduction', *Midnight's Children*, p.xv.
[136] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 587. Also mentioned by Katherine Frank, 256.
[137] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 288.

There is no doubt here that the fairytale language used and the images conjured by the passage above imply the witch-like character of the Widow. Here the stereotype of the evil witch with long black fingernails harming children is reinforced in the text. The passage continues with images such as 'the Widow laughs her tongue is green but her teeth are black' and 'little balls fly into night between the walls the children shriek as one by one the Widow's hand.'[138] Although the passage does not specify clearly the Widow devouring the children – as most evil witches in fairytales tend to attempt to do – it does imply that the Widow is terrorising the children by turning them into balls. The children here refer to the children born on the midnight of India's independence.

Rushdie terms this 'dream sequence nightmare of Indira Gandhi' as stream-of-consciousness.[139] In studying the workings of fairytale language, Jack Zipes has observed that fairytales 'serve to unite the people of a community and help bridge a gap in their understanding of social problems in a language and narrative mode familiar to the listeners' experiences.'[140] Indeed, there is a strong use of poetic language not to mention the fantastical nature of the content when describing the witch-like widow in colours green and black. The lack of punctuation allows the writing to flow and rhyme smoothly. Weickgennant observes that 'the tone is hypnotic and breathless and the atmosphere hallucinatory, as the scene is saturated with the colours of "green and black."'[141] Interestingly, the colours used by Rushdie relate back to the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*. In an essay written for the BBC film, Rushdie claims that he felt sympathetic towards the Wicked Witch citing that 'just as feminism has sought to rehabilitate the pejorative old words such as hag, crone,

[138] Ibid, 611.
[139] Salman Rushdie, 'Out of Kansas', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 17.
[140] Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 6.
[141] Weickgennant, 78.

witch, so the Wicked Witch of the West could be said to represent the more positive of the two images of powerful womanhood on offer here.'[142] Rushdie's own admission of the characterisation of the Wicked Witch of the West stands in contradiction to his portrayal of the Widow. On the one hand, Rushdie's portrayal of Indira Gandhi as the Widow/Witch is seen as misogynistic when placed in the Indian context. Yet, Rushdie himself admits that the character of Margaret Hamilton who plays the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* inspired his construction of the Widow.[143] One can therefore conclude that this intentionality signals what Weickgennant argues as the text's 'own self-consciously ambivalent use of the image of the witch (and widow).'[144]

Ultimately, Saleem does not meet the Widow but instead is faced with a woman who does the Widow's bidding labelled by Saleem as the Widow's Hand during the Emergency period. Described by Saleem as India's darkest period since Independence, the Emergency stripped away civil liberties whilst maintaining censorship. Many believed that electoral malpractice had occurred during the 1971 election when Mrs Gandhi's Congress party took power. This resulted in protests from both the Opposition in Parliament as well as the public. The catalyst of the Emergency, however, was when Mrs Gandhi's party was put on trial for said malpractice allegations and was found guilty. Instead of resigning she convinced the President of India to declare a State of Emergency, which gave her rule by decree. As well as controlling the movements of the people, Mrs Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi carried out the sterilisation program on poor people to stem fears of overpopulation. Indeed, this brutality of forced sterilisation on Indians is where *Midnight's Children* focuses the darkness of the Emergency period.

[142] Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute, 2012) 42-43.
[143] Rushdie, 'Out of Kansas', 17.
[144] Weickgennant, 80.

In an episode where Saleem is confronted by the Widow's Hand, she explains that, 'the people of India worship our lady like a god. Indians are only capable of worshipping one God.'[145] Here, we see the text linking the figure of Indira Gandhi to Bharat-Mata. However, this form of Bharat-Mata is seen as harmful to society, a transgressor who becomes destructive to the national identity it had initially inspired in conventional context. Furthermore, the text makes a strong point here warning us of the dangers of monotheistic establishments. If the Widow is God or as the Widow's Hand calls it, 'a manifestation of the OM', and Indians are only able to worship one god, India will then be at the mercy of a dictator.[146] It is a regular motif in Rushdie's texts to depict the danger of oneness, communalism and singularity. This is more so seen in *The Satanic Verses* than in *Midnight's Children*. However, the message remains the same. For Rushdie, diversity, multiplicity and hybridity are the way for the future, not through the dictatorial elements of singularity and oneness. It is communalism propagated by the Widow and now the Widow's Hand that has led to the removal – albeit temporarily – of civil liberties and basic human rights. Justifying the sterilisation program, the Widow's Hand is depicted in a similar fashion to the Widow herself, 'the pattern: green and black. Her glasses, green, her shoes were black as black.'[147] Since the Widow's Hand is coloured in the same fashion as her, the text here suggests that witchcraft and supernatural elements dictate the Widow's government. Certainly the text claims that the Widow is fearful of the 420 midnight's children that she has ordered to be sterilised immediately since their gifts are seen as a threat to her rule. Saleem, recognising the real intention of the Widow states that 'what I learned from the Widow's Hand is that

[145] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 611.
[146] Ibid, 521.
[147] Ibid, 611.

those who would be gods fear no one so much as other potential deities…[and that] is why we, the magical children of midnight, were hated feared destroyed by the Widow.'[148]

Traditionally, witches are often seen as evil. From Western fairytales to Eastern supernaturalism witches have been seen as unfavourable to society. In the case of *Midnight's Children*, the word 'witches' can have both negative and positive connotations attached to it. Admittedly, most of the female characters are attributed with some form of witchcraft element. Be it a mole that looks like a witch's nipple on Reverend Mother's face or 'Alia's culinary witchcraft', the women of *Midnight's Children* are often found afflicted in some way or another with witch-like look or demeanour.[149] Parvati-the-Witch, on the other hand, is constructed to be a strong and more importantly, good witch. Parvati's magic allows those who enter her basket to disappear. Due to being born close to midnight, Parvati, Shiva and Saleem are the three out of the 420 midnight's children with the most prominent and powerful gifts. Unlike other pseudo witches in *Midnight's Children*, Parvati-the-Witch is depicted as a real witch with magical powers and is 'able to make people disappear or do things against her will.'[150] It is interesting to note that it is Parvati who gives Saleem back his name in Bangladesh after losing his mind in the Sundarbans jungle fighting in the war between India and Bangladesh. This is in contrast to an earlier part of the novel when Ahmed Sinai gives his new bride Mumtaz a new name, Amina Sinai, and thus from his perspective a new identity. Cundy argues that the 'pliable and reconstructable nature of identity has particular significance [which] means that the individual's fate need not be once and forever determined.'[151] On the contrary, when one applies a Foucauldian lens, the power of naming

[148] Ibid, 612.
[149] Ibid, 462.
[150] Kortenaar, 116.
[151] Cundy, *Rushdie's Women,* 42.

relates to an individual's control over the object being named. In the case of Saleem's mother Amina Sinai, her name and her presence is now in the control of her husband. This practice is also followed by Saleem when he married Parvati whom he renamed Laylah. Saleem's beliefs are often easily mistaken for Rushdie's and this extends to the charge of misogyny laid against the narrator. However, episodes such as these are when the difference between Saleem the narrator and Rushdie the writer is accentuated. The moulding and remoulding of personal identities such as Amina, Saleem and Parvati-the-Witch reveals the deliberate and constant destabilisation of stereotypes.

As mentioned before, in contrast to the actions of Ahmed and Saleem Sinai, Parvati returns Saleem's identity to him by calling out his name. In addition, she helped smuggle Saleem out of Bangladesh by hiding him in her wicker basket. This episode raises concerns over the issue of the sort of refuge offered by women. Cundy observes that Parvati's basket enables Saleem to be 'preserved in a curious state of limbo…women and female sexuality are (thus) both the refuge and the abyss, and Saleem fears that Parvati's basket will send him into oblivion.'[152] Indeed, as discussed earlier there is a strong notion in the text that women such as Durga the washerwoman and Reverend Mother can become the site of dark abyss for their men. However, in Parvati's case it becomes the opposite. She is the saviour rather than the destroyer. Hence, the characterisation of women in *Midnight's Children* is polarised by the actions they take. Parvati's control over Saleem's fate may have made the narrator nervous but one can account for the anxiety due to Saleem's past experiences with women. Saleem sees himself as being the victim of women, 'women have made me; and also unmade,' which explains his misogynistic representation of women.[153] As a witch, Parvati is represented as

[152] Ibid, 41.
[153] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 565.

kind, forgiving but also slightly manipulative. Her desire to be with Saleem led her to manipulate events so that the end result would lead him to marry her since she is carrying Shiva's baby. Kortenaar states that 'Parvati's victim status is a role played to con Shiva into giving her a child and Saleem into fathering it.'[154] Parvati understands that the difference between Shiva and Saleem is that the protagonist will take responsibility whereas Shiva will avoid it. From Saleem's perspective, Parvati is regarded with sympathy for her manipulative act. Saleem is fully aware that he is to be blamed for it, as he tells Parvati bluntly that he cannot marry due to being impotent. This does not, however, discourage Parvati from having Saleem for her own. Saleem notes 'how Parvati took her destiny into her own hands; how a lie, issuing from my lips, brought her to the desperate condition.'[155] Manipulation is the only way for Parvati to regain control of her future with Saleem. The sympathetic tone emanating from Saleem's recount of Parvati's action illustrates Saleem's guilt due to his lie of impotence. Thus, one can deduce that Rushdie has deconstructed and decentred the representation of witches through reinforcing and challenging stereotypes.

An episode that marks one of the most humiliating revelations for Saleem occurs during one of his visits to the old prostitute Tai Bibi in Karachi. Like a witch, Tai Bibi possesses a gift for emanating any form of odour that pleases a client. Saleem describes her as a seductress who 'coaxed him in her voice [that sounded] like crumpled paper' to tell her of his favourite smells so that her 'eccrines and apocrines obeyed [his] instruction'.[156] So masterful is Tai Bibi of her gift that Saleem unexpectedly reveals a smell that belongs to his non-biological sister Jamila Singer. The incestuous desire felt by Saleem left him embarrassed and running

[154] Ibid, 118.
[155] Ibid, 568.
[156] Ibid, 443.

out the door while the prostitute shames him by calling him names such as 'sister-sleeper.'[157] It can be argued that Saleem feels guilty for having what appear to be immoral feelings towards his non-biological sister Jamila. Since the incestuous revelation, Saleem is terrified of becoming intimate with any woman for fear of seeing 'Jamila's face in the night.'[158] Even after marrying Parvati, Saleem is still unable to consummate the marriage recollecting how he 'spent our nuptial night with my eyes shut tight and my body averted from my wife's, lest the unbearable features of Jamila Singer come to haunt me in the bewilderment of the dark.'[159]

The supernatural element in the text is a literary device that strengthens Rushdie's narrative. Henceforth, the stereotypes of witches and monsters are reinforced and challenged to suit Rushdie's agenda. Indeed, Saleem's misogynistic perspective leaves many to transfer that blame to the writer as well. Weickgennant argues that 'feminism aims at finding a way out of patriarchal mechanisms and stresses the potential for change by laying bare the strategies that are used in order to keep patriarchal structures in place.'[160] For a novel that is written from one individual's perspective, *Midnight's Children* has certainly portrayed Saleem's weaknesses in his storytelling. The gender issue in *Midnight's Children* is not as simple as Neil Kortenaar claims it to be, 'women destroy, men are destroyed.'[161]

As a narrator, Saleem Sinai holds incredible power over the direction of the story. Cherokee author Thomas King believes in the power of stories, claiming them to be 'wondrous things…(but also) dangerous.'[162] Stories can be dangerous in various ways. Critical

[157] Ibid, 444.
[158] Ibid, 563.
[159] Ibid, 581.
[160] Weickgennant, p.75.
[161] Kortenaar, 109.
[162] Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (Toronto: Anansi, 2003), 9.

reception of fictional narratives such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Satanic Verses* proves that literature has the power to affect contemporary political attitudes and situations.[163] In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's role as narrator goes further than relaying a historical account. Anuradha Needham points out that national narratives are often about 'political power whereby an author claims the authority to speak on behalf of the entire nation and its diverse inhabitants.'[164] We see this in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* especially as the author attempts to capture India in its entirety. Although Saleem insists on the narrative as being one perspective of Indian history out of the many when he claims that, 'there are as many versions of India as Indians,' it has not stopped some critics from criticising the role *Midnight's Children* has played in shaping Indian history in the eyes of Indian as well as non-Indian readers.[165] Some critics have even gone so far as to point out Rushdie's mistakes in applying Hindu mythology.[166] The argument highlights that if Rushdie is unable to correctly utilise Hindu mythology, then he does not have the authority to interpret Indian history. Suffice to say that Rushdie disagrees and has until now continued to make comments on *Midnight's Children* along with the political and historical conditions of his birth country in his fiction and non-fiction works.[167] Rushdie's propagation of multiplicity and hybridity in Indian history is constructed through the protagonist and his co-narrator, Padma. It is interesting to note the power struggle that exists between Saleem the narrator and Padma, who arguably acts as a co-narrator as well as representing the reader. Saleem may hold

[163] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or Life Among the Lowly* (New York: Penguin Books, 1852).
[164] Anuradha Needham Dingwaney, 'Multiple Forms of (National) Belonging: Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 39, no. 1 (Spring1993): 95, EBSCO.
[165] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 373.
[166] Rushdie has noted in *Imaginary Homelands* that he has received criticisms from Indian critics about *Midnight's Children* as being an inaccurate portrayal of Indian history. Salman Rushdie, "'Errata': Or, Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's Children*", in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 23.
[167] For example we see him criticizing the Nehru-Gandhi family in Salman Rushdie, 'Dyansty', in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 47-52. Another example can be seen in Salman Rushdie, 'India's Fiftieth Anniversary,' in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 159-164.

authority over the narrative. However, as we will see, Padma keeps the narrative grounded and focused thus laying bare the narratorial strategy as well as establishing the ambiguities that exist in the text.

This thesis brings to light how gender operates in language and the hierarchical implications that frame our understanding of 'world and consciousness.'[168] Rushdie's attempt at constructing strong female characters has at best resulted in ambiguous representations. In *Midnight's Children*, the complexity drawn by the author to portray the strength of female characters in the representation of Bharat-Mata and Witches is limited by the ambiguities he invoked. Indeed, Arimbi and Kwary have observed that 'any linguistic unit about women is discursively produced not only by its linguistic meaning but also social and cultural meaning.'[169] Saleem Sinai's narratorial function is not only to relay his story but also to somehow link it to Indian history. In the process of this, it would seem that Saleem has unveiled a deep-seated fear and mistrust of women. This mistrust of women is well and truly confirmed towards the end of the novel when Saleem claims that 'women have made me; and also unmade.'[170] One can easily mistake Saleem's misogynistic interpretation of his world to be an extension of Rushdie's own personal views on women. After all, *Midnight's Children* is to some degree a semi-autobiographical piece of fiction. This may be true but for the construction of Padma. While Saleem is the storyteller, Padma can be viewed as the anti-storyteller. Saleem's concern for history, literature and aesthetic value in his storytelling is matched by Padma's critical, pragmatic earthiness and her unwavering need for 'what-happened-nextism'.[171] It can be argued that the construction of Padma offsets the

[168] Spivak, 103.
[169] Arimbi and Kwary, 169.
[170] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 565.
[171] Ibid, p.45.

misogynistic charge on Rushdie simply by creating a character that counteracts and challenges the main protagonist. Ivancu has argued that 'in Rushdie's novels women are the central engines which start and keep the world moving, and through whose role the identity of a male character is saved, such as in the case of Saleem and Padma.'[172] It is important to note that the gender issues in *Midnight's Children* are not as clear as Rushdie taking a stance by reinforcing and/or confronting sexism. These issues do, however, portray the ambivalence of language and discourse and thus, we begin to see that the representation of Saleem and Padma's relationship highlights the complexity of discourse and how it directly affects norms, values and traditions.

Saleem's narratorial strategy begins by reading the first draft of his narrative to Padma whose role is to criticise, comment or react to it. Saleem then revises the first draft by including what one can only assume to be some of Padma's reactions. It is important to understand that what we as readers receive is a second revised draft of the narrative. Thus, although Saleem as narrator does have control of and the final say on his story, the inclusion of Padma's voice brings out the ambivalent tone running through it. In order to understand how the ambiguities are developed in the text, one must first examine the characterisation of Saleem and Padma separately. The differences between Saleem and Padma are quite significant. Whilst Saleem cares for the aesthetic quality of his narrative, Padma is concerned with the plot of the narrative. As described by Rama Lohani-Chase, while Padma is the reliable listener, Saleem is the unreliable narrator.[173] Saleem's search for meaning and connections between his story and Indian history is by the end of it seen by Padma as futile

[172] Emilia Ivancu, 'Journeys onto the Female Body in Postcolonial Literature: Mapping and Identity with Salman Rushdie and VS Naipaul', in *Studies of the Female Body*, ed. Paul Nanu & Oana Ursache (Finland: University of Turku, 2016), 83.
[173] Lohani-Chase, 36.

if not nonsensical, especially when it comes to his understanding of the women in his lives. Furthermore, Rushdie's construction of Padma as the audience of Saleem's narrative creates a space for ambiguity in his version of Indian history. Ambiguity plays a key role in the text. Language becomes a force of contention when it comes to character and narrative resolution.

Saleem's narrative is designed in a way that is seen as fragmented. This is of course an intentional construction by Rushdie since Saleem is using his memory to trace his autobiography. Rushdie himself has argued in relation to the character of Saleem that 'his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary.'[174] Acknowledging that his narrator is less than perfect, we see that space is made to question Saleem's narrative. Saleem's memory seems, at times, to be dictated by the emotions he felt in the past which is further amplified while constructing his tale. As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, an author's approach to remaking the past is to some degree a strategy to claim what Lacan calls *objet petit a*. When taking a Lacanian perspective to *Midnight's Children*, one can argue that Saleem's memory of the past is controlled by the desire to return to the early and secure childhood state (imaginary order) rather than getting factual events right (symbolic order). In one episode, Saleem remarks that 'the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date…in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time.'[175] This is just one example where Saleem questions the concept of reality and facts claiming that 'the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems.'[176] For Saleem, it is important to establish that Mahatma Gandhi died while he was at the premiere

[174] Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', p.10.
[175] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 229-230.
[176] Ibid, 229.

of his uncle's movie *The Lovers of Kashmir*.[177] It did not matter that neither the date nor possibly the movie he watched is wrong, what is clearly established is the connection between the movie and the assassination in his memory. Hence, one can argue that there is a certain amount of mistrust on the part of the readers for Saleem's tale. Here, one can see that Rushdie makes a point of not trusting memory especially when the author himself has claimed in the past that 'Saleem Sinai is an unreliable narrator.'[178] The lack of certainty and constant ambiguity found in the text reiterates Rushdie's penchant for the ongoing questioning of truths.

Regardless of his faults, Saleem's agenda for his narrative has, until the very end of the novel, been concerned with India as a nation. His bourgeoise interest for the country is first discussed at the inaugural Midnight's Children's Conference when he asks the children what kind of meaning does their existence command and ultimately, 'what are we for.'[179] This obsession with meaning and purpose is carried throughout the text even after being scorned by the children of midnight. Saleem's nemesis, Shiva, is the first to highlight the meaninglessness in purpose when he argues, 'what thing in the whole sister-sleeping world got *reason*, yara? For what reason you're rich and I'm poor? Where's the reason in starving, man?'[180] Shiva raises important questions that Saleem's privileged background fails to sufficiently comprehend. Heffernan argues that 'Saleem tries, without much success, to negotiate the tensions that arise from Shiva's comments – public versus private, community versus the individual, centrality versus marginality, representation versus obscurity – tensions that plague the modern nation.'[181] Whereas Shiva's concern is survival, Saleem's

[177] Ibid, 194-197.
[178] Rushdie, 'Errata', 22.
[179] *Midnight's Children*, 316.
[180] Ibid, 306.
[181] Teresa Heffernan, 'Apocalyptic Narratives: The Nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', *Twentieth Century Lietrature* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 474, EBSCO.

middle class privilege position allows him to contemplate notions of common good. For there to be meaning in his life, Saleem insists on seeing India's post-independence history mapped in the same direction as his journey. This control over his and India's narrative arises out of a lifelong anxiety that he voices in the text; 'above all things, I fear absurdity.'[182]

Saleem's determined view of paralleling his life's journey with India's post-independence history demands that he shapes and views particular groups of people in his life a certain way. This is particularly the case for the women in his life.The characterisation of Saleem has often been criticised by many as being anti-women. For example, Charu Verma's article entitled 'Padma's Tragedy: A Feminist Deconstruction of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', notes the 'disturbing sexist biases' in Saleem's treatment of Padma.[183] In addition, this charge of misogyny can at times extend to Rushdie himself. On the other hand, Nicole Weickgenannt sees Saleem's misogynistic approach towards women as a 'conscious and multi-layered strategy' in her article 'The Nation's Monstrous Women: Wives, Widows and Witches in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.'[184] Certainly, on the surface one can see the similarities between Saleem and Rushdie's context. In fact, Rushdie himself has admitted to including his own childhood experiences in his novel.[185] The characterisation of Padma as 'co-creator of his (Saleem's) narrative' suggests that there is capacity for questioning and challenging the grand narrative.[186] What saves Rushdie from being guilty of reinforcing patriarchal values is the ability to present to readers the fallibility and thus unreliability of

[182] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 4.
[183] Verma, 154.
[184] Nicole Weickgenannt, 'The Nation's Monstrous Women: Wives, Widows and Witches in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 43, no. 65 (2008): 65, doi 10.1177/0021989408091232.
[185] Rushdie, 'Introduction', *Midnight's Children*, xii-xiii.
[186] Nancy E. Batty, 'The Art of Suspense: Rushdie's 1001 (Mid-)Nights', *ARIEL* 18, no. 3 (1987): 54, EBSCO.

his protagonist/narrator thus, echoing Derridean notions of instability in language and discourse.

The language used by Saleem is often seen to be invoking patriarchal attitudes. This we see especially in the way he portrays the women in the text. Saleem's misogynistic attitude towards characters such as Reverend Mother and Durga the washerwoman has been discussed. Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey, inspired by Rushdie's own young sister Sameen Rushdie, is another such example. Before turning into Jamila Singer, the 'Pakistan's Angel' or 'nightingale-of-the-faith', the Brass Monkey is known in the family as the less important child because of her gender and the very fact that she is the second born of the Sinai family with Saleem taking the prestigious first born son status.[187] Heffernan argues that 'outraged by gender inequity'[188] made her rebellious, thus understanding that being in her brother's shadow would mean that 'if she was going to get any attention in her life, she would have to make plenty of noise,' be it broken windows, vases or dinner-plates 'broken accidentally-on-purpose'.[189] The Brass Monkey is portrayed as mischievous but also talented. Her love for burning shoes is matched with her love for talking to animals and in particular, to birds. Saleem's description of the Brass Monkey is one of awe and respect, 'I decided to treat her as an ally, not a competitor.'[190]

However, that quickly changed when she transformed into Jamila Singer, Pakistan's 'Voice of the Nation.'[191] Jamila fell into the role of the stereotypical and 'ideal' Pakistani woman who is 'submissive and pure.'[192] Her voice managed to rally troops and inspired patriotism

[187] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 435.
[188] Heffernan, 483.
[189] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 205 & 208.
[190] Ibid, 209.
[191] Ibid, 435.
[192] Heffernan, 483.

in addition to justifying jihad. Nalini Natarajan notes that 'the status of woman as a sign constantly subordinated to male-dictated contexts is demonstrated in the transformation of Saleem's once uninhibited sister Brass Monkey into Jamila Singer when the family moves to Pakistan.'[193] Mixed with religious vigour, Jamila Singer's life becomes what Saleem's life lacks: meaning and purpose. Throughout Saleem's childhood, a painting of a pointing finger, a letter from India's first Prime Minister and his father's continuous promise that great things are in store for him – 'great deeds, a great life!' – suggests that his life will be of meaning and purpose.[194] Yet, this proves not to be the case when Jamila Singer becomes the star of the family and the country. It also provokes the narrator to question his own incestuous feelings towards his sister, 'Did Saleem, who had yearned after a place in the centre of history, become besotted with what he saw in his sister of his own hopes for life? ...did I adore in my sister the fulfilment of my most private dreams?'[195] Jamila of course, quickly shatters his infatuation and thus Saleem remarks that 'in time the effects of the spell faded altogether, and she took a dreadful revenge.'[196] Even so, this 'dreadful revenge' is arguably a manifestation of Saleem's guilt since it refers to how Jamila Singer's face appears every time he becomes intimate with another woman such as Parvati and perhaps even Padma, though the latter is not documented in the text. Even though in actual fact his love for Jamila is not incest, something inside of Saleem argues that it is immoral and thus when he tried to kiss Parvati he sees her face metamorphosing, 'becoming the face of a forbidden love; the ghostly features of Jamila Singer replaced those of the witch-girl; Jamila who was safely hidden in a Karachi nunnery was suddenly also here, except that she had undergone a dark transformation. She had begun to rot, the dreadful pustules and cankers of forbidden

[193] Natarajan,178.
[194] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 210.
[195] Ibid, 439.
[196] Ibid, 452.

love were spreading across her face…the rancid flowers of incest blossomed on my sister's phantasmal features, and I couldn't do it, couldn't kiss touch look upon that intolerable spectral face.'[197] For Saleem this is the ultimate revenge that Jamila has taken against him. The guilt of being sexually attracted to his sister manifests into the faces of women he tries to be intimate with thus condemning him to a life of celibacy. As readers, however, we can see it as being nothing more than Saleem's own guilty conscience exhibiting before his very eyes. Instead of acknowledging the moral illicitness of his feelings, he attaches blame to his sister when he labels it to be her 'dreadful revenge.'[198] One can argue that Saleem's use of the word 'revenge' suggests a misogynistic impulse considering Jamila's story itself is rendered invisible in the text. When one collates the evidence seen earlier in the chapter as well as what we have seen now in the treatment of Jamila Singer, it can be concluded that Saleem's agenda also includes demonising women and embedding them within patriarchal tropes.

Nevertheless, one must highlight the fact that the characterisation of Saleem is designed to be weak and ultimately flawed. He does not have the last say because of the construction of Padma. Her role is vital to the production of *Midnight's Children*. Saleem himself argues that without her, his 'certainties are falling apart.'[199] Padma's role as listener and commentator helps Saleem's narrative to be grounded and focused. In using the character of Padma, Rushdie attempts to invoke in readers a sense of power struggles in the narration. On the one hand we have Saleem telling and controlling his story and on the other, we have Padma reacting and questioning his story. Rushdie claims that 'reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and

[197] Ibid, 553.
[198] Ibid, 452.
[199] Ibid, 229.

knowledge.'[200] Rushdie's interrogation of reality and what we believe to be the norm and standard is often destabilised by representations in his novels. Saleem's role may be to present and reinforce patriarchal stereotypes, values and attitudes. Padma's role, however, encourages questioning and challenging of the same stereotypes, values and attitudes. Indeed, Cundy too observes that 'Padma serves to embody a critical scepticism about the narrative and to suggest a relationship of contestation between the text's form and content.'[201] Hence, *Midnight's Children* highlights the ambiguities of modern life by destabilising and decentring absolute ideas based on 'prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance.'[202]

Padma is not simply an illiterate low-class vat stirrer. Verma's feminist deconstruction of Padma arguably discredits the significance of Padma's role in Saleem's narrative.[203] Verma claims that Rushdie's strategy in the construction of Padma lies in her 'absences and those of presences. In Padma's case, most presences are openly derogatory, while the inferable positives in her being are simply absenced'.[204] For Verma, the representation of Padma is openly derogatory in the way that she is described by the narrator in the exposition as being 'plump…a bitch-in-the-manger…thick of waist, somewhat hairy of forearm.'[205] Verma continues by questioning not just the narrator but also the author himself, 'Saleem, like Rushdie behind him, claims that he knows India, her people, politics, sociology. How is it that he should be content with describing Padma as an illiterate without also pointing to the socio-economic conditions which keep women uneducated here?'[206] Firstly, it is important

[200] Rushdie, 'Errata', 25.
[201] Cundy, *Salman Rushdie*, 32.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Verma, 154-162.
[204] Ibid, 156.
[205] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 24.
[206] Verma, 157.

to distinguish that Saleem is not an extension of Rushdie's personal feelings and opninions. Secondly, Rushdie's portrayal of characters such as Padma and Durga the washerwoman reveals India's socio-economic and political realities especially for women. Verma seems to have missed the point of Padma working as a literary device strategically aimed to challenge, confront and eventually break down preconceived ideas and attitudes, especially those sustained by Saleem. Indeed, Verma argues that 'writing is Saleem's territory, and she [Padma] is alien here.'[207] Being illiterate and perhaps even uneducated, writing may be seen as alienating to Padma but she is arguably an expert in storytelling through oral narratives. This form of storytelling holds a significant cultural value in many countries including India and Padma is no stranger to oral narratives. Indeed, Abdulrazak Gurnah concurs that Padma 'is familiar with the sensationalist realist form of mythic narrative and interrupts to speed the story in directions she anticipates and prefers.'[208] Uma Parameswaran, on the other hand, attaches a higher value to Padma's role, observing that 'she provides the immediate atmosphere as well, with her interjections, her comments on the narrative… all of which add up to giving that realistic and tangible foil necessary to keep the narrative to the ground… she is the common people who, with their basic respect for learning (even though they might poke fun at "writery"), sustain the artist.'[209] Padma and Saleem's relationship lays bare the theoretical frame of Iser's Reader-Response concept in which the 'prevailing systems of norms and meanings in social "reality" are shared by both text [by that we mean the narrator Saleem] and reader [Padma].'[210] Padma's existence within Saleem's narrative calls attention to the ambiguities of meanings found in the text, which consequently dispels absolutist notions.

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[207] Ibid.

[208] Abdulrazak Gurnah, 'Themes and Structures in *Midnight's Children*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97.

[209] Uma Parameswaran, 'Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art', *ARIEL* 14, no. 4 (1983): 44-45, EBSCO.

[210] Wolfgang Iser, 'Texts and Readers', *Discourse Processes* 3, no. 4 (1980): 328.

Padma's function in the text is also a direct representation of Roland Barthes' popular idea disseminated in 'Death of the Author'. Barthes explains that a text can be 'drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader (or audience).'[211] Without an audience, a narrative is lifeless. When applying Barthes' reader-response approach to Padma's character, one will begin to understand the crucial relationship between Padma and Saleem and what it takes to create meaning in the text. Padma's presence in Saleem's narratorial process keeps his narrative meaningful ('Padma would believe it; Padma would know what I mean!)[212] and grounded ('once again Padma sits at my feet, urging me on. I am balanced once more').[213] Gurnah, too, agrees that Padma's grounding '"nobility" lies in her uncomplicated directness, which is figured as lending integrity to the text. Her tenderness, despite appearances, affirms this unselfconscious truthfulness.'[214] This bluntness can be seen when Saleem includes her reaction to the story of his mother's marriage with the poet Nadir Khan. Padma remarks, 'poor girl…Kashmiri girls are normally fair like the mountain snow, but she turned out black. Well, well, her skin would have stopped her making a good match, probably; and that Nadir's no fool.'[215] The candidness of Padma's statement is contrasted significantly with Saleem's determination for literary quality in his narrative.

Certainly, Padma exists at the periphery of the novel. Yet, her voice is strong and powerful enough for Saleem to include and depend on it for the sake of continuing his narrative. Heffernan, however, is of the view that 'Padma's exclusion is not an oversight. Padma's role

[211] Barthes, p.1469.
[212] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 218.
[213] Ibid, 269.
[214] Gurnah, 93.
[215] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 71.

as the outsider is the constant reminder of the impossibility of women's inclusion in either of Saleem's tales of the nation.'[216] Although it can be argued that the female characters in *Midnight's Children* stand at the periphery of the novel, their importance is far greater than that which critics such as Heffernan and Verma have associated them with. In one particular episode Padma leaves Saleem for a few days after being wounded by his assertion that 'I have come its master – and Padma is the one who is now under its spell…paralysed – yes! – by love.'[217] Frustrated at not having the opportunity to be intimate with Saleem, 'by the futility of her midnight attempts at resuscitating my "other pencil,"' Padma tries to hurt Saleem back by emasculating him, asking rhetorically, 'what use are you, little princeling…as a *lover*?'[218] Although Saleem initially dismisses Padma's absence following her rebuke by continuing with his work, he begins to miss her and notices the 'cracks widening down the length of my body.'[219] Saleem's cracks are made known again later on when Padma continues her disappearance act and Saleem is confused, 'in her absence, my certainties are falling apart.'[220] Batty argues that one can judge the 'worth of Saleem's narrative on the basis of Padma's response, and this is further reinforced by Saleem's explicit dependence on Padma as a conduit for his narrative.'[221] Furthermore, the inclusion of Padma's reactions and responses to the text reinforce the importance of her role to the narrative. Padma's importance to not only Saleem's narrative but also his mental well being suggests that her powerful peripheral position is underestimated especially by critics such as Verma.

[216] Heffernan, 485.
[217] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 165-166.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid, 206.
[220] Ibid, 229.
[221] Batty, 53.

At times, Saleem seems to view Padma in a condescending fashion, portraying her by mocking and exaggerating her movements to mimic that of Bollywood actresses. In one episode Padma is seen 'jutting a careless hip in my (Saleem's) general direction' after being dissatisfied with Saleem's lack of speed in his narrative.[222] In another episode, she attempts to persuade him, gently first and then slightly more aggressively, to eat and not care so much for 'all this writing-shiting'.[223] Despite the fact that Saleem attempts – patronisingly – to educate her on the subtleties of literary value and that he sometimes wishes 'for a more discerning audience, someone who would understand the need for rhythm, pacing,' the truth of the matter is that Padma is, in Saleem's mind, irreplaceable.[224] At her best, Padma complements Saleem's narrative by reminding him, especially at times when he needs it, that reality is easily seen without the many layers of meaning that Saleem favours. For instance, towards the end of the novel Saleem at one point indulges in a tirade against all the women who have affected his life, from Reverend Mother to Evie Burns to Tai Bibi. They have, he claims, contributed to who he is as a cracked and broken individual. Saleem claims that he has been 'at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex…for sixty-three years, before and after midnight, women have done their best; and also, I'm bound to say, their worst.'[225] It is Padma who, according to Saleem, 'brings me down to earth' and says 'they are just women, that's all.'[226] Weickgenannt observes that 'it is significant that Padma counteracts Saleem's homogenisation of women as an abstract principle, which merges them into a fearsome and not quite human entity.'[227] Saleem's yearning for meaning strings together certain perceptions about the women in his life but the ever pragmatic Padma unveils it at the very end with her simple remark that 'they are just

[222] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 44.
[223] Ibid, 24.
[224] Ibid, 135.
[225] Ibid, 565.
[226] Ibid, 568.
[227] Weickgenannt, 75.

women.'[228] The characterisation of Padma has been a site of contention between critics in Rushdean scholarship with strong opposing views. What does matter ultimately is the significance of the character of Padma in relation to our understanding of *Midnight's Children.*

Midnight's Children's complex style of storytelling creates ambivalence and ambiguity in terms of the language used in the text, the representation of characters and even the plot of the narrative. Complexity is the nature of the world and the way we interpret our world is paralleled to that of Saleem and Padma's comprehension of their world. Rushdie's novels are not meant to give you a singular truth. His agenda is to tell stories with multiple truths including the many faces or representations of Mother India, the many representations of good and evil through magic realism and the unreliability of historical narratives. *Midnight's Children* demonstrates language's 'boundaries of domination' as female characters continually revert back to sexist stereotypes.[229] For those like Parvati-the-Witch who do not fit into this pattern, they are constructed ambiguously, at times reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes and at other times subverting it. This pattern of ambiguity is also observed in Rushdie's third – and proclaimed to be feminist – text, *Shame*, which is examined in the following chapter. Interestingly, the text's effort to highlight the injustices faced by women is dismally impacted by the language used to construct the female characters. Societal norms and values are affected by language and discourse and vice versa. As examined in the next chapter, this pattern of ambiguity addresses how patriarchal language and discourse function through the characterisation of the women in the two texts, regardless of the intention of the text to destabilise and dispel patriarchal stereotypes, values and attitudes.

[228] Ibid, 568.
[229] hooks, *Talking Back*, 58.

Chapter 2: Narrating and Fictionalising History

The politics of Salman Rushdie is highly evident in his novels. Often leaning towards the progressive left, Rushdie's novels aim to challenge the Establishment. Varshney has argued that Rushdie 'seems to be singularly incapable of telling a story without political sharpness, without political courage, sometimes at great personal risk.'[230] Perhaps this is the reason why critics such as Ahmad and Grewal are puzzled by his representation of women particularly in *Shame*. Published in 1983, the novel is Rushdie's interpretation of the recent history of Pakistan. This interpretation is concerned with the treatment of women in post-independent Pakistan. August 1947 marked the split of India and Pakistan. Bitterly opposed by Mahatma Gandhi, many felt that the split would reduce the pressure of religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims.[231] As a result, many Muslims living within Indian borders migrated to Pakistan in order to escape the Hindu dominated India. Rushdie's family, too, migrated to Pakistan while he was still in England finishing his university degree. Thus, the concept of Pakistan as a nation has always fascinated the author. On the one hand there is secular India and right next door is theocratic Pakistan.

This chapter examines the use and abuse of the fairytale *Beauty and the Beast* as it is adapted in order to tell the story of Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil. Rushdie's experimentation and modernisation of the fairytale genre is further extended when hybridised with Islamic beliefs and norms. Islamic culture puts a great deal of emphasis on the importance of *awrah* or modesty in the appearance of women. Consequently, the concept of shame is instilled at a very young age to ensure that the child will grow up protecting her

[230] Ashutosh Varshney, 'The Political Rushdie: An Interview,' in *Midnight's Diaspora: Critical Encounters with Salman Rushdie*, ed. Daniel Herwitz and Ashutosh Varshney (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 10.
[231] Samir Dayal, 'The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie's *Shame*', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 31, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 39.

awrah. In Rushdie's *Shame*, this concept of *awrah* is dramatised fantastically in the character of Sufiya Zinobia to the extent that he metamorphoses Sufiya into a male-killing beast. This is a result of all the pent up shameless wrongdoings by others that build up in her and towards the end burst with beastly violence. Although some critics have considered *Shame* as Rushdie's failed attempt at writing a novel that highlights the oppression of women in Pakistan, one cannot help but notice that the text can at times be ambiguous in its representation of female characters.[232] Inderpal Grewal has argued that 'there is a disjunction between the mode of inclusion in which the narrative is written and the authoritative stance of the writer suggested in the novel.'[233] The tension between 'the authoritative stance of the writer' and subject matter of gender oppression is seen throughout the text and hence creates problematic stereotypes that reinforce as well as challenge patriarchal ideologies.[234] The characterisation of Sufiya Zinobia involves a mentally deficient protagonist who transforms physically and becomes, as M.D Fletcher argues, 'the destructive power of the violence resulting from an overdose of shame.'[235] To a large extent, Sufiya's body has rebelled against the oppressive nature of a society that attributes shame with such importance. This rebellion is further challenged in the form of her holy matrimony with the representation of shamelessness taken in the characterisation of the novel's male protagonist Omar Khayyam Shakil.

Shame acts as a political statement. Narrating and fictionalising history is a pattern in Rushdie's works as seen in the analysis of *Midnight's Children* in the previous chapter.

[232] Aijaz Ahmad, 'Rushdie's *Shame*: Postmodernism, Migrancy and Representation of Women,' *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 24 (June 15 1991): 1461-1471, EBSCO.
[233] Inderpal Grewal, 'Salman Rushdie: Marginality, Women, and *Shame*,' in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 124-125.
[234] Ibid.
[235] M.D. Fletcher, '*Shame* as an Apologue', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 107.

Shame is Rushdie's attempt at revealing the oppression that has been hidden in Pakistani history. Through the fictionalisation of history, Rushdie examines historical incidents at a micro socio-cultural level. Grewal claims that the text itself suggests that 'the fictional process of historiography… is itself an interpretation.'[236] *Shame* focuses on Pakistan from its conception as a national identity. As a young nation that is still striving to find its national identity, Pakistan comes from an oppressive postcolonial history and has consequently shed blood in order to stay on top and away from its oppressors. It is a country that has combined culture and religion into a unifying political force, consequently producing one dictator after another. Justyna Deszcz argues that 'the development of Pakistan has been thwarted by the repressive rule of dictators and that the country remains in the darkness of feudalism, theocracy and misogyny.'[237] Using a bloody political backdrop, Rushdie employs the characterisation of female characters to challenge the stereotypical narration of history. In bringing those from the margins into the centre, Rushdie utilises characters such as Rani Harappa and Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa to create an inclusive narrative. The recovering of political history makes it important to analyse Rushdie's experimentation with genre. When reading *Shame*, one can become slightly confused as to which genre Rushdie is using. Is it historical fiction? Or is it a documentary? Could it also be a fantasy fiction? The exploitation of many genres makes it wonderfully impossible to categorise *Shame*.

One of the main genre confusions stems from the construction of the narrator. Although the narrator makes a point of claiming that Omar Khayyam Shakil is the hero albeit 'a peripheral man' of the narrative and subsequently making him the protagonist, it can be argued that the narrator himself is the real protagonist of *Shame*. Structuring the narrative in didactic form,

[236] Grewal, 123.
[237] Justyna Deszcz, 'Salman Rushdie's Attempt at a Feminist Fairytale Reconfiguration in *Shame,' Folklore* 115, no. 1 (Apr 2004): 31, EBSCO.

the narrator includes contextual information of himself in the text that creates a personal relationship between him and the reader. He describes himself as a migrant and often mentions exilic authors such as James Joyce and Milan Kundera in order to raise similar comparisons. Nasser Hussain argues that 'the exilic and postcolonial marks Rushdie's authorial position…Rushdie is interested in reconceptualising the space of exile, in animating that space, making it one of enablement.'[238] It seems ironic that even though the text aims to reinterpret events in Pakistani history, it creates a daunting authoritative narrative voice in his interpretation of events. Additionally, the narrative voice comes across strongly as Rushdie's own voice. The background detail of the narrator is one that is suspiciously similar to the author himself. Aijaz Ahmad has observed that 'the narrative within the book itself is controlled transparently by the repeated, direct, personal interventions on the part of the narrator – who is…Rushdie himself.'[239] This seems to be yet another experimentation by Rushdie resulting in the blurrings of non-fiction and fiction. It becomes even more problematic when we turn to the issue of the narrator/Rushdie's representation of women in the text. Ultimately, the mixing and fusing of reality and fiction leads to the questioning of what is "truth" and which historical account is real.

Literature has for centuries been a site for experimentation and indoctrination. As well as finding new ways to explore and unravel truths, it has also managed to influence and affect the public's perception. This is one of the strengths of literature.[240] Michael Hanne has observed that 'in some extraordinary instances, works of literary fiction have had a

[238] Nasser Hussain, 'Hyphenated Identity: Nationalistic Discourse, History, and the Anxiety of Crititicism in Salman Rushdie's *Shame,' Qui Parle* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 8.
[239] Ahmad, 1463.
[240] Literature with a capital 'L' has in the past been used to describe traditional Canonical Literature such as works by Shakespeare and Elliot whereas literature with a lower case 'l' is used now inclusively to include world literature by writers such as Rushdie and Esquivel.

measurable effect in shaping political attitudes and events.'[241] This we certainly see in the reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to a certain extent, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Words are used as weapons in a non-violent attempt to affect change. On the other hand, words or language can at times be used to oppress, be it intentionally or not. hooks identifies language as 'a place of struggle.'[242] The language of patriarchy is known to be oppressive to both men and women and yet we still find this ideology directly affecting our everyday discourse and consequently reflected in literature. Arimbi and Kwary note that 'language portrays and represents women and… such portrayals and representations still convey gender inequality. Since patriarchy is still the norm of our everyday society, many words associated with women still assume the patriarchal power that supports gender domination.'[243] Hence, this chapter explores the profound relationship that exists between language and patriarchy in *Shame*. Since the novel is concerned with the use of religion as a disempowering tool for its characters, it is beneficial to examine the interplay between religion, language and patriarchy. In doing so, the power struggle that exists within *Shame* becomes visible.

Islam encourages Muslim women to dress and behave modestly. In his book titled *Rights of Women in Islam: Modern or Outdated*, conservative theologian Zakir Naik explains that for an Islamic woman, 'her complete body should be covered - the only part that can be seen is the face and the hands up to the wrist.'[244] Orthodox Islam deemed this necessary to avert the male gaze. Naik also makes the point that for men it is sufficient to cover their *awrah* from the navel down to their knees.[245] One can argue that this form of ideology builds a feeling

[241] Michael Hanne, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 7.
[242] hooks, *Talking Back*, 59.
[243] Arimbi and Kwary, 169.
[244] Zakir Naik, *Rights of Women in Islam: Modern or Outdated* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2010), 47.
[245] Ibid.

of shame on the part of the woman of her own sexuality. Growing up in a Malay Muslim community in Singapore, the concept of *awrah* is introduced at a young age: a girl is made to feel embarrassed about exposing body parts to the extent that even revealing her shoulders in public is met with negative criticisms by some members of the community. Using psychoanalytic principles, the feeling of shame propagated by some parts of the Muslim community suggests that not only should a woman feel embarrassed about her sexuality but that she should also be envious of the male sex for the lack of regulation on the male body. In his works, Freud coined the term 'penis envy' to describe how the female sex tends to feel envious of the male sex for the opportunities available to them.[246] Although critics such as Irigaray have dismissed this as being a form of inflating the male ego, one can argue that this is applicable in the concept of female *awrah* in Islam.[247] The character of Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa is one example discussed later in the chapter. It can be argued that Rushdie uses this knowledge of *awrah* to criticise the control that theocratic Pakistan has over its women.

In Rushdie's *Shame*, the novel utilises this concept of shame with a double meaning; one being shame within the Islamic context and the other to be ashamed or embarrassed. Set in a place that has been implied heavily by the narrator to be Pakistan, Rushdie embodies the double meaning of shame in the character of Sufiya Zinobia. This is further expanded when Rushdie metamorphoses Sufiya into a beast that mutilates and destroys turkeys and men. In an interview shortly after the publication of *Shame*, Rushdie explained that the agenda behind the character of Sufiya Zinobia is 'to create in her a huge violence which she can't control and which gets bigger and bigger and which becomes habit forming as violence

[246] Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991), 195-6.
[247] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 51.

does.'[248] This violence is directly aimed at the people that are trying to control her: men. *Shame* is regarded as Rushdie's attempt at a feminist novel since it is concerned with highlighting gender oppression in theocratic societies. Looking at *Shame's* theoretical framework, one can see that Rushdie's attempt at including the experiences of women in the political backdrop of Pakistan would help bring to the centre the voices of those who are oppressed. Indeed, the narrator has claimed that 'it is commonly and…accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men…their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions.'[249] However, critics such as Ahmad and Cundy have claimed this to be a massive failure on the part of Rushdie. Certainly, Rushdie invokes the patriarchal nurturer/destroyer dichotomy in some of the female characters such as Arjumand Harappa and to a certain extent Sufiya Zinobia. Yet, we also find instances of characters such as Rani Harappa and Naveed Hyder who reflect the oppressive culture of a society where women are treated as second-class citizens. In the case of Sufiya Zinobia, she is arguably represented ambiguously. One cannot simply label her character as reinforcing patriarchal ideology since from the very beginning she is represented in a way that exposes the deeply embedded patriarchal ideology found in some aspects of Islamic beliefs.

Often, *Shame* is read as a fairytale. Rushdie himself has observed that 'a lot of the people who have read it have read it as a fairytale.'[250] It is loosely based on Beauty and the Beast with Sufiya Zinobia as Beauty and Omar Khayyam Shakil as not quite the Beast but illustrated as ugly enough (physically and morally) to be one. Fairytales have long been a topic much discussed within feminist critiques since they have been interpreted as

[248] Anita Philips, 'An Interview with Salman Rushdie,' *Marxism Today*, September 1983, 38, http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/83_09_36a.pdf.
[249] Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Vintage Books, 1995), 173.
[250] Ibid, 36.

reinforcing patriarchal values by propagating the idea that everlasting happiness can be found in marriage if a woman is virtuous and obedient. Karen Rowe has added that fairytales 'encourage women to internalise only aspirations deemed appropriate to our "real" sexual functions within a patriarchy.'[251] As a writer who leans heavily to the progressive side of politics, one would expect Rushdie to reconfigure the concept of fairytales and use it as a means of confronting anti-Establishment notions and practices. Justyna Deszcz has argued that 'Rushdie is certainly aware that fairytale images or motifs have become significant cultural factors that mediate between culture, social groups and individuals in the process of constructing our perception of reality.'[252] To a certain extent, one can argue that Rushdie has experimented with elements of fairytale images such as the beastly Sufiya as a way to expose the oppressive reality facing the women of Pakistan. Rushdie also darkens the fairytale motif when the narrator considers the reality of fairytales and happy endings.[253] Admittedly, in light of a political and theocratic Pakistan, the reality of happy endings is slim as depicted in the story of Sufiya and Omar. Thus, Rushdie has adopted a traditional Eastern reading of the classic Western fairytale as the character named the Great Living Poet explains that the fairytale of *Beauty and the Beast* is quite 'simply the story of an arranged marriage.'[254]

Consequently, for the experimental Rushdie it is insufficient to take a postcolonial reading of Beauty and the Beast as his narrator goes on to consider 'whatif a Beastji somehow lurked *inside* Beauty Bibi? Whatif the beauty were herself the beast?'[255] It can be argued that this archetypal notion of beast within beauty has been explored at length in the Western Literary Canon. Characters such as Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and Caliban in *The Tempest* examine

[251] Karen Rowe, 'Feminism and Fairytales', in *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North American and England,* ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Gower, 1986), 211.
[252] Deszcz, 31.
[253] *Shame*, 158.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid, 159.

how there can be evil in someone who is on the surface good and vice versa.[256] In *Shame* Rushdie takes this idea one step further by metamorphosing Sufiya Zinobia into a beast towards the end of the novel. When readers are first introduced to Sufiya the narrator describes her beauty to be that of 'severe classicism of her features [which] would have pleased any watching eye.'[257] Moreover, her goodness or purity comes from being intellectually disabled when she is struck with brain fever that affects her mental growth. Thus, not only does she possess beauty, her innocence is heightened with a lack in her mental capacity to live as an able-bodied person. Turning someone pure in mind and body into a monster physically would suggest that Rushdie here is demonstrating that excessive and intense oppression can make victims commit villainous acts.

Sufiya Zinobia is a character who embodies a 'variety of roles and significance.'[258] This is after all 'a novel about Sufiya Zinobia.'[259] Daughter to the dictator General Raza "Razor Guts" Hyder and Bilquis Hyder, Sufiya, also referred to in the text as the 'miracle-gone-wrong', personifies the concept of Islamic shame due to her not being born a boy.[260] In this respect one can argue that Rushdie is drawing attention to the reality of living in a patriarchal society, where being born a girl can become a curse for a family. For Raza and Bilquis, the shamefulness of her existence increased when she contracted brain fever at twelve years old and this led her to become mentally disabled. For the Hyders, it does not matter that she is a beautiful and sweet natured girl. Hence, the violent acts that are unleashed within Sufiya contradict her beauty and innocence. Being a personification of shame, Sufiya 'absorbs on

[256] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (London: Penguin Books, 1996). Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 3rd ed. (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963).
[257] *Shame*, 137.
[258] Anurandha Dingwaney Needham, 'The Politics of Post-Colonial Identity in Salman Rushdie', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 154.
[259] *Shame*, 59.
[260] Ibid, 116.

behalf of those who do not feel it [and] finds vent at first in her fire-blushes; later, it surfaces in the sores and suppurations of her illness, and culminates in the bestial violence of her insanity.'[261] One might argue that on the surface this bestial construction of Sufiya reinforces patriarchal attitudes towards women. Yet, in taking this construction of Sufiya within the political context of *Shame* one can easily see that Sufiya is a literary device that aims to reveal the destructive nature of patriarchal Islam in Pakistan.

The omniscient narrator of *Shame* claims that the story of the violence or evil that exists within Sufiya Zinobia comes from two narratives that occurred in London.[262] The first narrative involves an honour-killing incident where a Pakistani father murdered his only child 'because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family.'[263] The second narrative involves an Asian girl who had on a late night been on the underground train and was attacked and beaten by a group of teenage white boys. The girl did not report the crime and chose instead to feel ashamed. These two narratives of violence, claims the narrator, are 'inside my Sufiya Zinobia now.'[264] The language used by the narrator to describe the two narratives seems to be one of surprise and curiosity as he goes on to consider that if the tables had been turned and the girls found in themselves the fury to fight back against their oppressors, how would the men feel, 'how to look their comrades in the face?'[265] One could argue that Rushdie's particular use of the word 'comrade' implies a sense of militant masculinity that exists within the male sex thus reinforcing a patriarchal attitude of male strength. Yet the crux of the narrator's question suggests a kind of inverted sexual violence where it is not the woman who feels physically vulnerable but the man. This

[261] Grewal, 134.
[262] It is interesting to note that the narrator lives in London and tells the story of *Shame* from a migrant perspective.
[263] *Shame*, 115.
[264] Ibid, 117.
[265] Ibid.

form of interrogation arguably highlights the ambiguity that exists in the narrative. Surely one cannot simply comprehend the text at face value. Samir Dayal argues that 'Rushdie's novel seems to be asking the question of how it feels for a man to be the object of violent sexuality, or of sexual violence.'[266] The implication of reversing roles in gender violence reinforces *Shame's* agenda of bringing to light the reality of the oppression faced by women in Pakistan. Suffice to say that the imagined fury has been rebirthed inside Sufiya Zinobia.

One can argue that the two 'ghosts' make their appearances known in Sufiya by exacting revenge on men through 'tearing their heads off their bodies and leaving the landscape peopled with headless torsos.'[267] In one episode, Sufiya Zinobia goes out at night and gang rapes four youths, 'four husbands come and go… four of them in and out,'[268] before murdering them through decapitation. Here, the use of sexual imagery with a violent act committed by a woman on men seems to intensify the patriarchal metaphorical image of *vagina dentata*. Dayal too observes that 'the phallic woman threatens the passivized man. The threatening woman is figured as the *vagina dentata* or the *femme fatale*…violent sexuality here represents phantasmic castration.'[269] This episode, according to Aijaz Ahmad, highlights Sufiya becoming 'the oldest of the misogynist myths: the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them, not an object of male manipulation but a devourer of hapless men.'[270] This reversion to sexist representation is indeed the symptom of a language that is inherently gendered. Admittedly, Rushdie experiments with Islamic theology on the issue of polygamy as gender roles have been

[266] Dayal, 46.
[267] Needham, 154.
[268] *Shame*, 219.
[269] Dayal, 52.
[270] Ahmad, 1468.

reversed.[271] Furthermore, the sexual violence invoked here is easily seen as reinforcing the patriarchal attitude of the innocent seductress decapitating hapless men. However, one has to take into consideration the question that is first asked by the narrator of how, when people are humiliated for long enough, 'a wildness bursts out of them.'[272] How can sexual violence be achieved by Sufiya who is 'so slight a figure, [that she] could command such awesome strength.'[273] The issue of sexual violence is inherently intertwined with the concept of strength. For Rushdie to command a powerful image of reversing gender roles, it is vital not only to call on patriarchal stereotypes but also to question the inherent misogyny found in society's treatment of Sufiya.

In this episode Sufiya or the Beast's eyes are described as 'deadly yellow fires,' and the four youths trailing after her are 'rats to her piper.'[274] The tone is also sombre. Dayal summarises this point claiming that 'the fear of the phallic woman's threat to marriage (the microcosm for society) sublates the fear of the socially anarchic power of unrestrained female sexuality.'[275] In taking a gendered lens to this episode, one can argue that patriarchy would view the power that comes with unrestrained female sexuality as a threat to the man's dominant political role in society. For patriarchy this would mean anarchy. The use of religious metaphors and patriarchal language in this episode demonstrates how the body of a female that exerts her power over men is immediately transformed into something that is terrifying and becomes an act of warning to men, thus reinforcing patriarchal belief of the image of the succubus. On the other hand, one can argue that Rushdie unsettles patriarchal notions in sexual imagery by reversing the roles of sexual violence. It is far too simple to

[271] Islamic law allows for the practice of polygamy for men. A Muslim man is allowed to have up to four wives provided he is able to love them equally and provide for them equally.
[272] *Shame*, 117.
[273] Ibid.
[274] *Shame*, 219.
[275] Dayal, 54.

take the imagery of the succubus represented in Sufiya at face value. Certainly, Dayal makes an important point in claiming that 'a woman reader's affective response to *Shame* may be "bifurcated" – on the one hand identifying with the women who are emasculated and on the other being "drawn into complicity" by the text in seeing the woman as a version of the castrating bitch.'[276] This ambiguity is arguably what makes *Shame* an interesting subject in analysing the language and discourse of gender violence.

Indeed, *Shame* does end on an apocalyptic note. Sufiya is constructed in a way where all the shame in the world not felt by those who act and do wrong is collated in her. It is like letting off a bomb that has been ticking since the day she was born blushing. Sufiya metamorphoses into a beast and is ultimately destroyed with those who were involved in her oppression including her husband the physician, Omar Khayyam Shakil. By the time she turns into a monster, she has escaped the safe confines of her life with her parents, *ayah* or nanny and her husband. Hence her metamorphosis is, for Rushdie, necessary in order to express her freedom. As a beast, Sufiya is mythologised by the people as being a 'demon' and a 'white panther…[that] could fly, or dematerialise, or grow until it was bigger than a tree.'[277] Rushdie is fascinated with the idea that if one becomes subjected to heavy concentration of humiliation and oppression such as Sufiya, it will lead 'people who are completely peaceful [to]) suddenly do outrageously violent things and they can't understand it themselves.'[278] The image of Sufiya as a monster and the vicious acts executed by her alter ego reinforces patriarchal fear against powerful dominant women. However, one should note that Rushdie's experimentation with reversing gender roles brings to light questions of strength and shame in the face of sexual violence.

[276] Ibid, 52.
[277] *Shame*, 254.
[278] Philips, 38.

By now one can see that Rushdie utilises polar ideas such as patriarchy and feminism in his portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia. In doing so, the message relayed by the narrative is undoubtedly ambiguous. This is continued further when one looks into one of Sufiya's important relationships with the opposite sex, namely her husband Omar Khayyam Shakil. The characterisation of Omar Khayyam Shakil is one of a peripheral hero. He is also Sufiya's physician. Their marriage occurred due to satisfying two male agendas: firstly, Shakil knew that it was the easiest way to climb the social ladder by marrying the head of state's daughter. Added to that, Sufiya would be the only beautiful bride that would not reject him due to his lack of physical beauty. Raza Hyder is guilty of murdering Omar Khhayyam Shakil's brother, the rebel Barbar Shakil. Thus marrying off his handicapped daughter to the brother of a man he murdered becomes a twisted sort of redemption for Raza and allows him to alleviate his guilt. In bringing to light the two male agendas that controlled Sufiya's future, one can argue that the text makes an important point of exposing the control and exploitation of a woman's mind, body and future by the state. Sufiya's metamorphosis can be seen as a form of reclaiming what is rightfully hers.

The concepts of shame and shamelessness are polar opposites. When Omar Khayyam Shakil is constructed to be lacking in shame, it would seem appropriate from a literary standpoint to unite shame and shamelessness together. In Sufiya and Omar's case, it turns out to be marriage. One is not necessarily better than the other. When looking at it from a moral perspective, to have no shame or modesty has negative connotations attached to it. Society has deemed modesty as a virtuous trait. Shame is arguably an extension of modesty. It is seen as an emotion in which Omar Khayyam Shakil is 'forbidden to indulge.'[279] As a

[279] *Shame*, 39.

consequence, without any shame, Omar's life revolves around debauchery and immoral doings with tyrants such as Iskander Harappa and General Raza Hyder. His emotional and mental ugliness is confirmed physically. The narrator has also claimed Shakil's misogyny to be 'acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers' for confining him in their mansion until he turned twelve.[280] His (over)weight too symbolises the increase in a lavish hedonistic lifestyle.

However, when he marries Sufiya and becomes aware of her beastly nature, his future starts looking different. Since Sufiya is unable to perform her wifely duties, her *ayah* Shahbanou offers her body as a replacement.[281] This added humiliation is known to Sufiya who 'heard the night-time noises, his grunts, her birdlike cries.'[282] So when the ending of the novel culminates in the Shakil mansion with Omar Khayyam Shakil and Sufiya Zinobia on the bed together with the power positions in reverse, it seems to confirm the patriarchal attitude towards powerful women. The male anxiety and fear of being castrated is a recurrent theme in *Shame*. Omar has by now lost his epicurean weight and has begun to feel a tinge of shame. Deszcz takes note of the ending as 'not only does Omar comprehend the scope of his shamelessness, but like the fairy tale Beauty he accepts his wife as a Beast and confesses his love.'[283] Ahmad on the other hand is more pessimistic.[284] He argues that 'there is nothing in Shakil's character to suggest that he is capable of such an act of imaginative understanding.'[285] Moreover, Ahmad continues to question the validity of this 'freedom' Rushdie has tried to portray in the Beast. He argues that the ending becomes more difficult 'because of the moral perplexity, for a reader to sympathise with her (Sufiya)…it is no longer

[280] Ibid, 40.
[281] Ibid, 211.
[282] Ibid, 231.
[283] Deszcz, 35.
[284] Ahmad, 1468
[285] Ibid.

a confrontation between shamelessness and shame but, rather, between a man who is…a moral cripple, and a woman who has become…in the most literal sense, a beast.'[286] On the other hand, one can argue that the ending sheds light on Sufiya's struggle for justice which she can finally claim. On the surface her destructive nature reinforces patriarchal fear of powerful women, yet one must not forget that the sexual violence depicted in Sufiya comes from the collection of violence endured by women in patriarchal society. What Rushdie is attempting to accomplish is not so much reinforcing patriarchy in his text as experimenting with the possibility of reversing gender roles so that the woman overpowers the man, yet is still subscribed to masculinist tropes.

The existence of patriarchal discourse within language is pervasive. We are all subjected to its influence. What we can do is be aware of its structural operations when communicating with one another. This is reinforced by Phillips when discussing the role of ideologies in language and discourse and asserting that 'the feminist idea that male ideological dominance gave rise to an alternative resistant interpretive perspective among feminists, including feminist interpretations of gender ideologies about language.'[287] Through a feminist lens, it is evident that Rushdie's *Shame* is a novel that has been intentionally constructed to demonstrate the suppression of women through culture and religion. The power to control and dominate a society's body and mind is the crux of the matter in *Shame*. Through the metamorphosis of Sufiya Zinobia, Rushdie attempts to reclaim strength and voice for the women in Pakistan. The representation of Sufiya as a monstrous succubus who can only dominate a man through horrific, violent acts would suggest that the narrative is unable 'to resolve the tension between the desire to help women and the fear of them.'[288] However, the

[286] Ibid.
[287] Susan Phillips, 562.
[288] Grewal, 141.

ambiguity between help and fear does not make the text weak. In actual fact, it creates more questions that should be considered especially in the case of sexual violence. The text demonstrates the cultural and religious oppression of women, bringing to light the structural workings of a dysfunctional patriarchal society.

Even though *Shame* may be seen as aesthetically inventive, it is as mentioned before a highly charged political novel. Many critics often focus on the representation and construction of Pakistani women in the text as being problematic. Discussing gender issues in the East from a Western point of view has generated some controversy. Some would argue that by applying a Western perspective to analyse the oppression of gender in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan would be insensitive since often those same Western lenses do not have the capacity to comprehend the socio-cultural and economic nuances impacting on the lives of the people in these countries. However, one can argue that Western lenses can shed some light on the injustice and inequality faced by people in countries such as Pakistan, though keeping in mind that gender oppression occurs differently in the West. Furthermore, it can be argued that writers such as Rushdie have a sense of double-consciousness whereby they are brought up within an Eastern tradition and have been educated in the West and thus influenced by Western interpretations of liberalism. In this respect, these writers have the capacity to comprehend and question both sides. As mentioned in the first chapter, the issue of the *hijab* or veil is a prime example of how highly political it can be in both Eastern and Western countries. Western media have at times portrayed the veil as being oppressive to women.[289] On the other hand, Muslim women have spoken up about their desire to wear the

[289] Marketa Hukpachova, 'Hijab: A woman's rite of passage in Iran,' *The Guardian*, December 19, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/dec/19/iran-hijab-islamic-veil. Nudrrat Khawaja, 'Hijab, the illusion of choice,' *Pakistan Today*, September 10, 2013, https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/09/10/hijab-the-illusion-of-choice/.

veil and insist that they have the right of say regarding the use of it. Here we have different interpretations of the symbolic and operational function of the veil. The debate surrounding the veil is part of a wider discussion on gender around the world.

Human rights values are often perceived to be universal from a Western lens. The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* provides us with a foundation that is supposedly deemed acceptable worldwide.[290] Yet, this does not necessarily mean that everyone has the same interpretation of his/her rights. The use of the word 'universality' becomes problematic as it implies completeness and often, it is not applicable to everyone. Similarly, gender issues and gender oppression have different interpretations for different cultures and societies. A Deconstructionist would observe that we are all driven by ideology and thus have different interpretations of right and wrong. In *Shame* Rushdie manages to extract gender oppression and injustice in Pakistani history through various experimental literary devices, in order to highlight the different interpretations of rights and wrongs from an Eastern and Western perspective.

Shame traces the steps taken by political figures to build nationhood. Although the narrator specifically but also humorously denies it being about Pakistan, *Shame* is structured as a 'looking-glass Pakistan' set in a place called Peccavistan.[291] Thus, in order to save himself from trouble with the Pakistani theocratic regime of the time, Rushdie created the fictional country of Peccavistan to mirror that of Pakistan. This of course did not work since *Shame* is banned in Pakistan. The word Peccavistan is itself a 'translation about the Pakistani region

[290] 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', *UN General Assembly*, accessed February 3 2017, http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html.

[291] *Shame*, 88.

of Sind which as a pun has the allegorical connotation of "the land of sin".[292] The idea of Peccavistan/Pakistan coming from the land of sin suggests immoral and unethical wrongdoings that have occurred in the past within its borders. In one episode, the narrator recalls an 'apocryphal story that Napier, after a successful campaign in what is now the south of Pakistan, sent back to England the guilty, one-word message, "Peccavi". I have *Sind*.'[293] Rushdie implies that the history of this fictional country is constantly repeated and follows the same pattern of destructive colonisation and dictatorial post-colonisation. When the narrator claims that he is 'not writing only about Pakistan', it seems to suggest that the story of *Shame* can be applied to other postcolonial nations that are on the path of building their national identity but are inevitably still recovering from the impacts of colonisation.[294] For the sake of the novel, however, *Shame* provides a backdrop of the political history of two dictators, Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder. It is known among critics that Pakistan's very own dictators in the 1970s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Zia Ul-Haq, inspired the two characters.

From the outset the narrator has made references to the postcolonial past of the narrative. As mentioned previously, the site of what we now know as Pakistan was colonised by the British up until 1947. Being aware of this, the text seems to create a palimpsest in its narrative through the setting of the novel. The first layer of historical narrative lies in the existence of the colonisers. The town of 'Q' is separated by Old town, where the local people lived, and 'Cant', where the colonisers lived. Hence the historical narrative of the present is written on the knowledge of the historical narrative of the past. We can find the second layer of historical narrative in the official interpretations of Pakistani history. The third layer is

[292] David W.Hart, 'Making a Mockery of Mimicry: Salman Rushdie's *Shame*,' *Postcolonial Text* 4, no. 4 (2008): 7, EBSCO.
[293] *Shame*, 88.
[294] *Shame*, 29.

arguably located within the story of *Shame*. Although the narrative of Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil should be taken centre stage in the novel as claimed by the narrator, their story is portrayed as a political backdrop of the elitist class and political dictators who take centre stage in the text. This third layer highlights the social experiences of individuals living with theocratic policies in place. The text specifically utilises this layer to bring to our attention the social experiences of the female characters. Like many of Rushdie's novels, *Shame* is littered with minor characters and in this instance it is the plight of women that is under the spotlight. David Hart has argued that the 'women in this story are palimpsests both covering and revealing Indo-Pakistani history and male shame.'[295] Hence, it can be noted that the structural narrative of *Shame* functions as artifactual evidence of the layers that are revealed as well as hidden in Pakistani history.

Official accounts of political history are often concerned with dates of wars, signing of treaties and discussions of decisions made by political leaders. Having read history in Cambridge, Rushdie has always been fascinated with social history and the personal impacts of historical events on its people. In *Shame* we see Rushdie attempting to exploit the official account of Pakistani history by experimenting with its social history. This is demonstrated through the incorporation of women. It can be argued that being a patriarchal society, the official Pakistani history is exclusively told by men from their perspective. However, *Shame* insists that the women must take over the narrative, 'they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me (the narrator) to…see my "male" plot refracted.'[296] As mentioned previously, *Shame* constructs the narrative, or more specifically women's narrative, to be revolutionary. Samir

[295] Hart, 16.
[296] *Shame*, 173.

Dayal has argued that 'what is entailed by such a re-seeing of plot is a re-narrativization of the parallel phenomena of the symbolic and literal emasculation of men and the masculinisation of women.'[297] Similarly, Ambreen Hai claims that Rushdie's inclusive narrative 'suggests that women and their stories can enact a reversal of power inequities and aggressively invade male "centrality" to "demand inclusion".'[298] By including the women in the history-making or history-narrating, the text becomes a site of political transgression. It becomes even more so when female characters such as Rani Harappa, Arjumand Harappa and Sufiya Zinobia demonstrate the shameful atrocities occurring in Peccavistan/Pakistani history.

The cultural liminal space occupied by Rushdie allows for the critical analysis of the hierarchy of discourse that exists in narrating history.[299] Foucault has observed that 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.'[300] This observation by Foucault illustrates how discourse is quite often a power struggle. This pertains to the way in which patriarchal and feminist discourse is produced and is at once conflicted in western societies. In *Shame*, Rushdie works in a space that is considered to be a counter-narrative to the official discourse circulated in Pakistani history. The counter-discourse relates to a narrative that opposes, questions and challenges the authorised version of history. It can be argued that Rushdie's 'formidable materiality' reveals the discourse of the minority through characterisations and the reinterpretation of events.

[297] Dayal, 46.
[298] Hai, 16.
[299] Later in the chapter, there will be a detailed discussion on the use of different genres in *Shame*. For the sake of the argument here, we will refer to *Shame* as historical fiction.
[300] Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 239.

Discourse produced by a government would often contain censorship and biased analysis of political events. *Shame*, however, becomes the counter-discourse by revealing oppressive historical incidents that take into account the social cost of Pakistani society. Highly critical of Islamic practices, the text unveils the hypocrisy of living under a theology-focused regime.

In addition to narrating the story of Sufiya Zinobia and Omar Khayyam Shakil, *Shame* tells a parodying story about two political families in Pakistan: the Harappa and Hyder families. It is important to note that the text is concerned with portraying the elite class in Pakistan and thus manages to satirise and ridicule them to the point of becoming cartoon-like. Rushdie himself has claimed in an interview that the novel is 'talking about an almost completely decadent class.'[301] Moreover, the class system in Pakistan is structured in a way that allows those on the top to remain on the top. In the case of *Shame* that could also mean toppling one rich dictator for another. Yet those fallen individuals would remain in the same ruling class. Being at the top of the ruling class, it seemed appropriate for Rushdie to use their narrative as a political backdrop in his text. Some may criticise the author for failing to be inclusive of other social classes in his narration of Pakistan. Yet, it is important to note that the focus of *Shame* is to reveal the political hypocrisy, corruption and oppression that generally dominate the upper class since they are also the ruling class. Rushdie has argued that 'the Pakistani ruling class really is the most grotesquely corrupt and morally bankrupt class.'[302] Thus, the process of historiography deems it necessary for Rushdie to offer an intimate account of the two families. The text portrays the incompetent political rulings of Iskander 'Isky' Harappa and Raza 'Razor Guts' Hyder. Indeed, Fletcher too agrees that

[301] Philips, 38.
[302] Ibid.

'Pakistani politics is being ridiculed via the portrayal of Isky and Raza.'[303] Harappa, a thinly veiled parody of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, is known for his secularist policies. In contrast, Hyder is depicted as a militarist dictator known for imposing extreme versions of Islam on his policies. Hyder's argument for coming into power supports the initial reasoning behind partition that led to independence for Pakistan: to create an Islamic state. The text refers to the event in 1947 as 'the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without.'[304] Although Harappa initially takes Hyder into his government, the General would later on execute Harappa in order to secure his place as leader of this troubled nation on the basis that Harappa had driven Pakistan away from its initial goal of achieving a theocratic country.

Although Isky and Raza are caricatured, Fletcher argues that 'the tragic effects on others of the actions of those ridiculed (Isky and Raza) are depicted seriously.'[305] This we see in the characterisation of Sufiya Zinobia. Sufiya is represented to feel the immensity of shame not felt by Raza, Isky and others that commit acts of immoral violence. Ahmad on the other hand warns us of the text's fondness for caricaturing Isky and Raza whose 'fictional equivalents of Bhutto and Zia are such perfect, buffoon-like caricatures, and the many narrative lines of the political parable are woven so much around their ineptitude…their sexual obsessions, the absurdities of their ambitions and their ends, that one is in danger of forgetting that Bhutto and Zia were in reality no buffoons, but highly capable and calculating men, whose cruelties were entirely methodical.'[306] Even though the text does reduce the two dictators to

[303] Fletcher, 98.
[304] *Shame*, 61.
[305] Fletcher, 98.
[306] Ahmad, 1466.

cartoon-like personas, it can be argued that the atrocities they enacted whilst in power are depicted quite seriously and accurately in the text. Rushdie himself has referred to General Zia ul-Haq as a 'fearsome "cartoon."'[307] Furthermore, David Hart remarks that 'the audience is not really in danger of forgetting these leaders' atrocities…I suspect the novel opens doors of knowledge and interest about the recent history of Pakistan.'[308] Although Eastern audiences will have the added benefit of looking into the history of Pakistan from a slightly unofficial angle, Western audiences too will appreciate the insight into the politicking culture of Pakistan.

Sexuality and politics go hand in hand in *Shame*. It is undeniable that the text deals intensely with the concept of sexuality especially that of a woman. Repression and oppression of sexuality is highlighted in the opening of the novel with the introduction of the three Shakil sisters, Chunni, Munnee and Bunny. It is evident that when the sisters throw a party after the death of Old Mr Shakil, their intention is to celebrate their newfound freedom. Their father kept the three girls 'inside that labyrinthine mansion until his dying day…uneducated…[and] imprisoned in the zenana wing.'[309] Unexposed to the outside world and illiterate, the three sisters are portrayed as being immature emotionally and sexually to the extent that they imagined 'fertilisation might have been supposed to happen through the breast.'[310] Foucault has claimed that one of the main prohibited discourses is that of sexuality.[311] In a society where discourse is controlled and selected, prohibited discourse plays a role in keeping society in line with its dominant norms and values. In *Shame*, sexual discourse is established

[307] Salman Rushdie, 'Daughter of the East', in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticisms 1981-1991* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 58.
[308] Hart, 13.
[309] *Shame*, p.13. 'Zenana' meaning an area or enclosed space reserved for women only. Almost always refers to a part of a house for women.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Foucault, 'Order of Discourse', 239-40.

from the beginning to be a part of that prohibited speech. Later in the novel, we find that discussing the political shortcomings of politicians too becomes part of the prohibited speech. Thus, it seems that old Mr Shakil exercised control over his daughters' sexuality by isolating them from the outside world. Ahmad has observed in the opening of the novel 'the sense that Pakistan is a cage is already there.'[312] Indeed, the Shakil mansion symbolises the closed, isolated and controlled country that Pakistan is. On the other hand, the outside world is comprised of 'the indigenous, colonised population and…the alien colonisers, the Angrez, or British, sahibs' where people intermingle and seen as free to move.[313] Here, we can see Rushdean philosophy at play where binarisms of singularity versus plurality and absolutism versus multiplicity are explored and interrogated. As reflected in *Shame*, singularity and absolutism are seen as oppressive and destructive whereas plurality and multiplicity are celebrated and represented as a better approach to life.

Control over a woman's sexuality is further illustrated in the text. Fletcher has argued that 'the statement that *Shame* is making involves the consequences of sexual oppression, not the suggestion that women are inherently superior to men.'[314] We see it happening in the narrative of Arjumand Harappa and Good News Hyder. Arjumand Harappa, who would later on be labelled as the Virgin Ironpants is Iskander Harappa's only child. Thinly veiled to reflect Benazir Bhutto, Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa is portrayed as a doting daughter who could never see her father doing any harm. The text describes her loyal dedication to her father as 'reverence bordering on idolatry.'[315] Similarly, in a non-fiction essay written by Rushdie in 1988, the author claims that Benazir Bhutto is 'still unwilling to

[312] Ahmad, 1465.
[313] *Shame*, 12.
[314] Fletcher, 105.
[315] *Shame*, 126.

admit that the martyred parent committed the tiniest of sins.'[316] From the moment that Isky decides to get serious with his political career, Arjumand, thirteen at the time, resorts to being 'at her father's feet' for support. Arjumand too receives advice from her father who states that 'it's a man's world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is no place to be a woman in.'[317] This reflect what Cixous observed in 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 'men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilise their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs.'[318] Indeed, Pakistan/Peccavistan certainly is no place for a woman to be in. This is already demonstrated at the beginning of the text when the birth of Sufiya Zinobia is described as a 'miracle-gone-wrong' due to her being born a girl.[319] Isky's patriarchal view of the world leaves Arjumand to despise her body leading her to participate 'in the very regimes of oppression that ensure the suppression of women.'[320] Dayal too reflects a similar situation to Arjumand that can be applied to Benazir Bhutto who 'had to downplay her image as a "Westernised" woman (in order) to be accepted in this context.'[321] Arjumand's contempt for her own sex is depicted when she tells her father that this female body 'brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame.'[322] Here, the text exposes patriarchal indoctrination and oppression in a theocratic country.

Arjumand's future continues to be dictated by the male world. As a 'mediator of patriarchal power',[323] Arjumand, the law graduate 'became active in the green revolution, threw zamindars out of their palaces, opened dungeons, led raids on the homes of film stars and

[316] Rushdie, 'Daughter of the East', 57.
[317] *Shame*, 126.
[318] Cixous, 878.
[319] *Shame*, 116.
[320] Grewal, 129.
[321] Dayal, 53.
[322] *Shame*, 107.
[323] Ibid, 130.

slit open their mattresses with a long two-edged knife, laughed as the black money poured out from between the pocketed springs.'[324] Indeed, some may argue that the image of Arjumand carrying out her father's political deeds reinforces the patriarchal view that women who inherit power will become dictatorial and thus destructive. This would certainly follow the alleged representation of Sufiya Zinobia as the powerful but destructive beast. This again is a pattern seen in Rushdie's texts. However, one has to take note of the fact that the representation of Arjumand depicts a society where women are pushed to be second class citizens to the extent that if a woman wanted to 'rise above [her] gender' she would need to masculinise her mind and body.[325] It is important to note that this patriarchal concept of masculinising one's mind and body is something that we see in the West when women take on leadership positions. What *Shame* does is not only criticise Pakistan's theocratic policies but the text also reveals the profound oppression found in Pakistani society's indoctrination of what it means to be from the supposedly weaker sex.

The story of Naveed 'Good News' Hyder is another prime example of a different type of control on a woman's sexuality. Having been married to the handsome police captain Talvar Ulhaq, Naveed begins to reproduce children at a rapid pace to the point of her eventually committing suicide due to Talvar's refusal to implement family planning practices in their family. 'Twenty-seven children aged between one and six puked, dribbled, crawled…sang, danced, skipped…experimented with bad language, kicked their ayahs' and the list goes on.[326] The idea of family planning is forbidden in some cutures' interpretation of Islam and in Good News Hyder's case, that option is not available regardless of whether she is carrying octuplets or not. Indeed, Stephanie Moss argues that 'the rejection of birth control by her

[324] *Shame*, 182.
[325] Ibid, 126.
[326] Ibid, 226.

police chief husband implies the militant fundamentalism that unites the country while creating its evils.'[327] This leads to her hanging herself in her bedroom with a suicide note that the narrator claims 'did not mention what she thought of her husband…who would never be brought to trial on any charge.'[328] Here, one can see that the narrator is attempting to expose the abuse faced by married women who are caged within certain matrimonial laws. The implication that Talvar Ulhaq should be brought to trial to face charges for failing to put a stop to Naveed's continuous pregnancies demonstrates the narrator's strong opinions against Islamic laws on family planning and contraception.[329] This can also be seen as another extension of his criticism of extreme orthodox Islamic beliefs.

Coming from an oppressive past, *Shame* has to a certain extent investigated the wounds of a nation that is affected by colonisation. The search for a national and cultural identity, the attempt to escape and recover a nation's history and its existing post-independence relationship with the coloniser plays a significant role in the building of nationhood and instilling patriotism. As a postcolonial text, *Shame* employs characters such as Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder to reveal the oppressive politics that is facing modern Pakistan. In particular, gender oppression is circulated within the laws as well as the language. Characters such as Naveed Hyder and Arjumand Harappa reflect the institutionalised oppression faced by the women of Pakistan. It is unquestionable that Rushdie applies a feminist perspective towards the representation of such characters. However, *Shame's* use of patriarchal language within a feminist agenda creates a problematic narrative that results in criticisms against the

[327] Stephanie Moss, 'Cream of the Crop: Female Characters in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*,' *The International Fiction Review* 19, no. 1 (1992): 29, EBSCO.
[328] *Shame*, 228.
[329] Ibid.

author.[330] Nevertheless, the text portrays this conflict in language so as to highlight the ambiguity that exists in our everyday discourse.

As someone who holds the power of narration, it can be argued that the omniscient narrator in *Shame* is the central character of the text. The construction of the narrator indicates that Rushdie has experimented with a literary device in a way that exploits the significance and role of the storyteller. *Shame's* postmodern style of writing enables Rushdie to manipulate not only the style of narration but to call into question the narrator himself. Essentially, the narrator has been constructed as a three-dimensional character. Although many critics often describe the narrative of *Shame* as a tightly constructed and authoritative text, it can also be quite ambiguous. This is evident in the narrator's questioning of the location of the text. As a literary device, the narrator allows the readers to see the many sides to a story. Rushdie's experimentation with the characterisation of the narrator allows for the existence of a personal and to a certain extent close relationship between narrator and reader. This we see achieved through the many personal interjections found in the novel. Readers discover from the beginning that the narrator is a migrant living in London but reflecting on his original roots through the narrative. This act of double-consciousness allows for an interpretation that is laced with two different cultural norms and values.

Rushdie takes it one step further by experimenting with this literary device to create a character thus adding another dimension to the role of the narrator. Postcolonial texts often incorporate oral storytelling in order to tell the story of those in the margin. Timothy Brennan argues that 'a gesture towards orality always suggests national authenticity.'[331] For Rushdie,

[330] Cundy.
[331] Timothy Brennan, '*Shame's* Holy Book', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 113.

a claim of authenticity is vital in telling a story that seeks to expose the natural injustices in a patriarchal society such as Pakistan. Moreover, this is seen to be an inclusive method of storytelling. Edward Said observes a more personal attachment to postcoloniality claiming that 'most of the postcolonial writers bear their past within them – as scars of humiliating wounds…as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the colonialist.'[332] From this we can observe that the postcolonial situation demands a writer tell the story of the oppressed through the use of the language of the oppressor. hooks comments that 'the oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves – to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action – a resistance.'[333] Writers of colour such as Rushdie use this postcolonial technique together with his postmodern style of writing to centre stories from the margins. This we can see clearly in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Furthermore, this experimentation extends to the characterisation of the narrator. The nature of the narrator makes it problematic for the reader to establish whether it is a first-person narrative or an omniscient narrator. Although the narrator is not directly included in the plot, it would seem that he is telling a story that he has personally witnessed. Moreover, if one were to follow the logic of the requirement for a text to be a first-person narrative, on some occasions the narrator includes himself in his minor side narratives. A good example would be the relaying of his dialogue with one of the World's Greatest Poets. In this episode, the narrator recalls his discussion of the fairytale *Beauty and the Beast* with the Great Poet who insisted that it is a story of an arranged marriage. Upon questioning whether Beauty can ever love her husband, the Great Poet replied that 'Woman must make the best of her fate; for if she does not love Man, why then he dies, the Beast perishes, and Woman is left a widow, that is to

[332] Edward Said, 'Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial Word', *Salmagundi*, no.70/71 (Spring-Summer 1986): 54-55, JSTOR.
[333] hooks, *Talking Back*, 58.

say less than a daughter, less than a wife, worthless.'[334] This episode highlights the indoctrination of Eastern attitudes towards arranged marriage and more importantly, towards the role of woman in an arranged marriage. The narrator fails to either support or reject this view. However, as already discussed, the narrator lays it bare for readers to consider the moral implications of such a view.

Some critics claim that the narrator is the author himself.[335] The blurring of the fictional character of the narrator with Rushdie the writer is arguably crafty for a novel that calls reality into question. As previously mentioned, the questioning of genre in *Shame* is similar to that of questioning the reliability of the narrator. Moreover, this is not the last time Rushdie includes himself in his texts. Some may argue it to be arrogant while others see it as a mischievous play on literary experimentation blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Brennan observes that 'what seems like a calculated literary device…is only the written simulation of the very common practice among storytellers of interrupting themselves.'[336] There have been occasions when the narrator allows the reader insight into his personal life. For a reader to stay focused on a text that is full of myriad plots littered with minor but significant characters, it is important for there to be not simply an entertaining narrator but also one who is captivating. So, in order to captivate an audience the storyteller must first establish a relationship with its audience. Anurandha Dingwaney Needham has argued that there are moments 'where Rushdie's narrator plays deliberately and self-consciously with the hybrid status of both his fiction and his identity as a postcolonial expatriate.'[337] For instance, in one episode the narrator reflects on his relationship with his sister who lives in

[334] Ibid.
[335] Ahmad.
[336] Brennan, '*Shame's* Holy Book,' 113.
[337] Needham, 149.

Pakistan, 'if this were a realistic novel about Pakistan…I would be talking about my youngest sister. Who is twenty-two, and studying engineering in Karachi; who can't sit on her hair anymore, and who (unlike me) is a Pakistani citizen. Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I have never lived there longer than six months at a stretch…I have learned Pakistan in slices, the same way as I have learned my growing sister.[338] As a result of this intimate revelation and contemplation on the part of the narrator, readers are able to piece together a fragmented but solid image of the narrator. Moreover, Ayelet Ben-Yishai has argued that these '"transparent" moments in the text are those not least, but most, pregnant with mediation and, consequently, with ideology.'[339] And it is this ideology that we need to deconstruct to reveal the ambiguities at work in *Shame*. Fragmentation of narratives is the aim in *Shame*. The narrator considers himself to be occupying an exilic space. This is mainly because he lives in London while his family, like Rushdie, was originally from India but has now moved to Pakistan. Therefore, he now sees the world in pieces claiming 'I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors.'[340] He is compelled to reflect on a world that he feels not quite alien to because of his family but odd enough for him to separate himself from it. Hussain remarks that in order for the contemplation on Pakistan to occur, it would have to depend on 'Rushdie's ability to map out a space for himself, a space at some geographical distance to his subject.'[341] This distance can only be achieved through his exilic space.

It can be argued that it is this exilic space that allows him to examine the oppression in Pakistan/Peccavistan. This would include the oppression of women. Ahmad has argued that

[338] *Shame*, 68-69.
[339] Ayelet Ben-Yishai, 'The Dialectic of Shame: Representation in the Metanarrative of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*,' *Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 249, EBSCO.
[340] *Shame*, p.69.
[341] Hussain, 8.

Rushdie 'living in the contemporary milieu of the British Left…has not remained untouched by feminism itself, at least in a cerebral sort of way.'[342] If one were to follow the argument that *Shame's* narrator is an extension of Rushdie himself, it should be expected that the text would revise the narrative in a way that would be sympathetic towards the women's cause in Pakistan. Grewal notes that 'Rushdie approaches the problem of the position of women through the coalition of the writer and the emigrant that he himself embodies.'[343] Following from this line of thought, this method illustrates that the marginal position occupied by women is parallel to that of the exile. Indeed the representation of women is highly problematic in *Shame*. On the surface one might argue that the female characters are destructive by nature. Grewal argues that this method 'breaks down when the narrative reveals that the writer has powers and abilities that the women do not possess.'[344] Yet, when deconstructing them on a deeper level, one notes the tone of exposition that exists in the representation of the female characters. Ambreen Hai, on the other hand, argues that Rushdie's 'narratives undermine their own (proto)feminist strains by regressing into reifications of stereotypes of gender and sexuality, or odd ways of asserting a beleaguered masculinity, and into replaying surprisingly parochial and patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality.'[345] Certainly the reinforcement of patriarchal stereotypes in the narrator's representation of the female characters as well as taking away the voice of the oppressed has affected Rushdie's attempt 'to see my "male" plot refracted.'[346] This, however, reinforces the dissertation's hypothesis that language and discourse are impacted by the two conflicting ideologies, patriarchy and feminism, and that despite his best efforts to centre women's

[342] Ahmad, 1466.
[343] Grewal, 128.
[344] Ibid.
[345] Hai, 18.
[346] *Shame*, 173.

narrative as a means of empowerment, his use of language demonstrates that this is not the case..

From the beginning of the novel, readers are able to locate the dirtiness of the word 'woman' and we certainly gain this impression in the episode where Mahmoud the Woman is introduced. 'When children spoke of Mahmoud the Woman they meant Mahmoud the Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool.'[347] The fact that the word 'woman' equated to such negative terms plainly shows the hierarchical nature of language used by these characters. In addition, it also exposes the mindset and attitude of the characters toward the female sex in the text. The representation of Bilquis, however, is a different story. Wife to Raza Hyder, Bilquis' story started in India before partition. Daughter to Mahmoud the Woman who owned a movie theatre that catered for Muslims and Hindus, Bilquis is portrayed as a conservative woman who ended up being mentally unstable towards the end of the novel due to a variety of factors including her husband's lack of attention and affection for her. Grewal observes that Bilquis' 'solipsistic words are not understood or decoded, and she lives and dies without overcoming her solipsism.'[348] Deszcz argues that when a male author attempts a feminist reconfiguration in a text (which is clearly what Rushdie is attempting in *Shame*), he should 'combine the following elements: (i) the archaeological task of "excavation", sifting through the strata of hostile patriarchal representations. Also, the revelation of how patriarchal systems victimise and reify women, often with the victims' acquiescence; (ii) a subversive postmodern agenda of discontinuities, paradoxes, and multivocalities; and (iii) emancipatory departures from previous representations of women, encouraging readers to reconstruct gender perspectives and identities.'[349] The representation

[347] Ibid, 62.
[348] Grewal, 129.
[349] Deszcz, 30-1.

of Bilquis Hyder is at times seen as being sympathetic and at others just downright annoying. Thus, if one is to adapt Deszcz's list on the analysis of Bilquis, it can be concluded that the text has managed to utilise some parts of the elements above to reconfigure the portrayal of Bilquis. The victimisation of Bilquis is portrayed when towards the end of the novel she is represented as deteriorating in mind and spirit as the narrator claims that 'things had been chipping away at Bilquis for years, firewinds and pennant-waving knights…not having sons and losing her husband's love.'[350] Caged in a house and abandoned by her husband's desire to climb the political ladder, the depiction of Bilquis highlights the suppression faced by women in Pakistan. This is especially seen in her interactions with her husband. Rushdie has mentioned in an interview that he is 'much fonder of the women in *Shame*, in spite of everything…[and that] the relationships between the sexes in that society…are based upon power.'[351] Here we see power concentrated in the hands of men while the women are kept in the house isolated from the public.

Although Bilquis' story ends with her loss of dignity, Rani Harappa by contrast is one character who has at times inspired awe from the narrator. Needham observes that 'only Rani Harappa seems to escape the specific oppressions that for the other women in *Shame* arise from their definitions within and through a predominantly male culture.'[352] Married and then abandoned physically and emotionally by Iskander Harappa, Rani manages to muster enough self-respect from the narrator as well as readers towards the end of the novel when we find out what the eighteen shawls she knitted depicted. Titled 'The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great', Rani sent all eighteen shawls to her daughter Arjumand as a gift when she was elected. The shawls portray the horrors and cruelties of Isky that Arjumand chooses

[350] *Shame*, 219.
[351] Philips, 38.
[352] Needham, 155.

to ignore. Perhaps one could also argue that sending the shawls to Arjumand at the point where she has entered politics serves as a reminder of how power can seduce one to lose her/his humanity. The narrator, however, comments that 'no two sets of memories ever match, even when their subject is the same.'[353] Here we see the narrator critically analysing historical interpretation of a series of events. Arjumand sees Isky's shameless acts during his reign of power as heroic and revolutionary whereas for Rani, 'the eighteen shawls of memory' speak for themselves.[354] David Hart argues that 'as a passive peripheral actor to these realities, as an absent storyteller, Rani has profound insight into her husband's life.'[355] Indeed, she is an absent storyteller as her story of Isky will only be limited to Arjumand. This is arguably the one single act in the novel by a female character that propagates feminist values as Rani commit a passive act of resistance within the limits Arjumand sets her. Moreover, Rani is the only character in *Shame* who does not become an agent of destruction directed towards the male characters or herself.

Rani's shawls suggest a counter-discourse to the official historical events that take place in the text. In graphic detail, the narrator catalogues each shawl in five pages depicting adultery, murder, election-rigging and cruelty. Although the narrator has the power of description, Rani Humayun (as signed by her using her maiden name when she sent the trunk of shawls to Arjumand) has the power to reveal the atrocities enacted by her husband. Even though the shawls are for Arjumand's eyes only, 'insofar as they touch upon actual but repressed events their effects spill over the boundaries of the book into the world – the actual history of Pakistan, as it were.'[356] Tthis is a highly significant part of the novel that is often missed by

[353] *Shame*, 191.
[354] Ibid, 201.
[355] Hart, 16.
[356] Needham, 156.

some critics of *Shame*. The knowledge of Isky's shameless acts is revealed to readers. Rani's oppression by her husband and culture is highlighted here in the last few scenes of the novel. However, this is not to say that Rani is not depicted by the narrator as a gossipy and nosey woman. Arimbi and Kwary have observed this binary in language where 'when women are talking to each other, it is usually considered as not serious matters or just gossping; however, when men are talking to each other, it is a "real talk" and commonly perceived as serious matters.'[357] Like most of the female characters in *Shame*, Rani Harappa and Bilquis Hyder are stereotypically represented as well versed in gossip and catty dialogues. Ahmad argues that 'both Bilquis and Rani are…quite aside from the insult and neglect they suffer at the hands of their husbands, paltry, shallow creatures themselves, capable of nothing but chirpy gossip.'[358] Yet, from the interview given by Rushdie, one is able to conclude that Rushdie's sympathetic representation of them illustrates that 'women in those kind of societies, Moslem society…are distorted by social repression and (thus) behave very oddly.'[359] Thus, the structural isolation and removal from public life can lead those like Bilquis to lose their mental capacity.

As previously explained, the narrator claims that Omar Khayyam Shakil is the hero and thus the protagonist of the text. However, it is from the beginning that the narrator makes Omar's shortcomings known to the reader, 'dizzy, peripheral, inverted, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?'[360] Rightly so, Omar's character is confronted with the stereotypical nature of a hero. When a novel such as *Shame* calls into question all the fundamental issues pertaining to the text, it is expected of the narrator to hold an

[357] Arimbi and Kwary, 166.
[358] Ahmad, 1467.
[359] Philips, 38.
[360] *Shame*, 25.

ambivalent position when it comes to his representation of Omar Khayyam Shakil. Although claimed to be the hero of the text, Shakil's behaviour and actions deem him as the anti-hero, a coward. Rushdie himself has pointed out that 'the men (in *Shame*) seem to me to be kind of irredeemable.'[361] As previously mentioned earlier in the chapter, the female characters are portrayed in a more ambiguous way. The men, however, have been depicted in a humorous cartoon-like manner. The same can be said of Omar Khayyam Shakil. The narrator seems to be not the least bit impressed with Omar's character. Throughout the novel, he is portrayed as an opportunist, social climber, sycophant and most importantly, a coward. Even towards the end of his life, Omar does not stir sympathy from readers. His death marks redemption for Sufiya as all the shamelessness she encapsulates finally bursts out of her, but not before she exact her revenge on the people who lacked it in the first place.

It can be argued that the narrator and Omar occupy a similar place in history. The narrator is described as an exile character who now lives in London. Omar too borders on two cultures. Having a Western father together with being educated overseas as a physician, Omar's plight is similar to that of *Shame's* narrator. Indeed, the narrator has contemplated the language he uses to relay a story set in the East. Imagining an argument with a local from the East, he notes the criticisms that are likely made against him, 'Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!...We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies?'[362] As an immigrant myself, it is a constant battle when one returns home with a different language to what one has grown up with: this is a familiar experience that many of

[361] Philips, 38.
[362] *Shame*, 28.

us face as our tongues are considered 'forked' in our country of origin as well as our country of destination. Nevertheless, the accusatory language used here resounds with the narrator's exilic position. Dayal argues that 'the rhetoric of suspicion deployed in this novel presents a problem.'[363] This is a problem that the narrator tries to overcome by invoking authenticity in the text through the use of oral storytelling. The fear and suspicion of the West is one of the many ways Eastern culture, especially the culture we see in *Shame*, protects itself from the West's supposedly ungodly influence. The Islamic religion is arguably notorious in spreading anti-West propaganda and rightly so due to the destructive impact of past political interventions. Similarly, Omar's hedonistic lifestyle with Isky Harappa is blamed on many occasions (parodied by the narrator of course) on the West's influence on him whilst he was studying overseas.

This chapter demonstrates that the text's representation of women is ambiguous even if the intention of the author was to highlight the oppressive injustices faced by women. Indeed, women are portrayed in a way where they are the agents of destruction for the male characters. This highlights Rushdie's pattern of reverting strong female characters back to sexist tropes. When dominant societal discourse (norms, values and attitudes) is shaped by patriarchal ideologies, it becomes a challenge – although not impossible – to write outside of the dominant. This is depicted to a certain extent through the characterisation of Rani. In addition, the male characters such as Omar Khayyam Shakil and Raza Hyder have also played a role in the process of political destruction. Moreover, the male characters play a significant role in maintaining control over the women's bodies, minds and spirits to the extent that the oppression of women becomes not just the reality but also the norm. In sustaining the oppression of women, *Shame* depicts a harrowing narrative that still holds true

[363] Dayal, 42.

for many contemporary patriarchal societies. As mentioned earlier, Rushdie's attempt at centering women's stories backfired yet his love for experimenting with language and literature means that his attempts continue with the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. The following chapter's analysis of Rushdie's most controversial novel reveals further development in his characterisation of women and gender.

Chapter 3: Blasphemy, heresy and gender in *The Satanic Verses*

The Satanic Verses is celebrated by many as a masterpiece of both political and aesthetic value. Renowned critic Harold Bloom has expressed his aesthetic delight at the text claiming it to be 'a figurative achievement, a cunning and beautiful structure of rhetorical tropes.'[364] On the other hand, Bloom also seems to ignore the political content embedded in the novel and remarkably argues that by publishing *The Satanic Verses*, 'Rushdie has broken with the motley crew of postcolonialism, the rabblement of lemmings who might have seen him as a martyr according to the Gospel of Foucault.'[365] One can easily credit the text for its literary value, and one can also argue that the subject matter of *The Satanic Verses* is inherently political. The Fatwa is proof of the nature of the politics being discussed in the text. Received on February 14 1989, Rushdie calls the religious edict his 'unfunny Valentine.'[366] Published a few months before the Fatwa, *The Satanic Verses* was well received by critics. Literary experimentation as well as raising concerns for racism, diaspora and religion made the text an engaging reading experience. However, the politics surrounding the Rushdie Affair has arguably overtaken other subjects discussed in the text; in particular, diasporic discourse and the interplay of gender dynamics within the diaspora. Since the recall of the Fatwa in 1998, critics have begun to open the text and appreciate the hybridity of aesthetic and political experimentation through structure, characterisations and imagery. This chapter explores the representation and development of the female characters that has up to this point not been visible in his previous novels. It further illustrates how the interpretation of the modern world including the portrayal of modern women can offer a valuable insight into the workings of contemporary patriarchal and western feminist ideologies.

[364] Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 1.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 11.

It is important to understand why there was such a backlash within the Muslim community around the world in regard to *The Satanic Verses.* The Fatwa, which was imposed by the political and religious leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, forced Rushdie into hiding for almost nine years. The Fatwa encouraged Muslims around the world to murder Rushdie and those involved in the publication of *The Satanic Verses* for publishing a text that, Khomeini and other Muslims feel, degrades both the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. There have been many arguments as to the reason behind the imposition of the Fatwa. Some have said that Rushdie was simply caught in a political cross fire between two countries, the United Kingdom and Iran, where diplomatic relations were already quite strained. The Fatwa was said to be politically aimed at elevating Khomeini's status as a revolutionary and spiritual leader in the Muslim world. This school of thought believed that Khomeini pursued endorsements from Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia. A bounty was offered and attempts at assassinating Rushdie failed. In one episode, a suicide bomber accidentally detonated a bomb in a London hotel where Rushdie had planned to reside. Unfortunately, murder attempts on one of his translators were successful. His Japanese translator, Professor Hitoshi Igarashi was stabbed to death and his Italian and Norwegian translators were seriously injured. Khomeini's Fatwa led to profound consequences for the literary as well as the Muslim community. Questions were raised as to whether a book is worth the sacrifice of people's lives.

In 'The Order of Discourse', Foucault argues that in every society discourse is controlled through three 'systems of exclusion.'[367] One is termed 'forbidden speech'. In mainstream Islamic discourse, it is forbidden to question and challenge Islamic theology and history. As

[367] Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 239.

Foucault points out, 'the prohibitions that surround it very soon reveal its link with desire and with power.'[368] One becomes aware that many Muslims are unwilling to discuss and question their religion because there is a fear of loss of power. The power of Islamic discourse lies with the Imams and Mullahs in each Islamic society. Rushdie's controversial novel has entered into the arena of forbidden speech and this has led to unfortunate and sometimes fatal consequences. *The Satanic Verses* has been termed 'poisoned food for thought' by Ali Masrui, an African Muslim scholar.[369] The text shows that religious doctrine can be full of flaws. The fact that Muslim extremists are intimidated by the text and quite eager to have it banned suggests that there is fear in Institutionalised Islam that what Rushdie has written could possibly decentre their interpretation of the religion. Foucault has observed that 'truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint.'[370] It can be argued that Rushdie has written *The Satanic Verses*, a text that is concerned with the perplexities of truths and untruths, within a space that is both constrained and free. Rushdie has defended his position claiming that 'blasphemy and heresy, far from being the greatest evils, are the methods by which human thought has made its most vital advances.'[371] History has dramatised the process through which change can be achieved and truths developed; first comes controversy, then acts of violence followed by a gradual progress in thought and action.

No one expected Rushdie to need police protection for ten years. When the Fatwa was first issued, Rushdie himself assumed the matter would be resolved in a matter of days if not a week. The media certainly did not take Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa very seriously until the

[368] Ibid, 240.
[369] Hanne, 195.
[370] Foucault, 'From *Truth and Power*', 1668.
[371] Rushdie, 'Messages from the Plague Years', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 214.

book burnings started in England and India in addition to the bounty offered by the Iranian government. [372] This was further exacerbated when Rushdie's case was being seen as possibly affecting negotiations with terrorists holding British hostages in Lebanon. It should be noted that at the time the text was published, the dialogue between Iranian and Western governments was already strained if not hostile. There existed a profound ideological and political conflict between the East and the West and Rushdie's text – or the hysteria surrounding it – added oxygen to it. Iran's diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom and Europe were by then vulnerable. Rushdie's text was used by Islamic extremists as a pretext for furthering the row and forced 'the withdrawal for several months by all the countries of the European community of their ambassadors to Iran.'[373] When looking at *The Satanic Verses* within the context of the Rushdie Affair, it is possible to understand the concerns of both sides.

Islam is the most recent religion of the three Abrahamic traditions. Ranasinha argued that the Affair seems to portray 'the suppression of intellectual debate or reasoned dissent, proving Islam's inability to endure criticism or change.'[374] Of course one must remember that Christianity had its share of extremism in the early days, and still does. However, the Western public is now used to hearing jokes made about Christianity; for example, the parodying of Jesus Christ's life was enjoyed by many in the feature film *The Life of Brian*. Even the controversial *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons* did not spark riots and murder. While the Vatican frowned, Christianity in general has entered into tolerant critical debate in the West with intellectuals, the media and the public. Perhaps this is where Rushdie

[372] 'The Satanic Verses Affair,' *Compass*, screened July 26, 2009 (Perth, WA: ABC TV, 2009), Television Broadcast.
[373] Hanne, 192.
[374] Ruvani Ranasinha, 'The *fatwa* and its Aftermath', in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50.

has positioned himself. It could be argued that he was attempting to drive some progress in the Islamic world. The accusations made by Islamic scholars of Salman Rushdie's work have always centred on the novelist's 'conscious intention of vilifying Islam, in order to ingratiate himself with Westerners and earn a lot of money.'[375] Moreover, these critics have added that 'Islam's spirit of tolerance is steeped in theological and epistemological confidence rather than weakness, in a refined aesthetic vision rather than close-mindednes, in a receptive intellectual agility rather than refractory rejection.'[376] Rushdie himself has said that 'Islamic jurisprudents have stated that the Fatwa contradicts Islamic law, never mind international law.'[377]

Dr Zaki Badawi, a Muslim leader in Britain has said that 'what he (Rushdie) has written is far worse to Muslims than if he had raped one's daughter.'[378] To suggest that writing an offensive novel is worse than committing rape is not simply abhorrent, but it also implies the degraded position a woman has in the eyes of some Muslim leaders. Critics such as Amin Malak and Agha Shahid Ali would disagree. Yet, it is plausible that this is one of Rushdie's intentions; criticising patriarchal interpretation of Islamic laws that privilege men over women, the unjustified requirement of women having to cover in *hijab* from head to foot, stoning and public humiliation of adulterers currently still practised in theocratic countries. This is not to say that Islam is regressive but it is a comment that some aspect of its theology needs to be questioned.[379] And literature, in particular Rushdie's body of literature, allows space for it to be explored and interrogated.

[375] Ibid, 196.
[376] Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 111.
[377] Rushdie, 'Messages from the Plague Years', 233.
[378] Hanne, 195.
[379] Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 400.

Rushdie's writings have always been political and subversive. His treatment of religion, philosophy, literature and history are both confronting and to a large extent, progressive. Nevertheless, his construction of female characters and his representations of the female 'plight' in his novels are ambiguous and even at times quite bizarre. Frequently the anti-Establishment ideologies propagated in his texts are at odds with the patriarchal portrayal of women in his narratives. When deconstructing the female characters in Rushdie's novels, one can even go so far as to argue that his experimentation with language, history and literature is oppressive and 'strangely demeaning.'[380] Although *The Satanic Verses* seeks to challenge established thinking in areas such as religion and history, it has also at times been seen to reinforce stereotypical patriarchal norms and values. It would be useful then to examine the patriarchal values that Rushdie has attempted to undermine to reveal the conflicting ideologies that exist within *The Satanic Verses*.

Salman Rushdie is never shy of controversy. We have seen this discussed in previous chapters with the court case against Indira Gandhi regarding *Midnight's Children* and the banning of *Shame* in Pakistan. When *The Satanic Verses* was published, Rushdie received a backlash so intense and violent from Muslim communities around the world that he would spend the next ten years of his life in hiding and under protection from terrorist groups. In many respects, the debates surrounding the Fatwa had overshadowed important issues such as gender in the text. Spivak claims that the gender issue in *The Satanic Verses* 'is never opened up, never questioned, in this book where so much is called into question, so much reinscribed.'[381] This, however, could be due to the fact that the text garnered many criticisms

[380] Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, 126.
[381] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Reading The Satanic Verses', in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 223.

related to its reasons for inciting a fatal religious edict. Hence, it can be argued that the politics of *The Satanic Verses* overshadowed other issues in the novel. Even feminist groups such as the Southall Black Sisters in Britain did not interrogate the text's portrayal of women, instead focusing the debate on freedom of speech.[382] This sentiment is recognised by other critics such as David Smale who has also observed that 'considering the mass of criticism that surrounds Rushdie's writings, it is somewhat surprising that so few critics choose to examine Rushdie's treatment of gender.'[383] Now with the Fatwa repealed and its memory slowly fading into history, research on the issue of gender in Rushdie's novels has started to increase.[384]

As a contemporary writer, Rushdie has fully utilised social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook as an extra platform to respond to criticisms and interact directly with his readers. In addition, his status as a public figure often conflicts with his role as writer. Rushdie has become, to a certain extent, a cult figure: he is regarded as a celebrity, appearing in talk shows, public forums, acting in movies such as *Bridget Jones' Diary* and even gracing fashion magazine dinner parties. Contemporary writers are in a privileged position to be able to discuss their texts directly with readers through guest lectures at universities, attending and participating in writers' festivals not to mention interviews with mainstream media such

[382] Lisa Appignanesi & Sara Maitland ed., *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), 238.
[383] David Smale, *Salman Rushdie* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 116.
[384] Parashkevova, Vassilena. "I put down roots in the women I love": Migrant Stories/Cities and Cartographic Re-inscriptions of Gender and Sexuality in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses." *Textus* 23, no. 2 (July 2010): 437. Two as yet unpublished postgraduate theses dealt with the treatment of gender in Rushdie's novels. From the University of Hong Kong, Deepali Prasad's 2001 thesis titled 'Women in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, *East, West* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*' examines the stereotypical representations of Indo-Pakistani women and uses Rushdie's novels as case studies. Arguably, Rushdie's writings are often mistaken as having feminist concerns. Prasad's thesis analyses Rushdie's works for feminist as well as patriarchal content. Similarly, Kristiane Rivedal's thesis from the University of Oslo titled 'Female characters and counter-discourse in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*' (2004) suggests that the female characters in *Shame* play a part in resisting the postcolonial counter-discourse and thus argues for the importance of the characterisation of Rushdie's female characters.

as newspapers and magazines. Thus, it can be argued that Rushdie's strong and visible presence in the media has reinforced the ties between author and readers enabling a richer production of meaning of the texts. Scholarly criticisms of his novels would often include articles written by Rushdie himself, defending his position or articulating his intentions especially in regard to *The Satanic Verses*. Added to that, Rushdie is also known to include episodes from his own life experiences in his texts. Rushdie's immersive participation in his writing and the commentary on his work reveals, to a certain extent, the key messages he wants to convey to his readers.

Rushdie's use of the English language is experimental and hybridised into what critic M.D Fletcher has noted as being 'many voices, languages, dialects, intonations and inflections from different countries, races, classes, genders and generations.'[385] This experimentation of hybridising language and culture is very much visible in *The Satanic Verses*. Critic Jacqueline Bardolph is of the same view as Fletcher claiming that *The Satanic Verses*' 'dialogue and the narrative are extremely varied in scope: suburban Indian English, Bombay's mixture of Colonial and Americanese, London West Indian or African, new-generation Asian English, mid-Atlantic show-biz jargon – they all coexist in the pages and merge with the narrative voice.'[386] This 'mongrelisation' of language is of course on par with Rushdie's own philosophy on literature, as he argues that 'the creative process is rather like the processes of a free society. Many attitudes, many views of the world, jostle and conflict within the artist, and from these frictions the spark, the work of art, is born.'[387] His work simultaneously reflects and influences both modern and established values and

[385] D.M Fletcher, 'Introduction,' in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 17.
[386] Jacqueline Bardolph, 'Language is Courage', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 211.
[387] Rushdie, 'Messages from the Plague Years', 215.

attitudes. Indeed, critic Timothy Brennan has also argued that 'Rushdie's fiction is current-events collage, articles clipped from a newspaper…his reliance on the logic of the headlines, and the subordination of character to the allegorical logic of news commentary.'[388] Oddly though, Rushdie's experimentation within every layer of language and literature seems on the surface not to apply to his female characters. Instead, we find characters such as Ayesha the Prophetess and Hind Sufyan seemingly reinforcing patriarchal beliefs about women. Foucault's *The Order of Discourse* observes that discourse is often controlled by societies and is protected from undesirable dangers.[389] Societies tend to circulate old and new discourse and from then on, the process of reselection and redistribution begins. On the other hand, feminist theorists have often shown how language internalises patriarchal thinking. When taking both Foucauldian and feminist perspectives on language and discourse, it can be argued that Rushdie's ambiguous patriarchal construction of women in his novels communicates an irrepressible inclination to revert back to sexist ideology. However, as discussed in previous chapters, Rushdie's portrayal of women is ambiguous and this is evident in the characterisation of female characters in *The Satanic Verses*. Parashkevova too agrees that 'in the greater part of the novel, the defence of the women's causes seems to fail, as reflected, for instance, in the number of female characters who die from various causes.'[390] This failure in portraying positive representations of women is a result of Rushdie's use of language that is socially located within a pervasive patriarchal culture.

The crux of Rushdie's ambiguous construction of women lies in his insistence on including women in his narratives and attempting to challenge patriarchal stereotypes. This is already

[388] Timothy Brennan, 'The Cultural Politics of Rushdie Criticism: All or Nothing', in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K Hall & Co., 1999), 114.
[389] Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', 239.
[390] Parashkevova, 438.

demonstrated in the previous chapter analysis of *Shame*. Readers are frequently introduced to strong female characters who are more often than not intelligent and play an important (albeit peripheral) role in the life of the protagonist. This sentiment is echoed by Parashkevova who argued that 'the novel's female characters embody ideas that dangerously seduce or even hold the protagonists captive.'[391] For example, the actor Gibreel Farishta's married lover, Rekha Merchant is constructed to be a powerful woman, 'she had a strong personality, drank *like a fish* from Lalique crystal and hung her hat *shameless* on a Chola Natraj and knew what she wanted and how to get it, fast.'[392] But when Gibreel left her for another woman, she took her own life by jumping off her apartment building. In addition, she left a note giving clear indication that her affair with Gibreel existed in order to tarnish his reputation. Here, one is tempted to highlight the popular sexist quote by William Congreve in which he claims, 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'[393] Arguably, Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is littered with minor female characters who are often constructed as being powerful and pro-feminist but ultimately destructive and, in Rekha Merchant's case, detrimental to their own lives. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that a writer can never fully control how meanings are created, 'the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses.'[394] And because the structure of language reflects a societal discourse that is gendered, Rushdie's representation of women ultimately falls within the binary of inferior and superior, the women being inferior and the men being superior. This pattern is consistent with *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* as demonstrated in the last two chapters. Critic Ambreen Hai is also conscious of this pattern.

[391] Ibid.
[392] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Berkshire: Vintage, 2006), 14.
[393] William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride: A Tragedy* (London: British Library, 1797), 49.
[394] Derrida, 'From *Of Grammatology*', 1825.

In her article titled '"Marching In from the Peripheries": Rushdie's Feminised Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism', Hai argues that the 'feminist/revisionist impulse in Rushdie is countered by another quite contradictory though changing one. His narratives undermine their own (proto)feminist strains by regressing (perhaps because of a concurrent anxiety about feminisation/ emasculation) into reifications of stereotypes of gender and sexuality, or odd ways of asserting a beleaguered masculinity, and into replaying surprisingly parochial and patriarchal discourses of gender and sexuality.'[395] Hai's observation goes to show that the inconsistencies in Rushdie's construction of his female protagonists mark the uncomfortable meeting place of patriarchal and anti-patriarchal sentiments found in *The Satanic Verses* and his other novels. It is also interesting to note that Hai has placed the reasoning behind this ambivalence on Rushdie's 'anxiety about feminisation/ emasculation.'[396] Whether Rushdie is aware of this anxiety is something to be considered.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is renowned for its controversies. One of the many reasons for the Fatwa is Rushdie's portrayal of the flawed prophet Mahound which echoes that of Islam's much-revered Prophet Muhammad. The Fatwa also took issue with the portrayal of Muhammad's wives in the novel. In an episode in Jahilia that drew various criticisms from the public and academic spheres for blaspheming Muhammad's wives, Rushdie exposes the possessive nature of men when it comes to women. The text constructs two opposite worlds: Mahound's harem and the brothel in Jahilia called The Curtain. In this section, Rushdie seems to be operating on two levels. Firstly, he has politicised the issue of gender by attempting to challenge Islam's justification of polygamy especially for the prophet Muhammad. Islamic history has claimed that the reason Muhammad had accumulated

[395] Ambreen Hai, 'Marching in from the Peripheries: Rushdie's Feminised Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism', in *Critical Essays on Salman Rushdie*, ed. M. Keith Booker (New York: G.K Hall & Co, 1999), 18.
[396] Ibid.

twelve wives was because most of them became widows after wars with other Arab tribes. By marrying the widows, Muhammad was allegedly protecting them from a culture that places women in an inferior if not unsafe position particularly if they are divorced or widowed. Political reasons were also cited as being a factor since in signing treaties with other Arab tribes, one needed to marry into that particular tribe. In the text, even the character of Baal defends Mahound for having 12 wives claiming, 'if families offer him brides and he refuses he creates enemies, - and besides, he's a special man and one can see the argument for special dispensations.'[397] Secondly, Rushdie is also doing his best to depict the reality of women's socio-cultural and economic status in 610 A.D Middle East, and henceforth revealing the oppressive nature of men's entrenched control of a woman's present and future.

Yet, one could argue that Rushdie seems to be quite ambivalent in the portrayal of his female characters. His article 'In Good Faith' explains his intention of portraying the dichotomy of the harem and the brothel. He argues that the harem and the brothel '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.'[398] He goes further, asserting that this dichotomy points towards the 'extent to which sexual relations have to do with possessions.'[399] The concept of women as possessions is not new. History has demonstrated that women have occupied two roles in society: the good girl and the bad girl. The good girl, or as Victorian culture would label her, the 'angel of the house', is often represented as virginal, obedient and is placed on a pedestal for protection and reverence. The bad girl is one that misbehaves, does not conform to patriarchal values and expectations of a woman. This finds her placed even further on the margins of society. These 'bad girl' characters exist

[397] Rushdie, *Verses*, 386.
[398] Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', 401.
[399] Ibid.

in canonical literature such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.[400] The Madonna/whore binary is often enforced in contemporary literature as we have observed in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Through a gendered lens, one can see that this form of representation of women by men ensures that they are within the control of patriarchy.

By using the names of Mahound's wives in the brothel to arouse the Jahilian clients, it illustrates the male fantasy of attempting to penetrate the sacred, the innate curiosity aroused by something that is forbidden as well as hidden. Cundy, however, problematises Rushdie's construction of women observing that 'attempts to address ideas of submission and domination in *The Satanic Verses*...falter on the rocks of its own inability to disentangle the fantasies of the whores from those of Baal and the author himself sufficiently to make its arguments clear.'[401] Rushdie is seeking to portray women in a positive light. Yet, his utilising of a language that is profoundly patriarchal has led to confusion and contradiction. Feminist critic, Laura Mulvey has argued that women 'stand in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.'[402] Furthermore, it is the one who makes and defines meanings who is in control. While Rushdie portrays very strong female characters in his text, one sees that in the final analysis they are almost always portrayed as destructive figures. For example, the character of Hind Sufyan develops from being a meek obedient wife to a fully-rounded (physically and emotionally) matriarch whose conservative ideas lead to the destruction of her family.[403] This is the reality in which Rushdie places

[400] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009). Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Q.D Leavis (Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1966).
[401] Cundy, 'Rushdie's Women,' 13.
[402] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001), 2182.
[403] Rushdie, *Verses*, 245-53.

women of strong mind and character. As demonstrated in previous chapters, this is a pattern that Rushdie utilises: his attempt at experimenting with gender fails yet again as a result of his use of language that Cixous describes as 'by its structure and history ha[ving] been subject to a law that is patrilinear, therefore masculine.'[404]

In another episode, the character of Ayesha the Prophetess can be read as both feminist and sexist. The story of Ayesha is similar to that of Moses from the *Bible* in that she leads villagers from Titlipur to believe that she will take them on a pilgrimage to Mecca by foot from India. Ayesha's naked but butterfly-clad appearance goes hand in hand with her divine-sounding omniscient dialogue as she explains to the village head of Titlipur, Sarpanch Muhammad Din, the pilgrimage on which the Archangel Gibreel has ordered her to lead the village:

> We will walk two hundred miles, and when we reach the shores of the sea, we will put our feet into the foam, and the waters will open for us. The waves shall be parted, and we shall walk across the ocean-floor to Mecca.[405]

Here, we see Rushdie interrogating and challenging the notion of institutionalised religion's historical preference for delivering its revelations to men instead of women. Hai argues that Rushdie's 'feminist/revisionist impulse' is highlighted by his 'continual attempt to protest and revise the misogynistic construction of women not only in Islam but also in the Judeo-Christian tradition…(and) to transform female representation by offering alternative possibilities.'[406] One can see that this is an effective form of interrogating religious traditions as well as experimenting with historical narratives. This is typical of Rushdie. On the other hand, the narrative structure of Ayesha is constructed in a way that makes her destructive to society. This, too, is typical of Rushdie. Ayesha's pilgrimage leads to the drowning of the

[404] Helene Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La jeune née* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1975), 130-131.
[405] Ibid, 236.
[406] Hai, 38.

villagers of Titlipur and this end can easily be interpreted as Rushdie reverting back to reinforcing the patriarchal fear of a woman in power that will inevitably destroy society. Spivak argues that 'one of the most interesting features about much of Rushdie's work is his anxiety to write woman into the narrative of history. Here again we have to record an honourable failure.'[407] Interestingly enough, Rushdie seems to be aware that women's place in history is absent especially in theological history. Hence, Rushdie's insistence in including women into history is, as Hai mentions, an attempt by him to not simply revise Islamic history but to use 'their marginality as…a trope that he can appropriate for, or that can be comparable to, his own construction of postcolonial artistic identity.'[408] Some may view Rushdie's construction of them as merely peripheral characters who at best only act as appendages to the male plot.

Furthermore, in the Ayesha episode, readers are first introduced to the orphan prophetess in a highly eroticised manner. Her first encounter with the wealthy landlord, the zamindar Mirza Saeed is constructed with sexualised and bestial imagery. As Ayesha breakfasts on butterflies that were magically landing on her palm, her sari became loose and revealed 'her small breasts to the gaze of the transfixed zamindar.'[409] In that instance the zamindar begins to lust after her. This episode along with many other episodes sexualises the female characters in *The Satanic Verses* and reveals the patriarchal belief that sexuality equates to power and hence the ruination of the man. Another example is the character of the female hijacker Tavleen with the grenades attached to the naked 'arsenal of her body' being described as 'extra breasts nestling in her cleavage.'[410] Mann has argued that the 'female

[407] Spivak, 223.
[408] Hai, 17.
[409] Rushdie, *Verses*, 219.
[410] Ibid, 81.

characters overwhelmingly re-enact stereotypical male typologies of women…Rushdie goes too far in the opposite direction, casting his female characters as eroticised bodies and yet…conferring upon them a peripheral role in a largely male-centred narrative.'[411] Readers are also constantly reminded of Ayesha's 'distracted beauty and her air of staring into another world' and how she is in many ways 'the object of many young men's desires.'[412] One can see that there exists a pattern in Rushdie's writing whereby beauty and sexuality is perceived to be not just powerful and eroticised but dangerous and destructive as seen in chapter two's analysis of *Shame*. Cundy too agreed that, '*The Satanic Verses* shows Rushdie caught once again between the threat and the promise that women simultaneously seem to embody for him…beauty and destructiveness, fear and desire appear simultaneously.'[413] Added to that, it can be argued that Rushdie's attempt at feminist revisions has instead reinforced the orientalist notion of the dangerous but erotic and exotic Eastern woman in his portrayal of Ayesha and the prostitutes in Jahilia. Critic Srinivas Aravamudan has observed that 'if the episodes of…the Meccan brothel show Islam as anti-feminist, the strong characters of Ayesha…Zeeny Vakil, and Mishal Sufyan…indicate that there is no dearth of Muslim women portrayed as much more resilient than their male contemporaries.'[414] Indeed Ayesha, Zeeny Vakil and Mishal Sufyan are powerful minor characters who play significant yet supplementary roles in the two protagonists' lives, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha. Ayesha and Mishal Sufyan are both constructed to be independent and strong-minded characters. Ayesha's independence and leadership (like that of Lady Macbeth's ambitions for her husband) leads to the tragic end of a whole village. However, Ayesha's story continued after the drowning of the whole village when Mirza Saeed, in his last days,

[411] Harveen Sachveda Mann, '"Being borne across": Translation and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses,*' *Criticism* 37, 2 (Spring 1995) 288-9.
[412] Rushdie, *Verses*, 221.
[413] Cundy, *Rushdie*, 78.
[414] Srinivas Aravamudan, 'Being God's Postman is no Fun: Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. D.M Fletcher (Amsterdam: Radopi, 1994), 198.

dreamt that the waters did part for the pilgrims and Ayesha walked with them on the bed of the ocean floor to Mecca. This ending to Ayesha's narrative suggests that Rushdie's insistence on ambiguously representing his characters to the extent of questioning the realities and illusions, especially that concerning Ayesha's end, avoids conclusions drawn on the nature of character construction.

In regard to Mishal Sufyan and Zeeny Vakil, it is safe to conclude that these two characters are the only two who do not revert to patriarchal gender stereotypes. They shall be discussed later in this chapter. Moreover, both characters display strong feminist elements. Mishal Sufyan is a black belt expert who participated in the racist street fights and defies her parents and culture by moving in with her boyfriend. At her parents' death, she rebuilds and manages the café owned by them. Zeeny Vakil is a surgeon, writer and art critic who in the end helped Chamcha to reconcile with his father and his cultural identity. She harbours ideas such as artistic eclecticism, political secularism and multiculturalism. Both Mishal and Zeeny represent the diasporic and hybridised ideology advocated by Rushdie. Having said that, some critics have argued that Zeeny's character is seen to be two dimensional as Rushdie has failed to explore how she 'arrives at such an enviable flexibility…the narrative simply casts her as Chamcha's female instructor, one who, through her sexual appeal, reintroduces him to the hybrid charms of secular India.'[415] Zeeny's perfect *Binaca* smile parallels her (and to an extent Rushdie's) perfect philosophy of flexibility and hybridity. According to the narrator, Zeeny is a modern Indian woman, 'whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethic of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-

[415] Cundy, 'Rushdie's Women', 17. Mann, 'Being borne across,' 289.

best-and-leave-the-rest.'[416] Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* advocates the beauty of plurality and multiplicity and fears absolutism. In this respect, he has been successful. Rushdie himself claims that 'by using what is old, and adding to it some new thing of our own, we make what is new. In *The Satanic Verses*, I tried to answer the question, how does newness enter the world?'[417] Rushdie is aware that life and the ideologies that shape life are not black and white. Hence, the ambiguities we see reflected in the text are arguably a reflection on life where humanity is constantly at battle with conflicting ideologies in our language, discourse, politics and religion. Yet, as seen in the analysis of Ayesha, the women in his texts often revert back to patriarchal tropes or are potrayed ambiguously as seen in the analysis of Ayesha.

As a novel that called into question every aspect of literature and life, *The Satanic Verses* successfully integrates ideas of multi-isms and tolerance. Ironically enough when one takes the Fatwa into consideration, it is Rushdie's most optimistic work when compared to the likes of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. Yet, one can argue that the postmodern text is often ambiguous in the meanings it creates and messages it conveys. This we can certainly find in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. On the face of it, Salman Rushdie is guilty of reinforcing sexist norms, values and attitudes. However, he is also responsible for challenging sexist stereotypes as we have seen in the characters of Ayesha, Mishal and Zeeny. Some feminist critics such as hooks have suggested ways of getting beyond patriarchy.[418] This will most certainly come with time as language evolves and changes. The flexibility and fluidity of language allows for old and new ideologies to be in a constant state of flux. Globalisation

[416] Rushdie, *Verses*, 52.
[417] Salman Rushdie, 'Influence', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 66.

[418] hooks, *Talking Back*, 58.

has played a vital role and it will continue to do so as language begins to change, reshape and mould to differing ideologies and value systems.

Vijay Mishra has noted that when it comes to gender relations in the history of diaspora, it has been 'repositioned… and women begin to occupy a different, though not necessarily more equitable, kind of space.'[419] The position of women through migration has arguably shifted to ambiguous ground. This we see especially in the case of Rushdie's novels and in particular, *The Satanic Verses*. Often at the centre of contentious debates, diaspora has different meanings. It has mainly been the definition of diaspora that has academia rife with, at times, heated discussions. Roger Brubakers is well aware of the problem in the method of approaching the study of diaspora claiming that 'we should not, as analysts, prejudge the outcome of such struggles by imposing groupness through definitional fiat.'[420] Indeed, diasporic experience is proven to be different for many people. The classic Jewish diaspora may be similar to contemporary diaspora faced by Indians, Polish and Singaporeans but only in the sense of crossing states or borders through migration. In the early twenty-first century, the reason for migration within and outside of one's country of origin varies from seeking asylum to economic betterment. Some critics such as Mishra will argue that one highlighting characteristic of diaspora is that 'they do not, as a general rule, return' home.[421] Others such as William Safran take into account the Jewish experience and argue that the idea of home is understood as the true home and thus there is a sense that there will be an eventual return to their home.[422] The idea of home is one that concerns Rushdie. Although this has been dealt with on a smaller scale in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, the concept of a 'damaged'

[419] Mishra, 74.
[420] Roger Brubakers, 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, (2005): 13.
[421] Mishra, 64.
[422] Safran, 83. It should be noted that Safran has, since this publication, revised some of his ideas related to diaspora.

home is profoundly explored in his later novels starting with *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie's exploration of the diaspora in *The Satanic Verses* reinforces the idea that nothing in this world is stable. The movement of people across borders implies that values, beliefs and traditions are in a constant state of flux and that certainty is a luxury that an increasingly globalised world cannot afford.

The diasporic narratives tend to find it challenging to define personal and cultural identities. The term 'diaspora' comes from the Greek word *speirein* which 'suggests an anticipation of root-taking and eventual growth.'[423] Certainly when migrating to a foreign country one intends to put roots into place but how could one feel at home in a foreign land when one is aware that home and identity is elsewhere? Hence, the concept of 'home' has become, as Rushdie puts it, 'a scattered, damaged, various concept in our present travails.'[424] The term 'home' now is displaced and 'signals a shift away from homogenous nation-states based on the ideology of assimilation to a much more fluid and contradictory definition of nations as a multiplicity of diasporic identities.'[425] Most of Rushdie's characters in *The Satanic Verses* are migrants thus representing to readers the various effects globalisation and displacement has had on different groups and individuals. In addition, diasporic narratives can often be stories of people who in reality do not fit 'within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse.'[426] Thus, by placing the focus on the migrant's view of the world, Rushdie is inevitably giving readers another interpretation of the world, that is, 'to see the world anew'.[427]

[423] Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.
[424] Salman Rushdie, *East, West* (London: Vintage, 1995), 93.
[425] Mishra, 64.
[426] Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (California: Stanford University, 1994), 139.
[427] Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', 393.

The concept of home for many migrants has become quite problematic. Mishra has observed that 'the idea of "home" has indeed become a "damaged" concept.'[428] For first generation migrants especially, breaking away from one's roots, one's point of origin creates a sort of 'psychic trauma' to the body.[429] The loss of cultural and often national identity displaces a migrant's own personal identity. Through movement across borders, it can be argued that one's values, traditions and beliefs too begin to shift and occupy foreign and more importantly, ambiguous ground. Certainly, the majority of migrants do create enclaves in their new home, thus transplanting their culture to secure the continuation of their traditions and values. Although enclaves do not necessarily propagate the sort of hybridity that Rushdie celebrates, it does perpetuate a community mindset resounding in support and security of its traditions and beliefs and thus relieves the anxiety of losing one's roots in the first place. This is certainly demonstrated in the representation of the Sufyan family in terms of where they lived. Hence, the idea of home becomes fractured to a certain extent. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie writes of his migrant condition claiming that 'it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.'[430] Like a time capsule that aims to preserve the past, diasporic narratives tell the story of a home that is lost and preserved in time.

Diasporic narratives help writers such as Rushdie to reclaim this 'damaged' home. The process of looking back towards homeland and reconciling with our roots, our history and identity, of where we used to belong, is one of necessity. Accounting for it being 'haunted by some sense of loss', writing on diaspora allows Rushdie the opportunity of 'finding new

[428] Mishra, 63.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 9.

angles at which to enter reality.'[431] As mentioned in the introduction, the fixation in diasporic narratives to look to the past as a manner of finding reconciliation with the present is paralleled with Lacan's *objet petit a*. In taking a Lacanian perspective, one can argue that the process of reclaiming one's childhood through memories indicates one's attempt to recapture the lost object of desire. The lost object of desire being the sense of belonging, personal and cultural identity that one loses when crossing geographical and cultural boundaries. Although in reality the lost object of desire relates back to our Imaginary Order, certain memories are linked to this preverbal stage where we feel secure and at one with our mother or in Rushdie's case the mother being India. Therefore, in adapting a Lacanian perspective, Rushdie's portrayal of diasporic narratives is arguably an attempt to return back to the Imaginary Order and reclaim the lost object of desire. In the case of the diaspora, the desire is to be at home, to feel secure and to belong. This we see in Hind Sufyan as she immerses herself in Bollywod gossip and Hindi television series. In keeping the cultural symbols close, Hind Sufyan maintains the connection to her roots.[432] When applying a Lacanian lens to the character of Hind Sufyan, one observes that the cultural symbols transport her to a time away from her present reality (Symbolic Order) and that is, according to Lacan, the true object of desire.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is what the author himself has called, 'a love-song to our mongrel selves.'[433] A story written by a migrant for migrants around the world. It is a story that reflects the conditions of the diasporic communities within a globalised context. Although part of the text is set in London, the diasporic experience is one that resonates with many around the world. Rushdie attempts to present to readers a diverse range of diasporic

[431] Ibid, 10-15.
[432] Rushdie, *Satanic Verses,* 250.
[433] Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', *Imaginary Homelands*, 394.

narratives including raising the issue of the 'migrant women's concern'.[434] Indeed, as a migrant, Hind Sufyan is predisposed to transformation and reconstruction of personal, cultural and gender identity. Gender politics, in particular, is shifted to make way for Hind the capitalistic breadwinner, the proud owner of Shaandaar Cafe and B&B, and her husband her employee. Safran argues that 'the embourgeoisement of the Indian diaspora has also meant changes for the status of women as they benefit from greater gender equality while trying, at the same time, to maintain as much of the homeland culture as possible in their foreign surroundings.'[435] Here, we can see that Safran's assessment of the Indian diaspora is fitting for Hind. Being in the position of migrant has led to a socio-economic change in gender dynamics within the Sufyan family since it enables her to gain a better status in society by allowing her to own and run a business that celebrates one of Indian culture's best form of import: Indian cuisine. However, this does not necessarily mean that Hind is happy with this change. Hind longs to be back in her own native country, 'where now was the city she knew? Where the village of her youth and the green waterways of home? The customs around which she had built her life were lost, too, or at least hard to find.'[436] And so, obvious economic necessity and her husband's involvement with politics compelled her to remain on the foreign soil of London. To make up for the lack of proximity with her homeland, Hind resorts to 'endless supply of Bengali and Hindi movies on VCR through which (along with her ever-increasing hoard of Indian movie magazines) she could stay in touch with events in the "real world."'[437] The 'real world' of course refers to her *desh*, her country. Certainly, here we see Rushdie attempting to dramatise the reality of a migrant's narrative in a satirical tone with a hint of sexism. Hind's interest for the 'real world' in her country is portrayed as

[434] Joel Kuortti, '*The Satanic Verses*: "To be born again, first you have to die"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 128.
[435] William Safran, Ajaya Kumar and Brij V. Lal, 'Indian Diaspora in Transnational Contexts: An Introduction', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 1 (2008), 3, doi: 10.1080/07256860701759907.
[436] Rushdie, *Verses*, 249.
[437] Ibid, 250-1.

superficial and related to Bollywood or film stars gossip. Here, too, we see Foucault's notion of discourse in action. Embedded within language and discourse are many ideologies: in this instance it is a sexist ideology.

Indeed, Hind can be regarded as a representation of a group of migrants who despised the foreign country they have been forced to place roots in. Mishra has also observed that 'large sections of the diaspora wish to retain this nostalgic definition of the self and cling to "millenarian" narratives of self-empowerment in which only the untranslated can recapture a lost harmony but, paradoxically, the desire to retain a pristine sense of the past is only possible through the technologies of mechanical reproduction such as cassette tapes, films, and so on.'[438] For Hind, the VCRs and Indian magazines symbolise her last attempt at keeping in touch with her cultural and personal identity. London, for her, is a 'demon city in which anything could happen.'[439] In keeping with one of the main themes of the novel, Hind does not survive her diasporic narrative. Unable to deal with the conflicting and shifting nature of diaspora and secularism, Hind is led to her destruction, which is ironically perpetrated by racist hooligans. Rushdie once said that 'to experience any form of migration is to get a lesson in the importance of tolerating others' points of view.'[440] Hind, like Gibreel, could not tolerate the viewpoint of others. Their narratives are often constrained by their absolutist ideologies, and their characters are defined as being 'untranslated, continuous, non-hybrid.'[441] It can also be said that like Rekha Merchant, Hind's stubbornness against tolerance, too, becomes her Achilles heel.

[438] Mishra, 69.
[439] Rushdie, *Verses*, 250.
[440] Salman Rushdie, Preface to *On Writing and Politics: 1967-1983*, ed. Gunter Grass (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), xiii.
[441] Kuortti, 132.

It is interesting to note that the characterisation of Hind is arguably similar to that of Naseem Aziz or Mother Reverend in *Midnight's Children*. Both characters begin their story as beautiful blushing brides and doting wives before they begin to 'resemble the wide rolling land mass itself' or to put it simply, they were objectified for putting on weight.[442] Both characters also have passive intellectual husbands who are passionate in political movements much to the dismay of their wives. Muhammad Sufyan and Dr Aadam Aziz bear similar strategies in the way they choose not to communicate with their wives. This is not to say that Rushdie is recycling characters. Indeed, this is an observation of a generation that Rushdie is familiar with. This is the same generation in which, as described in chapter one, modern post-Independent India with secular ideas is pushing the boundaries of tradition. The role of a traditional but modern Indian woman is not simply to be a passive and devoted wife, it has reached out to include being a strong, assertive but heterosexual woman within the confines of tradition.[443] Thus, the modern Indian woman such as Hind is obliged to take control of her family's life and future when she senses danger (that being her husband's sudden interest in and involvement with the Communist Party) by moving them to post-war England. Referring to the Communist Party as 'ideological witchcraft', she blames her husband for their move to England, claiming that 'she had had to endure all the privations and humiliations of the process of immigration; and on account of this diabolism of his that she was stuck forever in this England.'[444] Even though Hind feels stuck in England, one must take note of the bravery and resilience that compelled her to move her family across borders to a foreign country where language, culture, values and traditions are all confrontations and challenges that a village girl from Dhaka would have to face. Like Reverend Mother too, Hind's characterisation is one of complexity and ambiguity. It can be argued that Rushdie

[442] Rushdie, *Verses*, 246.
[443] Gopinath, 469.
[444] Ibid, 248.

invokes both ideas of feminism and sexism in the one character to prevent the stereotyping of Hind in order to destabilise the construction of the character. Brian Finney too recognises this Rushdean strategy by arguing that 'uncertainty is the only unchanging certainty that Rushdie perversely posits in the novel.'[445] This ambiguity in gender discourse is not only a pattern seen in the text but it parallels the political and religious ambiguities reflected strongly in *The Satanic Verses*.

As we have seen, the diasporic experience has not only shifted gender roles for migrant families, but ideas on sexuality and religion have also shifted to unstable ground. Taking his example from *The Satanic Verses*, Mishra has observed that 'the space of the Shaandaar Café B&B becomes the space of new labour relations between husband and wife but also new forms of sexuality.'[446] Being a second generation migrant, Mishal Sufyan, daughter to Hind and Muhammad Sufyan, enters into a sexual relationship with another second generation migrant Hanif Johnson and falls pregnant as a result of it. Family drama ensues when her mother finds out about the affair through her jealous sister Anahita. Hind 'went at Mishal with a kitchen knife and her daughter responded by unleashing a painful series of kicks and jabs, self-defence only.'[447] Mishal then leaves home to continue living with her boyfriend. Mishal's actions, from her mother's perspective, are seen to be unorthodox and more importantly, prohibited in Islam. However, due to Mishal's position as a second generation migrant living in a liberal country, she has the luxury of transgressing her cultural roots to fit her lifestyle albeit to the extent that it becomes detrimental to her relationship with her parents. One can argue that had the circumstances been different and were she living

[445] Brian Finney, 'Demonizing Discourse in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', in *Salman Rushdie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 193.
[446] Vijay Mishra, *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 228.
[447] Rushdie, *Verses*, 290.

in Bangladesh where religious values and traditions are insulated and followed meticulously, her actions may not have been tolerated by the community.

Religion plays a strong role in the transplanted community. It can become to a large extent the glue that holds the community together. Like transplanted culture, transplanted religion can, at times, become stricter than its original place of conception. It can be argued that this movement towards the far right is due to a fear that the new land will corrupt the religious followers with its foreign liberal ideas. Moreover, transplanted religions would prefer to maintain a tight control over their followers to ensure communal obedience. Some migrants choose to stay out of these transplanted communities. Saladin Chamcha is arguably one of them. But others such as the Sufyan family rely on it for commercial reasons. The Shandaar Café and B&B hosts food and lodgers that are both foreign to England. Hence, Mishal Sufyan's actions would have been reprimanded by the community and would have brought shame onto the family. Wearing provocative clothes 'with yards of midriff showing between shortie tank-top and 501s,' falling pregnant out of wedlock as well as living with a man who is not considered to be your blood relative is considered *haram* or prohibited under Isamic practices.[448] That she chooses to continue to do so demonstrates the fluidity of the diasporic experience. In addition, when in a foreign land there exists a choice of whether one should participate in community life. Saladin Chamcha and Mishal Sufyan both choose not to do so.

The character of Mishal is one that critics such as Harveen Mann and Ambreen Hai approve as being Rushdie's 'own avowed feminism' in portraying the 'daughters of the new

[448] Ibid, 271.

generation…(who) are sexually triumphantly independent.'[449] Her character has been constructed in such a way as to advocate the importance of flexibility and hybridity to survive in a diasporic-filled world. A star in Jumpy Joshi's martial arts class as well as a fashion provocateur with her spiky rainbow coloured hair, Mishal Sufyan is a force to be reckoned with in the novel. Her bravery is reflected in various instances including the episode where she first meets an enormous and dangerously angry metamorphosed Chamcha whilst her boyfriend, Hanif Johnson, stays on the periphery ('mutant Saladin only snorted, yellow and black, and Hanif backed quickly away').[450] Still a teenager at the age of seventeen, Mishal cannot appreciate nor feel any affiliation to her parents' country of birth declaring that 'Bangladesh in't nothing to me.'[451] At a young age, cultural identity did not have much significance to her and instead she recognises and identifies herself to be purely British. Moreover, this also suggests that second generation migrants integrate better into the new foreign soil since growing up in England would have resulted in a close affinity to the land they grew up in. Thus, the concept of home is not so much damaged in Mishal's case. Once roots are planted, the trauma of migration does seem to ease. Rushdie's construction of Mishal's libertarian character reinforces the overall feminist notion of egalitarianism. Her participation in the racial street fight which ended in the demise of her parents as well as her successful attempt at rebuilding the burned down Shaandaar Café and turning it into a full-time hotel demonstrates her resilience and determination. Indeed, Rushdie has constructed Mishal Sufyan to be the complete opposite of her mother. Whilst Hind Sufyan clings desperately to the patriarchal values of her homeland, Mishal continues to live her life pursuing what she loves including asking Hanif to marry her. Gayatri Spivak concluded that Rushdie's female characters are 'an honourable failure' but that a failed

[449] Hai, 38-39. Mann, 12.
[450] Rushdie, *Verses*, 294.
[451] Ibid, 259.

representation is more interesting than a successful one[452]. By portraying elements of feminist and patriarchal ideologies in his characters, Rushdie brings to the surface the ambiguous and conflicting nature of language.

Ultimately, *The Satanic Verses* is a text about migrants, for migrants. Joel Kuortti observes that 'Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was by the time of its publication the fullest and most ambitious attempt at voicing migrant issues.'[453] The development and the continual production of migrant or diasporic narratives is arguably a literary response to globalisation and mass migration. In *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie illustrates how migration has affected groups and individuals in characters such as Otto Cone, Hind Sufyan and Saladin Chamcha. The concept of 'home' implies something different to each of these characters due to the conflicting and problematic nature of their past and the way they are treated in their present migrant circumstances. Migration has, to some extent, resulted in the displacement of an individual's cultural and personal identity and this is further interrogated in chapter four. Although the realities of the migrant condition may seem confronting and challenging, *The Satanic Verses* endorses strongly the conflicts arising from 'union-by-hybridisation'[454] and argues that only through the process of a mixing and matching of various cultures can newness enter the world. Moreover, the text seems to suggest that the overpowering influence of mass migration and cultural hybridity leads one to interrogate the relevance of nationalism in a globalised world.

Observing the gender discourse in the text reveals that the migrant woman is one who challenges as well as move with change. The enduring migrant woman inculcates feminist

[452] Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (Oxon: Psychology Press, 1993), 251.
[453] Kuortti,128.
[454] Rushdie, *Verses*, 319.

notions in a patriarchal world. The migrant experience is fluid and subject to change. The survival of Mishal Sufyan's character is due to her open-mindedness to embrace hybridity and difference. Hind Sufyan, on the other hand, perishes for succumbing to parochialism and puritanism. Migration is a condition of a globalised world and in order to survive in an ever-changing world, the text suggests that society must learn to be flexible and adaptable to changing norms, evolving values and beliefs. This is the lesson that diasporic narratives such as those told in *The Satanic Verses* are attempting to convey.

The ending of *The Satanic Verses* marks a turning point in Rushdie's body of work. The first three of Rushdie's novels, *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* deal with apocalyptic endings and tend to leave readers with a sense of despair and perhaps even slightly depressed. This is arguably not the case for *The Satanic Verses*. It is Rushdie's first novel that deals with reconciliation, though not so much a straightforward resolution. Arguably, this approach to a non-apocalyptic ending is due to his own personal experience with his father.[455] This is discussed later in this chapter. Insisting on it being a novel that is a 'love-song to our mongrel selves', the ending reconciles the concept of home for migrants.[456] Like Rushdie, the flawed Chamcha returns to Bombay in an effort to reconcile with his estranged dying father. The Bollywood star Gibreel Farishta, however, is driven mad and suicidal by his immovable and puritanical visions and beliefs in the face of a changing diasporic world. The remainder of this chapter will explore how the women in *The Satanic Verses*, in particular Zeeny Vakil and Allie Cone, play a part in the reconciliation and destruction of Chamcha and Farishta respectively. The reconciliation of Chamcha and the destruction of Farishta seem, on the surface, to be aided by Vakil and Cone. This may have contributed to

[455] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton,* 88.
[456] Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', 394.

Gayatri Spivak's overall assessment of the female characters in the novel as being 'an honourable failure.'[457] Yet, a deeper analysis shows that the language used by Rushdie places the women in an ambiguous position in the text thus not necessarily destructive to the male characters. Certainly, the use of Vakil and Cone as key components in the reconciliation of the two protagonists places the text in an ambivalent position in regard to Rushdie's treatment of his female characters. Zeeny Vakil helps Chamcha to reconcile with his father and to an extent his culture and his past whereas Allie Cone's destructive relationship with Farishta pushes him to the brink of mental ruination leading to his eventual suicide. An analysis of the two relationships demonstrates how the two female characters contribute to Rushdie's overall agenda: invoking ambiguities to destabilise and decentre truths.

One could argue that the beginning of the novel marks a certain kind of apocalypse. Similar to *The Tempest* where the tension of a climax opens the play, *The Satanic Verses'* apocalyptic beginning opens with a plane explosion and two survivors falling out of the sky.[458] And with that the premise of the novel begins with Rushdie's portrayal of the two protagonists, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, in binary roles: good and evil. This is achieved through metamorphosis when Farishta acquires a halo whilst Saladin takes on a devil-like form and is left with horns and hooves. For Farishta and Chamcha, the apocalyptic beginning opens up the space needed for the rebirthing process to start. 'To be born again…first you have to die' sang Farishta as he falls 'twenty nine thousand and two feet towards the English Channel.'[459] As migrants, the process of uprooting one's life to begin in another country is similar to that of dying and being reborn. The text offers its readers two approaches as to the type of migrant one could be. Like Farishta, one could be unchanging, inflexible and more

[457] Spivak, 223.
[458] Shakespeare, *Tempest*.
[459] Rushdie, *Verses*, 3.

importantly, do the impossible: transplant one's culture of origin into new foreign soil. Chamcha on the other hand, offers change, flexibility and the chance to hybridise his personal and cultural identity. It is Chamcha's acceptance of his past as well as his present reality as a migrant that enables him to survive the narrative.

As a result of migration, the concept of home has become damaged. When one is taken out of one's natural environment and placed on foreign soil, the familiar starts to become unfamiliar and the natural becomes unnatural. In the episode where Chamcha is forced to eat a kipper for breakfast at boarding school, a breakfast routine that is familiar to many white English families, it becomes a traumatising experience for him due to the fact that he is unfamiliar with the method of eating a kipper. The cultural barrier here led to Chamcha feeling humiliated. It is from this episode that Chamcha begins to understand that 'England was a peculiar-tasting smoked fish full of spikes and bones, and nobody would ever tell him how to eat it.'[460] The process of migration is similar to the process of learning how to eat a kipper since it includes being traumatised by the unfamiliar as well as the discomfort in assimilating oneself to a foreign way of living. Indeed, nobody would tell migrants how to settle into their new life nor explain the destination country's unspoken customs and values. For Chamcha however, the best coping strategy to deal with the unfamiliar is to transform himself into a 'goodandproper Englishman' thus immersing himself fully into the new culture.[461] To survive migration, Chamcha assimilates by talking, dressing and behaving like an Englishman. Yet, as the text illustrates, there are times when he experiences an 'accent slippage' as a result of repressing his native roots intensely.[462] This form of repression pushes him to be transformed into a goat/devil-like creature. This alienates him from the

[460] Ibid, 44.
[461] Ibid, 43.
[462] Ibid, 63.

culture that he desperately wants to assimilate to and as a result he is subjected to the same form of discrimination that migrants are typically exposed to everyday. As the text demonstrates, the only form of redemption for Chamcha would be to discard the sycophantic behaviour he has accustomed himself to and start learning to accept his migrant roots thus reconciling his personal and cultural identity. This occurs with the help of Zeeny Vakil.

Rushdie's construction of Zeeny Vakil is vital to Chamcha's reconciliation process. Although she is a minor character in the text, her role in helping Saladin to come to peace with his past and present emphasises the variety seen in Rushdie's representation of female characters in the text. Arguably a sounding board for Rushdie's own personal beliefs and values, Vakil's belief in hybridity and the "mongrelisation" of culture persuades the Anglophile sycophant Chamcha to make peace with his father and to a large extent his culture. Sometimes seen as a two dimensional character by critics such as Cundy, Vakil is an attempt by Rushdie to articulate his interpretation of a feminist character.[463] Cundy further argues that 'the crucial role which Rushdie assigns to his hero Saladin's Indian lover, Zeeny Vakil is…undercut by his presentation of her, and by the continuing and now ingrained tendency to demonise the female.'[464] Indeed Vakil pushes Chamcha to embrace his roots but she is only able to do so once the protagonist goes through the life changing experience of being metamorphosed into a subhuman creature. Her role as a minor character is to influence and assist Chamcha into realising the importance of the culture one is brought up in. Albeit small, Vakil's role reinforces a key message of the text: to celebrate diaspora by embracing hybridity and multiplicity. It would be too simple to disregard the characterisation of Zeeny Vakil as small and therefore insubstantial. Moreover, Vakil's statements and dialogues with

[463] Cundy, 17.
[464] Ibid, 16.

Chamcha and his father bring to surface the theme of the novel from the beginning until the end of the text.

One can argue that the relationship between Saladin Chamcha and Zeeny Vakil reflects that of Chamcha's relationship with Bombay. Vakil is a representation of past and present Bombay since she belongs to both his past and present. Therefore, Chamcha's relationship with her can be seen at times to mirror his relationship with the city he tried to escape from. In an episode where a married Chamcha goes back to Bombay to take part in a George Bernard Shaw production *The Millionairess*, he begins an affair with Zeeny Vakil thus kick starting his path back to accepting his roots. The constant reminder of cultural familiarity shocks Chamcha into a new state of reality. This is especially the case when he comments on Vakil's 'Binaca smile.'[465] Khanna too agrees that a 'remembered advertisement marks and designates not just the city itself and all that it stands for in the immigrant Saladin's memories, but also his own identity, as Bombayite, Indian, and non-white.'[466] Chamcha's confusion over the past that he has tried to suppress whilst in England comes back to haunt him as a reminder that he does not belong in a place that he desperately wants to belong. In exasperation, he tells Vakil to resign from helping him as he claims, 'I have forgotten the rules of seven-tiles and kabaddi, I can't recite my prayers, I don't know what should happen at a nikah ceremony, and in this city where I grew up I get lost if I'm on my own.'[467] Vakil, on the other hand, is determined for Chamcha to 'come home' essentially meaning for him to reconcile and accept his roots.[468] Parashkevova also argues that 'Zeeny is…instrumental to the male migrant's negotiation of a *reconfigured* Bombay, to the idea of the city as a *re-*

[465] Rushdie, *Verses*, 53.
[466] Stuti Khanna, 'Language and the Postcolonial city: The case of Salman Rushdie,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 406, doi: 10.1177/0021989411409815.
[467] Rushdie, *Verses*, 58.
[468] Ibid, 63.

turn or a new beginning.'[469] For Vakil, it is important for Chamcha to have a relationship with Bombay in the present rather than simply remembering it for its past. As much as Chamcha tries to break free from his Indian roots, like Vakil is to Bombay, he is eventually drawn to it.

This theme is further continued when Vakil brings to light the psychological struggle that is clearly inherent in Chamcha that he perhaps cannot yet comprehend. In one episode, Vakil says to Chamcha:

> Sometimes, when you're quiet…when you aren't doing funny voices or acting grand, and when you forget people are watching, you look just like a blank. You know? An empty slate, nobody home. It makes me mad, sometimes, I want to slap you. To sting you back into life. But I also get sad about it. Such a fool, you, the big star whose face is the wrong colour for their colour TVs, who has to travel to wogland with some two-bit company, playing the babu part on top of it, just to get into a play. They kick you around and still you stay, you love them, bloody slave mentality, I swear.[470]

This powerful speech by Vakil highlights Chamcha's struggle in coming to terms with his personal and cultural identity. To a large extent, this is a struggle that many migrants face as they try to fit in by adopting the destination country's values and attitudes but are still constantly reminded that they will never fit in due to their appearance or their accents. Indeed, Vakil's sound assessment of Chamcha's character reveals an individual who is obsessed with trying to fit into a culture that rejects him in the first place. This is subsequently unveiled when readers are told of Chamcha's profession as the 'Man of a Thousand Voices and a Voice.'[471] Chamcha's talent with pitching a variety of accents rewards him with a role in a children's television show where he ironically plays an alien. Vakil's statement on Chamcha's appearance as being 'the wrong colour for their colour TVs'

[469] Parashkevova, 'New Cities Out of Old Ones: Catoptric echoes and reversals in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet,' Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45, no. 4 (2009): 451.
[470] Ibid, 61.
[471] Ibid, 60.

echoes the widespread racism prevalent in England during the Thatcher regime as well as the everyday racism faced by migrants and people of colour in Western countries.[472] In using a minor female character to reveal a protagonist's internal and physical struggle as well as bringing to light the main political issue that is rife in England, Rushdie has attempted to place great importance on those living and existing on the periphery. One could also further argue that in doing so, Rushdie exhibits how those on the outside can sometimes provide a clearer assessment of those central to the narrative.

Indeed, her ability to help Chamcha reconcile with his father towards the end of the novel suggests the significance of her character and the ability for Vakil to influence Chamcha with her ideas of multiplicity, hybridity and flexibility. Chamcha's work visit to Bombay at the start of the novel reminds him that 'he is no longer able to encase himself in the illusory Englishness that would keep him from being affected by contact with his people and his homeland.'[473] In other words, Chamcha is not able to separate himself physically and emotionally from India and Zeeny's role has been to remind him of the actual reality that his sycophantic consciousness refuses to comprehend: he is an Indian. In an earlier episode, Chamcha's dream of a glass skin stranger begging to be released from 'the prison of his skin' foreshadows how in recreating his English identity through the disposing of his Indian identity, Chamcha will suffer an internal irreparable breakdown. This is of course not realised by Chamcha until towards the end of the text when he begins the process of reconciliation. Chamcha realises on his way back to Bombay to visit his dying father that love is the most important form of reconciliation. *The Satanic Verses* demonstrates how different emotions throughout life will compel a person to act and behave in a certain way.

[472] Ibid, 61.
[473] Michael Cody, 'Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', *The Explicator* 56, no.4 (1998): 218, EBSCO.

Chamcha has been at the mercy of hate, vengeance and desire. It is from his relationship with Vakil that he becomes confused at first and thus resorts to loving his country of origin and more importantly, his father. In the last chapter, titled 'A Wonderful Lamp', Saladin reverts back to his original name Salahuddin, asks his dying father for forgiveness and redemption, and falls in love with Zeeny Vakil. As mentioned earlier, this chapter is inspired by Rushdie's own personal experience with his father. Like Chamcha, Rushdie had a troubled relationship with his father from childhood. This is described in his autobiography *Joseph Anton*.[474] Like Changez Chamchawala too, Rushdie's father, Anis, died of cancer and his son would later repeat the episodes leading up to his father's death and funeral in his most controversial novel.

When it comes to portraying Zeeny Vakil's character, *The Satanic Verses* provides a tone of admiration and to a certain extent, wonderment. The language used by Vakil is one that is seen as 'smart-alec Bombay English.'[475] One must take note of the fact that Rushdie's illustration of the language used by Bombayites indicates the cosmopolitan nature of the city where a hybridised form of English and Hindi is mixed and matched thus reflecting the diverse features of a once colonised country. Khanna has noted that in some instances 'such individuation has a sound socio-economic basis.'[476] This is certainly applicable to Vakil's character who is described by the text as a fearless, intelligent, beautiful and politically driven woman. Unafraid of offending people, Vakil wears her heart and beliefs on her sleeve. Her constant criticism and judgement of Chamcha is not vilified in the text but narrated as being enlightening and to a large extent, a foreshadowing of what is to come from Chamcha's traumatic metamorphosis experience. Towards the end of the text, Vakil portrays

[474] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 88.
[475] Rushdie, *Verses*, 333.
[476] Khanna, 404.

characteristics of a lover who has been abandoned and even though she acted selfishly by not being on Chamcha's side during his father's death, the text's honest portrayal of her did not in fact demonise her as is done to the character of Rekha Merchant. In this respect, Rushdie's characterisation of female characters remains ambiguous. His ability to illustrate a variety of female characters from one extreme to the next presents a form of balance in the text. Indeed, the construction of Zeeny Vakil is Rushdie's attempt at characterising the feminist figure. This we can certainly witness in his later texts when strong feminist characters are developed and portrayed in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence*.

On the other hand, the representation of Alleluia or Allie Cone is first introduced by the text as being a 'climber of mountains, vanquisher of Everest, blonde yahudan, ice queen.'[477] Inspired by Rushdie's ex-lover, the character of Allie Cone is, according to Rushdie, 'an avatar of Robyn (Davidson).'[478] Allie is often referred to in the text as the ice queen and her independent spirit resonates with Rushdie's own personal relationship with the famous Australian writer who is 'transformed from desert walker into mountaineer and from Christian into Jew.'[479] The term 'ice queen' itself plays into the sexist trope where a successful woman who shows no emotions is characterised as icy and unfeminine. Bălănescu too has observed that 'patriarchal values and assumptions permeate British culture (and) in *The Satanic Verses* both Pamela Lovelace and Allie Cone assume representative roles.'[480] Allie Cone is portrayed in such a way in the text when the narrator claims that

> To be an attractive woman in a sport dominated by, well, hairy men was to be saleable, and the "icequeen" image didn't hurt either. There was money in it, and now that she was old enough to compromise her old, fiery ideals with no more than

[477] Rushdie, *Verses*, 31.
[478] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 71.
[479] Ibid.
[480] Olivia Bălănescu, 'Visions of England: The Outsiders', *ANUL* 1, no. 2 (2005): 108, EBSCO.

> a shrug and a laugh, she was ready to make it, ready, even, to appear on TV talk-shows to fend off, with risqué hints, the inevitable and unchanging questions about life with the boys at twenty-odd thousand feet. Such high-profile capers sat uneasily alongside the view of herself to which she still fiercely clung: the idea that she was a natural solitary, the most private of women, and that the demands of her business life were ripping her in half.[481]

As a result, Allie's character can at times be seen as detrimental and even destructive to herself as well as to Gibreel Farishta. In this respect, critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Parashkevova observe 'the defence of women's causes' as a failure.[482] This is especially the case when one examines Allie's relationship with Farishta. Her unending desire to be a 'natural solitary' pushes Farishta to the brink of mental incapacitation which ultimately leads to her violent death.[483]

Allie's death is ironically constructed as her falling off the top of Everest Villas, which is the residence of Farishta and coincidentally, Allie is also famous for her ascent of Mount Everest. Although Chamcha is partly to blame for reinforcing the voices in Farishta's head while they were in London, Allie is seen to play a significant role in the destruction of Farishta. Their relationship is characterised as being tempestuous with Farishta constantly in an egotistical and jealous rage. Allie's peaceful and distant nature is often in conflict with Farishta's diva personality. This is illustrated when Allie leaves Bombay three days after her first encounter with Farishta. Her inability to be physically tied down to an intimate relationship leads Farishta to seek her in London thus starting their tumultuous and destructive relationship. In seeing that Farishta is suffering from an unstable state of mind, Allie compromises to help him by staying in the relationship. However, after the fires of Brickhall, Allie refuses to reconcile with Farishta acknowledging that he is beyond her help.

[481] Rushdie, *Verses*, 309.
[482] Spivak. Parashkevova, 438.
[483] Rushdie, *Verses*, 309.

Farishta's obsession with the divine is seen as detrimental from the very beginning when his mother would label him her angel, *farishta*, as a child. This preoccupation with the divine continues into adulthood and soon he begins to play the role of gods in Bollywood's famed theological movies. It is perhaps because of this fetish for finding divinity that he is attracted to Allie, whose actual first name is Alleluia; 'an affirmation and praise of the divine and, though it seems to contradict her freethinking character, sits well with her mysticism.'[484] Christine Cavanaugh argues that Allie is portrayed as a prophet in that she receives visions in the same way that other prophets in the text have illustrated.[485] Her visions occur when she climbs mountains whereas Farishta's visions/delusions can sometimes take place when he is asleep and even when he is conscious. Henceforth, Allie's prophetic status is not as threatening as Farishta's violent outbursts. Cavanaugh has observed that 'in the love affair of Gibreel and Allie Cone, Rushdie juxtaposes kinds of prophecy; in Allie Cone appear the authentic features of the prophetic tradition and in Gibreel appear the distortions of these features, distortions that leads to violence.'[486] Doomed from the very beginning, their relationship is mutually destructive.

Farishta's inability as a migrant to be flexible and his intolerance of hybridity is arguably the cause of his mental breakdown. Insisting on converting London to the correct path of tropical weather as well as the oneness of God, Farishta encounters difficulty in assimilating into life as a Londoner. This is especially the case when he moves in with Allie. His immovable attitude as a migrant is evidently contrasted with Chamcha's assimilationist desire to be a 'goodand-proper Englishman.'[487] Like Chamcha and Farishta, Allie Cone is also a migrant.

[484] Christine Cavanaugh, 'Auguries of Power: Prophecy and Violence in *The Satanic Verses,' Studies in the Novel* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 399, EBSCO.
[485] Ibid, 395.
[486] Ibid, 399.
[487] Rushdie, *Verses*, 43.

Born in Poland, Allie's Jewish family moved after the war to Britain in search of a better life. This historical context illustrates the traveling nature found in Allie. Anke Gilleir places Allie's position as post-diasporic arguing that 'she seems to enact this inherited exilic element by devoting her life to climbing mountains. If Allie is not en route to some mountain, she surrounds herself by miniatures, which metonymically express her traveling.'[488] Her passion for climbing mountains is in part due to her desire to overcome a handicap: Allie suffers from flat footedness. Her fallen arches cause immense pain for her. However, this is not known publicly since as noted in the text, she much prefers to transgress gender boundaries in a sport dominated by men and be known as the woman who climbed Everest. Nevertheless, the drive in Allie's nature to pursue her ambitions is portrayed negatively in the text. In this sense, one can argue that the characterisation of Allie reinforces elements of patriarchy found in the text. Moreover, Allie's destructive relationship with Farishta echoes that of *Shame's* Omar Khayyam Shakil and Sufiya Zinobia's relationship.

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is ultimately a text that celebrates hybridity, plurality and multiplicity. As succinctly put by Bălănescu, Rushdie's third successful albeit controversial novel strengthens the writer's 'place in late twentieth century literature as a self-conscious migrant writer who mixes various styles, genres and cultural levels in order to present a hybrid world in the age of transit.'[489] This hybrid world or as Rushdie calls it, 'cosmopolitanism' is where we find binary ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy in conflict with one another. This is similar to the Western world's political context where binary ideologies such as capitalism and socialism are pitted against one another. Language influences our discourse, genres and ultimately how we perceive our social world. hooks

[488] Anke Gilleir, 'Figurations of Travel in Minority Literature: A Reading of Hafid Bouazza, Salman Rushdie, and Feridun Zaimoglu', *Comparative Critical Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007): 263, EBSCO.
[489] Bălănescu, 110.

also agrees that 'language reflects the culture from which we emerge.'[490] Thus, language also mirrors our values, norms and attitudes. Rushdie's experimentation with language in *The Satanic Verses* highlights the problematic nature of language and discourse. There are female characters such as Hind Sufyan and Alleluia Cone who are constructed in such a way as to reinforce patriarchal values. Yet, characters such as Mishal Sufyan and Zeeny Vakil reflect feminist beliefs where independence of mind and spirit is celebrated and as such indicate the development of his characterisation of women and gender politics. Moreover, Rushdie's portrayal of Ayesha the prophetess confronts and subverts institutionalized religion's preference for revealing its message to men by choosing a woman instead. Having said that, Ayesha is also depicted as being erotically destructive in the text thus highlighting the ambiguity and more importantly, instability found in the construction of Rushdie's female characters. Rushdie's demonstration of both patriarchal and feminist ideologies in his characters reflect the current globalised world we live in where both ideologies continue to be seen in our values, everyday norms and attitudes. This notion of global feminism and the dominance of patriarchal ideologies in language and discourse is further explored in the next chapter's analysis of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

[490] hooks, *Talking Back*, 141.

Chapter 4: Gender dynamics, feminine identity and globalisation

In a changing world where stability is an unaffordable luxury, one can observe that there is a shift in the way gender issues are perceived especially within the context of globalisation. Global or transnational feminism

> Enable[s] us to grasp the contradictory processes that are entangled in contemporary feminism(s), for it understands feminism(s) as multi-located discourses…it understands feminism(s) as a participant of politics in various institutional context. "Transnational feminism" is thus a concept that envisions the possibility of a non-homogeneous community that can be auto-reflexive of the cross-cutting inequalities and power differences that are constructed in continuous dialogue between different actors wherever they may be located.[491]

Much like global or transnational feminism, patriarchal structures too have been changed and reshaped to suit this globalised context. This can be manifested within dominant discourse. An example of this is the comment that Australia's current Prime Minister Scott Morrison made at an International Women's Day event, 'we're not about setting Australians against each other, trying to push some down and lift others up. We want to see women rise but we don't want to see women rise only on the basis of others doing worse.'[492] The implicit sexism in Morrison's comment indicates a fear within patriarchal discourse that is masked by an attempt to support gender equality. The fear of losing patriarchal power arguably hinders progress towards gender equality which Cixous herself addressed in 'The Laugh of the Medusa'[493]. McGaughey and Maguire responded by advocating for Australia to do better and that as a nation it 'ought to be beyond immature statements that depict women's equality as necessarily diminishing men's capacity or rights in society.'[494] In order for society to

[491] Márgara Millán, 'The traveling of "gender" and its accompanying baggage: Thoughts on the translation of feminism(s), the globalization of discourses, and representational divides,' *European Journal of Women's Studies* 23, no. 1 (2016): 8.
[492] Paul Karp, 'Scott Morrison wants women to rise but not solely at expense of others,' *The Guardian*, March 8, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/08/scott-morrison-wants-women-to-rise-but-not-solely-at-expense-of-others.
[493] Cixous, 877.
[494] Fiona McGaughey & Amy Maguire, 'Australia's performance on gender equality – are we fair dinkum,' *The Conversation*, March 19, 2019, https://theconversation.com/australias-performance-on-gender-equality-are-we-fair-dinkum-113657.

progress, we must change our language and/or the way we use language to construct meaning.

Technology has enabled us all to be better connected and thus diversity of experiences, in particular the sharing of gender injustices is more prominent in a globalised world. This impacts on language and it is this impact that one can start to see in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. It would seem odd that *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has not garnered much attention from critics in regard to its treatment of gender issues. Published in 1999 after his period of exile from the Fatwa years, the novel tells a tragic yet epic love story about two strong-minded individuals, Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama, against the backdrop of the 1970s civil rights movement. Similar to *Midnight's Children*, the story is told by a first-person narrator, Umeed 'Rai' Merchant who is also Vina and Ormus' childhood friend. Rai's perspective on women is the opposite to what we have observed in Saleem's narrative. It can be argued that the 1970s is also a time when feminist issues began to have quite a significant impact in political and social life around the world. With this in mind, the characterisation of Vina, Mira and other minor characters such as Lady Spenta, Antoinette Corinth and Anita Dharkar reflect contemporary 1970s Western norms and values. This chapter demonstrates the change in Rushdie's writing in regard to the female characters as he endeavours to improve his writing of women. Although the construction of characters such as Lady Spenta and Antoinette Corinth still have traces of patriarchal elements, one can observe that Rushdie's treatment of gender issues has in many ways changed. Rushdie's representation of feminism through the characterisation of Vina and Mira may not align with many who consider themselves feminist but it is a vast improvement in comparison to the female characters discussed in the last three chapters. Thus, the diversity found in the female characters in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* represents a form of feminism that is

multicultural and inclusive demonstrated through the depiction of their socio-economic struggles within a structurally patriarchal world.

Rushdie's experimentation is taken a step further in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. In mixing Greek mythology with popular culture, Rushdie has written a text that aims to interrogate and explore globalised issues (politics, populism, culture) within a global context. Martino too agrees that 'the novel represents a space in which ancient myths migrate into new forms – shaping complex identities – and at the same time a fascinating narrative about music and pop musicians as contemporary myths, or better metaphors, of migration.'[495] The construction of Ormus Cama is richly inspired by a mixture of Greek and Roman mythological characters such as Castor, Polydeuces and Orpheus as well as popular culture's Elvis Presley and John Lennon. The similarity found between Ormus' sleep interactions with his dead twin Gayomart is a reflection of twins Castor and Polydeuces who also shared two different worlds together. Common to Rushdie's style of writing, the text exploits historical fact and fiction by creating two worlds and not even the reader can at times tell the difference between what is truth and illusion. In the waking reality of the characters, *The Watergate Affair* is a fictional novel with a fictional character named President Nixon whilst Ormus and Gayomart's underworld is a true impression of readers' own waking reality. Ormus' character is also an echo of Roman mythology's Orpheus, who struggles to bring back his lover Eurydice from the dead. Orpheus, like Ormus, is 'the minstrel whose music enchanted all nature.'[496] Moreover, Ormus' gyrating hips and association with a dead twin is arguably inspired by Elvis Presley's own history. In addition, Ormus' death mimics that of John Lennon where a fan shot the celebrity outside his New

[495] Martino Pierpaolo, '*The Ground Beneath Her Feet:* Myth, Migration and Identity in Salman Rushdie', *Le Simplegadi*, no. 18 (November 2018): 207, EBSCO.
[496] Parashkevova, 418.

York City apartment. This mixing of ancient Greek and Roman mythology with urban popular culture is typical of Rushdean literary experimentation. Rushdie's approach of 'take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest' to writing is clearly exemplified in the construction of Ormus.[497]

One of the main themes of the text is Rushdie's depiction of contemporary culture's fascination with celebrities. This is discussed in the first part of the chapter as depicted in the characterisation of Vina. Her rise to cult status begins when her death is publicised in a tragic earthquake in Guadalajara. Her death strongly echoes that of Princess Diana where a tragic car accident took the life of the publicly loved Princess of Wales. Public sentiment on both episodes is rated so highly that the text describes some people's emotional reaction to Vina's death as being a 'personal bereavement,' which is similar to the worldwide publicised funeral of Princess Diana.[498] The fascination in the lives of celebrities does not only extend to deaths but it also includes the desire to be actively included in the lives of public personalities. This is typically depicted in tabloid magazines and television. The public seem to care about celebrities' political affiliations, sense of fashion and more importantly, their intimate relationships. Rushdie's portrayal of famous people's lives as well as the public's thirst for knowledge about celebrities' lives creates a sense of sordidness as an element of globalisation. Furthermore, the construction of Vina highlights part of the feminist movement seen in the 1970s. Thus, in the wake of celebrity culture and globalisation, Rushdie has constructed a richly innovative fictional narrative that observes all aspects of life. From the rise of globalisation to the inclusion of feminist discourse, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* depicts the ambiguities that exist in our everyday lives.

[497] Rushdie, *Verses*, 52.
[498] Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), 480.

This chapter discusses Rushdie's articulation of diaspora and how it has developed into a discourse of globalisation. Migration, for Rushdie, is not simply a matter of moving to a new country and living within one's own cultural enclaves. Perhaps it is possible to deduce that Rushdie's development in migration discourse is due to his experiences during the Fatwa years. The rejection he faced from his own migrant community in England and to some extent a small minority from the literary community as well as dealing with the daily threat to his life for nearly a decade arguably contributed to his ideas on rootlessness. Admittedly, without wanting to 'establish a crude parallel between Rushdie and Rai…Rushdie's own post-Fatwa "metamorphosis from…the Salman I know to the 'Rushdie' I often barely recognise" informs his representation of an "alienated disconnected" narrator.'[499] Discussions of contemporary diaspora have for the most part revolved around how groups of people have transplanted their culture to new foreign soil. Yancey and Ericksen have both argued that

> Rather than assume that the cultural heritage of all members of a particular group is transplanted from one social structure to another, we suggested that there is considerable evidence indicating that the impact of ethnic ancestry has varied over time, depending on the structural conditions which members of the group faced and the degree to which the ethnic group emerged as a social organisation.[500]

In other words, variable factors play a significant role in determining the growth of diasporic communities. Yet sociological studies have found that first generation immigrants tend to hold onto their cultural values more so than the second and third generations.[501] However, through the depiction of first-generation immigrants, Vina, Ormus and Rai, the concept of home is not so much damaged but is portrayed as being everywhere. Their lack of concern

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[499] Caroline Herbert, '"No longer a memoirist but a voyeur": Photographing and narrating Bombay in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet,' Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44, no. 2 (June 2008): 143, EBSCO.
[500] William L. Yancey and Eugene P. Ericksen, 'On Transplanted Culture', *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 3 (1977), 739, EBSCO.
[501] First generation refers to those that were born in their native country but moved to a different country to seek a better life. See Richard D. Alba, *Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity*, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1985). *The New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

for belonging within a particular culture is due to the nature of their hybridised identity. This is especially the case for Vina and Mira. The onset of globalisation seems to make it easier for the characters to cope with migration, a loss of national identity and a sense of rootlessness. This globalised world is embodied in the shape of New York City, as immigrants from Asia and Europe congregate to mix and consort. As a result of this development, one can argue that gender dynamics has shifted to new ambiguous ground creating new opportunities as well as making the voices of those in the margin heard. This would have been impossible without the new technologies that came with globalisation.

Feminism is represented in diverse forms in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Whilst Rushdie's grasp on feminism is not academia-focused, it does however reflect the kind of popular feminism that dominated the media in the 1970s. This we see in the characterisation of Vina. The latter part of this chapter will focus on the development of female characters in Rushdie's text. Although one can still find patriarchal representations of characters such as Antoinette Corinth and Lady Spenta, the many representations of strong female characters outweigh those who reinforce patriarchal attitudes and norms. The diversity of female characters and the feminist beliefs that they portrayed in the text reflects the Rushdean philosophy of recognising multiplicity and diversity in women. One can be assured that the feminism propagated by the text is one that champions differences in women. Moreover, the representation of destructive characters such as Antoinette Corinth suggests that Rushdie is perhaps still experimenting with ambiguities in the text so as not to portray a singular perspective on gender politics. When it comes to decoding the message(s) in Rushdie's novels, one finds that the representation of variety, diversity and multiplicity creates ambiguity and ambivalence which is in line with Rushdean philosophy.

So far, in trying to understand Rushdie's characterisation of women in his novels, one is inclined to observe that the types depicted are often varied and diverse albeit ambiguous and at times distinctlysexist. From Amina Sinai to the discussion of Zeeny Vakil in chapter three, Rushdie's inclination to represent patriarchal stereotypes in his female characters is arguably unjustifiable.[502] In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* we see a shift happening in the construction of women, gender and sexuality. To a certain extent, the characterisation of women is no longer depicted through the nurturer/destroyer dichotomy. What we see instead is Rushdie embracing female empowerment politics that were propagated widely during the 1970s civil rights movement. It is also possible that this shift occurs as a response to the discourse of an increasingly global community. It can be argued that globalisation has pushed forth what we now know as postmodern values and norms in mainstream culture. The rise of technology has contributed significantly to the global village whereby stories, be they about natural atrocities or political injustices that occur in America or China, are immediately known to those living on the other side of the world through social media such as Twitter and Facebook or 24-hour news television channels such as the Australian Broadcasting Channel News 24. The speed and details of such episodes create a sense of interconnectedness between human beings, thus giving people the ability to relate to one another. As such, it is only logical that globalisation is dealt with in contemporary literature. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* addresses issues to do with globalisation which includes the reinterpretation of gender and sexuality.

Globalisation is a multifaceted issue that implicates social, geographical, biological, political, historical, cultural and intellectual elements into public and private discourses. The

[502] This we see in criticisms by critics such as Catherine Cundy, Charu Verma and Gayatri Spivak.

term itself is understood to be 'both a *process* and a *condition*'.[503] As a process, globalisation can be defined as a means of incorporating, on an international scale, the proliferation of ideas, viewpoints and any other factors contributing to culture. As a condition, however, globalisation is best defined in how we live our life at present with the global influence on the way we eat, dress and even think. As Short notes, the 'globalisation project contains much that was desirable: improvements in living conditions through global trade, reducing conflict and threat of war through political globalisation and encouraging cultural diversity in a widening cultural globalisation.'[504] However, in recent decades globalisation has come under attack for raising the profile of the elites from multinational corporations and overshadowing localisation. This angst is normally mixed with anti-capitalist discourse. The economic disparity, especially when in competition with corporations such as McDonalds, Nestle and Bank of America, leaves locally owned companies disadvantaged and sometimes leads to bankruptcy. Moreover, globalisation has become synonymous with Americanisation 'in which United States military, political, corporate and ideological objectives are set loose upon the world with devastating consequences.'[505] American hegemony is best exemplified in the global success of McDonaldisation. Developed by American sociologist George Ritzer, McDonaldisation refers to the homogenisation of food and the 'standardisation of tastes whereby unique regional and seasonal delicacies are homogenised to appeal to the widest consumer market.'[506]

[503] Robert Van Krieken, Smith Hutchins and Habibis Van Krieken, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (Sydney: Pearson Education Australia, 2006), 31.
[504] John Rennie Short, 'Globalisation and its discontents: Why there's a backlash and how it needs to change,' *The Conversation*, November 29, 2016, http://theconversation.com/globalization-and-its-discontents-why-theres-a-backlash-and-how-it-needs-to-change-68800.
[505] Ibid, 57.
[506] Peter Beilharz and Trevor Hogan, ed., *Sociology: Place, Time & Division*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 256.

On the other hand, one can also argue that globalisation has created positive influences. The constant movement of people across the globe, be it through traveling or migrating, has created a hybridisation of local culture. This hybridity of food and culture can be found in most cosmopolitan cities such as Melbourne, Singapore and New York City where one can choose to dine on Indian, Ethiopian or Vietnamese cuisine easily. Diasporic enclaves, too, can be found in suburbs of cities such as Melbourne and London. In addition, the anti-capitalist movements have connected activists around the world through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to campaign for effective change. One example is the Occupy Movement in 2011 that highlighted the rise of economic inequality. The campaign of the 99% against the elite 1% proved to be successful with protests occurring simultaneously all over the world from Brazil to Melbourne.[507] Protests of the election of Donald Trump in 2016 as President of the United States of America brought women from all over the world to march together on the 21st January 2017 'to show their rejection to the demonstrated sexism, xenophobia and Islamophobia of the new American president.'[508] This feel of interconnectedness between people with geographical distance barely making an obstacle to communication emphasises the role that globalisation has played in being both beneficial and detrimental to us. Nevertheless, the huge impact of globalisation on society makes for very good raw material for postmodern authors such as Rushdie.

With the widespread accessibility of technology, popular culture has become a pervasive influence in the life of the average person. One particular phenomenon that has come out of

[507] The Occupy movement is arguably one of the most successful campaigns against corruption in corporations as a consequence of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook became a site of disseminating information as well as organising political actions around the world. Facebook event pages congregated people around the world to meet in the financial districts of their respective metropolitan cities in order to picket outside buildings such as Bank of America and Barclays.
[508] Ariadna Estevez, 'Women marching worldwide revive a long-sought dream: global feminism,' January 24 2017, *The Conversation*, http://theconversation.com/women-marching-worldwide-revive-a-long-sought-dream-global-feminism-71777.

popular culture, especially with the advancement of colour television, is the obsession with the fame and fortunes of celebrities in the eyes of the public. The cult of celebrity plays a significant role in peoples' lives and it is within *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* that Rushdie touches on this peculiar contemporary subject. It can be argued that the life and actions of celebrities nowadays influences society at an international level. What is reported of an American celebrity is reported here in Australia. This, of course, depends on how far the media extends the information. Certainly, this was highlighted in the 2012 United States presidential campaign where musicians and actors such as Beyonce Knowles-Carter, Steven Spielberg and George Clooney endorsed the then President Barack Obama as the favoured presidential candidate.[509] Celebrities have often used their reputation and popularity to bring to light causes that they are passionate about. Campaigns such as the 2013 Gucci's Chime for Change and Bob Geldof's 1985 Live Aid and the 2005 Live 8 concerts helped raise awareness in developed countries about the social, economic, health and political injustices that are still occurring in underdeveloped countries.[510] David Jackson and Thomas Darrow, in their study of how Canadian youths are influenced by the political alignments of Canadian celebrities, have observed that 'the youth orientation of much popular culture and the oft-noticed tendency of young people to dress and act like their favourite celebrities suggest that celebrities may be able to influence the political as well as consumer choices of young

[509] 'Election Centre: Celebrity Endorsements,' CNN, accessed November 13, 2013. http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2012/05/politics/celebrity.endorsements

[510] Founded by fashion couture house Gucci, Chime for Change is a global campaign that focuses on the empowerment of women focusing on three key issues affecting women at present: health, education and justice. It uses a crowd-funding site Catapult where not for profit organisations can post their projects allowing the general public to choose who gets their donations. Chime for Change ambassadors are Beyonce Knowles-Carter, Frida Giannini and Salma Hayek Pinault. The Live Aid and Live 8 concerts were organised by lead singer from rock band Boomtown Rats Bob Geldof. The concerts highlighted the poverty issue in Africa and gathered musicians from all genres to play for a free concert. Live 8 was held on 2nd July 2005 which was a few days before the G8 summit took place. People were asked to give their name and not their money to present to then UK Prime Minister and chair of the G8 Tony Blair in a campaign to make poverty history.

people.'[511] Therefore, it is safe to conclude that to a large extent, the public's trust in a celebrity influences and shapes their political opinions. On the other hand, Andrew Pease and Paul Brewer, in their study of television host Oprah Winfrey's political endorsement of Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary campaign and its ability to affect public favour, cautions critics not to oversimplify the direct correlation of celebrity endorsements with political favours.[512] Pease and Brewer's observation implies that even though voters are not likely to admit that they themselves would vote for a candidate based on a celebrity's endorsement (in this case Oprah Winfrey), they are aware of the fact that political candidates will have a slight advantage because of the endorsement.[513] Moreover, they have discerned that although it 'may be irrational for voters to trust celebrity's political endorsement…[it is] rational to consider the implications of that endorsement for the strategic political environment.'[514] Although these studies were done almost a decade after the publication of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, it is interesting to note that Rushdie recognised how celebrity involvement in politics can have an impact on the public. This is strongly reflected in the text's celebrity couple, Vina Apsara and Ormus Cama. Admittedly, musicians in the late 1960s and early 1970s made their political stance known through their music. Celebrities such as John Lennon, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan propagated anti-Vietnam war opinions through their music and the protests that they themselves attended. However, it is also important to note that direct political endorsement by celebrities is a current post-Obama phenomenon.

[511] David J. Jackson & Thomas I.A. Darrow, 'The Influence of Celebrity Endorsements on Young Adult's Political Opinions', in *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 83, doi: 10.1177/1081180X05279278.
[512] Andrew Pease & Paul Brewer, 'The Oprah Factor: The Effects of a Celebrity Endorsement in a Presidential Primary Campaign', in *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 4 (October 2008), 387-389, doi: 10.1177/1940161208321948.
[513] Ibid, 395-396.
[514] Ibid, 397.

In depicting a cosmopolitan world in the text through cities such as Bombay, London and New York, Rushdie manages to embrace the conflicting discourses that circulate in a postmodern society through his characters. In particular, his portrayal of feminist ideologies and his treatment of gender issues have become less ambiguous. Goonetilleke has compared Rushdie's treatment of gender issues in his previous works to *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and found that 'Rushdie's view of women has become increasingly liberal. He presents positively, and approves of, the liberated women.'[515] This may, however, be too simplistic a conclusion since there are traces of patriarchal elements still visible in his characterisations. Nonetheless, Rushdie's shift in the treatment of gender issues in the text could result from a number of factors, one of which is the geographical break from India and London. Although it is not a clean break since a significant part of the novel still takes place in both cities, the text does highlight the need to break away from the point of origin, that is Mother India, and the colonial linkage to London. In addition, Anshuman Mondal observed that this ideological shift pertains to 'personal factors germane to his own position within what might be termed the "iconography of globalisation" as well as by more structural processes that have visibly transformed the world from the end of the 1980s.'[516] By doing so, the characterisation becomes more complex since the three protagonists, Vina, Ormus and Rai, go through a double transformation migrating to London firstly and then to the city of migrants, New York City. The 'membrane' described by Ormus and Rai symbolises the change in the self one goes through when migrating to a new country.[517] Even though the migrant enters a new foreign space and is transformed in the process, a part of the culture they were brought up with remains within themselves.

[515] Goonetilleke, 158.
[516] Anshuman A. Mondal, '*The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *Fury*: The reinvention of location', in *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie*, ed. Abdulrazak Gurnah, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 170.
[517] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 250.

As a celebrity with the power to have her voice heard, Vina Apsara is a modern woman who is outspoken, loud and unafraid of challenging political injustices and social conventions. Vina represents woman power and her voice, music and actions reflect the period of the novel as well as her own lived experiences. The 1970s saw the feminist struggle entering not just academia but popular culture. Female musicians and artists such as Joan Baez and Yoko Ono used their celebrity status to voice political dissatisfaction especially against the Vietnam War. In the early 21st century, we have actors and musicians such as Angelina Jolie and Beyoncé who have used their fame to champion causes and the rights of women. The recent social media #MeToo movement brought women around the world to openly discuss, name and shame everyday harassments, abuse and violence they have experienced at the hands of men.[518] The campaign not only gained global attention but it also brought to light the widespread gender inequality women around the world are currently and always have faced. Similarly, we find the characterisation of Vina highlights the capacity for celebrities to utilise their reputation to influence and shape the public's perception. Here, it can be argued that globalisation has helped to reinterpret meanings of gender and sexuality. Vina's celebrity status positions her on a global scale. Her interpretation of feminism is arguably disseminated through radio, television and even while performing live on stage. Thus, we can see how the condition of globalisation allows for celebrities like Vina to transfer their ideas, values and norms to the public rapidly.

The female characters in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* depict a varied type of feminism. From the construction of Lady Spenta to Ifredis Wing, the women in the text represent

[518] Lauren Rosewarne, '#MeToo and Modern Consciousness-Raising', *The Conversation*, October 19, 2017, https://theconversation.com/metoo-and-modern-consciousness-raising-85980.

different aspects of feminism. Perhaps it is also possible to extend this argument to include the fact that Rushdie's own interpretation of feminism has become varied as a result of exploring the concept of globalisation. As demonstrated in previous chapters, Rushdie's attempt at representing feminist ideas through his characters has often been criticised as a huge failure.[519] On the surface, this seems to be justified. However, this dissertation highlights the ambiguities found in Rushdie's representations of women. As a wordsmith, Rushdie is aware of how language can be shaped, manipulated and exploited to create new meanings. Critics such as Ganapathy-Dore have observed that

> The language and narrative style of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are a representational defence and illustration of the disorienting predicament of being in today's syncretic world. At the narrative level Rushdie uses both old and new devices such as the surrealistic appearance and disappearance of the succubus-like character Maria, the ambiguity of alternative story lines, the jumbling of narrative logic when the conclusion…comes in the middle…the combination of fairy stories with science fiction, cinema with literature, music with mythology, poetry with photography. This narrative prestidigitation prepares the reader for more disorienting experiments at the linguistic level.[520]

Here, one finds that the most popular running theme in his texts is to celebrate linguistic experimentation coupled with hybridity of literary devices and multiple truths in all aspects of life. To a large extent, one can also argue that this Rushdean philosophy includes the construction of his female characters. Where a character such as Antoinette Corinth is seen as destructively strong and represented as feminist and sexist, the text then countervails her with the likes of Mira Celano and Anita Dharkar. This is Rushdie at his best experimenting with disparate ideologies; feminist and patriarchal elements are embedded in the characters to create a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity for the reader. The ambiguity and ambivalency found in Rushdie's women are most certainly part of his strategy to decentre and destabilise established singular truths. Moreover, it reflects the current state of dominant discourse in

[519] Spivak. Hassumani, 132.
[520] Geetha Ganapathy-Dore, 'An Orphic Journey to the Disorient: Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*', *World Literature Written in English* 38, no. 2 (2000): 24-25, EBSCO.

the West. As a result, his characterisation challenges the reader by bringing to light more questions rather than final answers and resolutions.

Rushdie's experimentation with creating a cosmopolitan world in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* raises interesting questions in regard to globalisation and gender issues. Where does patriarchy stand in a globalised digital world? How does patriarchy function with new forms of communication? More importantly, how can feminism progress in a globalised era when globalisation itself is under attack for being a 'homogenising "world culture"'?[521] Certainly it is an agreeable fact that ideologies and thus language, are organic and prone to change. Wittgenstein himself has compared language to a city where side streets, main roads and alleyways become avenues for growth and expansion in search of multiple truths.[522] Thus, it can be argued that both feminism and patriarchy have developed to adapt to new environments, be it in the online world or in our current social interactions. Despite the fact that the text is set in a time before the worldwide web, the technology of radio and television in the 1970s foreshadowed, to a certain extent, how society would become obsessed with the speed of receiving information and the more or less irrelevancy of geographical distance. Rai's freelance profession as a photojournalist traveling around the world to capture political images that are then disseminated through news media outlets is one example of 'homogenising a "world culture"'.[523] At the point of capturing Vina's death in Guadalajara, Rai is aware that this image taken by him will be the lasting 'bitter posterity' that he will be remembered for as a photographer.[524] It will be published by news media outlets around the world reaching audiences from 'the streets of Yokohama, Darwin, Montevideo, Calcutta,

[521] Istvan Adorjan, 'New Cosmopolitanism: Altered Spaces in a Postcolonial Perspective', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 197, EBSCO.
[522] Wittgenstein, 14.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 467.

Stockholm, Newcastle, Los Angeles, (where) people are heard describing her death as a personal bereavement, a death in the family.'[525] He continues to contemplate that Vina's *The Lady Vanishes* photograph will become 'part of the collective memory of the human race.'[526] In addition to Vina's already established cult celebrity status, her tragic death evidently reveals somewhat the existence of a world culture, one that will mourn collectively the death of a stranger who is not so strange.

As discussed earlier, the drawback of living in a cosmopolitan society for many of us is what seems to be on the surface the proliferation of a homogenous culture from the food we eat to the clothes we wear. One can even go so far as to argue that the homogenous culture extends to the choice and type of holiday destinations that many middle-class people will opt for. It is important to note that not only does this take place in metropolitan cities such as Tokyo and Paris, but one can easily find traces of globalisation in regional spaces such as Katoomba in regional Australia. Mondal too agrees that 'the "paradox" of globalisation is that tendencies towards diversification, heterogeneity and polarisation are enmeshed with processes that increasingly draw diverse places and peoples into the hegemonic and homogenising frame of a single economic system and its attendant cultural logic: postmodern consumer capitalism.'[527]Globalisation is nowadays negatively associated with the homogenisation of culture. Many fear that this will spark the end of localisation. Millán too has observed that 'while local spaces are always interacting with national and transnational (or global) forces, they are never totally subsumed by them.'[528] The cynicism and reservation against globalisation is very much illustrated by means of humour in

[525] Ibid, 480.
[526] Ibid, 467.
[527] Mondal, 171.
[528] Millán, 'Traveling of "gender"', 8.

Rushdie's text in the portrayal of celebrity culture. For example, Vina uses her popularity to propagate her approach to clean living by publishing her diet book as well as promoting her exercise regime, thus successfully pioneering the 'celebrity exercise video and license(ing) a range of organic vegetarian meals…under the name Vina's VegeTable.[529] In another episode, Rushdie mocks anti-war music that becomes a global movement attracting mostly drug addicted hippies through Rai who claims that 'when you run out of peace juice, bliss pills or sweet treats for your veins, you are always welcome to return to Happy Valley…as long as you are in possession of the requisite spondulicks.'[530] Rushdie's dry humour encapsulates the irony of the interconnectedness between peace loving drug addicts and their profit-driven drug dealers.

On the other hand, globalisation has the spatial capacity to allow for individuals to fight and challenge the status quo. Whilst society may on the surface be following popular trends, the condition of globalisation creates the capacity for individuals or small groups to be the counter-culture. Vina's interpretation of feminism is a clear example of fighting against established singular ideologies, something Rushdie himself writes passionately about. Rai describes her as being a 'fiery, witty speaker on behalf of women's rights and against the sloppy *imperium* of men.'[531] Like Rushdie, Vina is criticised for her double standards in her approach to feminism with critics in the text demanding, 'how is it…that this outsize, free-spirited female is so obsessed by the clearly obsolete male member, so anachronistically in need of penetration, that she actually boasts in public about her "conquests"?'[532] Vina's openness about her sexual relationships to the public indicates the individualistic nature of

[529] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 394.
[530] Ibid, 381.
[531] Ibid, 394.
[532] Ibid.

ideologies in a globalised world. When on stage, Vina would announce the 'names of her latest stopgap lovers, her Reichian belief in the healing powers of orgone energy and multiple orgasms…[thus] demolishing – by inhabiting – taboos.'[533] Her blasé attitude towards her very own sexuality encourages the breaking down of social conventions. When taking into account the study of Pease and Brewer, one cannot deny that in a globalised consumer driven world the voice of a famous individual is disturbingly looked upon more favourably than that of a politician or an expert.[534] Indeed, the predominant principle and goal of feminism is to encourage an egalitarian society by breaking down the gender barrier. Yet, one must acknowledge that within every ideology exists differences and no one theorist's perception of feminism is congruent to another theorist. Hence, it can be argued that globalisation has the ability to acknowledge the diversity found in feminism and Vina Apsara represents one aspect of its diversity.

In the battle between homogenisation of world culture versus individualism, globalisation permits the two to exist albeit in conflict. Bringing together Bhabha's theory of the 'third space' with globalisation, Martino claims that the novel 'embrace this aesthetics of the impure, seen as the only resource to preserve us from identitarian obsessions which could lead to war, death and self-destruction.'[535] In presenting the two arguments in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the author demonstrates the importance of ambiguity and ambivalency in literature. It is only through invoking contradictions and conflicts that questions will arise. For Rushdie, it is better to have more questions than answers when examining life and literature. Certainly, on the face of it the cult of celebrity encourages a homogenisation of society. Even so, people are creative and it is this imaginative behaviour that allows for

[533] Ibid, 385.
[534] Pease & Brewer.
[535] Pierpaolo, 'Myth, Migration and Identity,' 209.

individualistic and rebellious behaviour such as that of Vina Apsara. When observing the text's celebration of hybridity and globalisation, Chun-Yen Chen argues that 'Rushdie mocks and calls into question the proliferation and standardisation of anti-globalisation discourse today, discourses that depend greatly on localistic identitarianism for personal or cultural anchorage.'[536] In evaluating the inexpedient nature of localisation especially in relation to one's personal identity, the protagonist Rai settles on multiplicity. Be that as it may, some critics argue that to view hybridity as existing within globalisation may prove to be idealistic and naïve.[537] Lawrence Grossberg's understanding of globalisation observes that within 'contemporary formation of globalisation, one can belong to the global as a place just as one can belong to the local as a space…It is no longer a question of globality and locality, but of the various ways people are attached and attach themselves into the world. It is a question of the global becoming local and the local becoming global.'[538] If one is to consider the notions of hybridity and multiplicity as vague and potentially disillusioning in a globalised era, it would mean that personal identity too has become problematic and unstable. Adorjan has argued that the 'excessive valorisation of a rather vague notion of hybridity and inter-cultural translation may easily overlook some of the more sordid realities of the global marketplace.'[539] Adorjan's case for this argument rests on the belief that the notion of hybridity indicates stability.[540] This could not be further from the truth. The notion of a hybridised culture in a globalised world is best exemplified in the text when the three protagonists move to New York City. A cosmopolitan city built by migrants for migrants,

[536] Chun-Yen Chen, 'A Place that is Other: Ethos of Groundlessness in Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*', *Mosaic* 43, no. 4 (December 2010): 58, EBSCO.
[537] Adorjan, 194.
[538] Lawrence Grossberg, 'The Space of Culture, The Power of Space', *The Postcolonial Question*, ed. Iain Chambers & Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 2001), 185, ProQuest Ebrary.
[539] Adorjan.
[540] Adorjan, 196.

the constantly evolving and hybridised nature of New York City's culture makes it impossible for any form of grounded stability. Hybridity indicates the existence of diversity.

As a condition, globalisation opens up space for newness to occur. It is for this reason Rushdie has embraced this notion and applies it in his fiction. Understanding that contemporary society is living within a globalised world, there is a need for cosmopolitan writers to examine and make sense of the many layers of politics, ideologies and most importantly, the use of language. Indeed, the term globalisation may have a negative overtone but one should not be too quick to be disillusioned with it. Although it may seem chaotic initially, the ability for contemporary literature to encapsulate both homogenising and individualistic ideas as well as offer diverse approaches to established theories such as feminism and psychoanalysis suggests the shifting and fluidity of language and discourse. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is a key example of how one individual's interpretation of feminism becomes another person's argument for sexism. The comparison of constructing two distinct characters such as Vina and Mira pushes the text nearer to its agenda: love.

Although Rushdie has claimed many times in interviews that neither criticisms nor readers' expectations of his texts make any difference as to how he approaches his writing, one can easily take note of the difference in the construction of characters in his later novels.[541] Rai's narrative is not simply plot driven but it is also reflective and contemplative. It is interesting to note that Rai's narrative in regard to Vina and Ormus' childhood and family experiences shapes their adult behaviours and actions. In true Rushdie form, their hybridised migrant position creates a kind of psychological fracture. By examining Rai's narrative on Vina and Ormus, one can observe that Rai's analytical and contemplative point of view of the celebrity

[541] Philips, 38.

couple reflects that of himself as well. In applying a psychoanalytic lens, the text reveals an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of the three protagonists on migration, loss of national identity and being in a state of rootlessness whilst living in an age of globalisation. As such, Rushdie's use of language to articulate issues related to diaspora and gender becomes even more ambivalent as he looks to depicting a chaotic and dysfunctional cosmopolitan world.

As discussed in previous chapters, Rushdie has been concerned with articulating the issue of migration and the diasporic experience in his texts. Arguably, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is concerned with the next level of diaspora: a sense of rootlessness. The protagonist-cum-narrator, Umeed 'Rai' Merchant, explains this sense of rootlessness that not only he himself feels, but others such as Ormus and Vina have also associated themselves with: 'in every generation there are a few souls, call them lucky or cursed, who are simply born not belonging, who come into the world semi-detached, if you like, without strong affiliation to family or location or nation or race; that there may even be millions, billions of such souls, as many non-belongers as belongers.'[542] Ironically, the three protagonists, Rai, Vina and Ormus, seem to belong to the idea of not belonging. Adorjan observes that 'while they embrace rootlessness and migration, they are in fact embarking on a quest in search of…a home in the world.'[543] This would imply that Rushdie is attempting to illustrate a globalised condition taken to the next level where migrants are uprooting their lives more than once and breaking their bonds with the diasporic communities which was echoed in the characterisation of Mishal Sufyan as discussed in the previous chapter. Driven by various factors such as economic opportunities, ease of travelling, a desire for change and many

[542] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 72-73.
[543] Adorjan, 209.

more, migrants are open to becoming rootless figures for the sake of searching for a better life. For Rai, Vina and Ormus, this is certainly the case.

Rushdie, in an article about the novel, wrote that 'one of the novel's principal images is that of the permeable frontier between the world of the imagination and the one we inhabit.'[544] The crossing of frontiers is arguably another important marker of a globalised world where countries seem to become, on the surface, nationless and people move somewhat freely between borders. Rushdie seems to suggest that for migrants, the onset of a globalised world points to an end of diasporic communities and enclaves. Mondal has suggested that Rushdie's shift in diasporic discourse 'is accompanied by a preference for "homelessness", an absolute concept which signifies less a lack of any particular sense of "home" and more an existential condition.'[545] Henceforth, cosmopolitanism becomes for Mondal, 'an existential fact' since 'Rushdie's representative migrants…are characters for whom crossing political frontiers is literally meaningless.'[546] This shift in ideology, from challenging national identity through diaspora to embracing a boundary-less philosophical state of mind, is a reactionary response to dealing with a globalised world. Indeed, Ormus, Vina and Rai's self-professed lifestyle as international rock stars and photojournalism deems national boundaries as irrelevant. Constantly crossing borders during tours or editorial projects, Vina, Ormus and Rai's understanding of national identity is pushed to the point of ceasing to exist. Even more so, as migrants who have uprooted themselves more than once, the three protagonists' movement towards a new national identity is less rigid. The concept of home is not bound within a specific locale but is instead propagated as rootless and boundless.

[544] Salman Rushdie, 'The Ground Beneath My Feet', in *The Nation* 273, no. 2 (2001): 42, EBSCO.
[545] Mondal, 179.
[546] Ibid, 181.

It can be argued that migrants have the privilege of being placed in between two cultures. There is the culture that one has grown up with as a child. Then, as adult migrants, immersing oneself into a different culture has, arguably, conditioned one to be in a state of double-consciousness. For Rai, Vina and Ormus, to be rootless or 'non-belongers' means, among many things, to be in a constant state of double-consciousness. Adorjan argues that 'it is this double vision…that may serve as the best illustration of the "translational" logic of migrancy. The possibility of stepping out of a frame always presupposes entering into another frame without abandoning critical awareness.'[547] Ormus' experience of looking through his world and the other world perhaps symbolises this state of consciously looking into two similar yet different cultures. The text goes further by making references to a world that is similar to its own. In the first instance, Ormus experiences the underworld in his sleep with his dead-at-birth twin brother Gayomart. In moments described as 'cama obscura', he is able to anticipate music that will in future become popular chart topper hits.[548] In one episode, Ormus played a song called 'Yesterday' at a gig where music industry mogul, Yul Singh, attends and who then consequently accuses him of stealing it. Ormus, however, could not tell him the truth of where he had heard the song. After all, 'how could he say, I have a dead twin, I follow him in my dreams, he sings, I listen.'[549] Parashkevova has argued that Ormus' link to Gayomart's anticipatory music 'disrupts both the concepts of cultural origin and the supremacy of the Western popular culture.'[550] Being the first to listen to these future chart toppers seems to imply the 'alternative future in which the songs of the West are but echoes of the East's.'[551] Thus, Ormus' experience of the underworld and the real world not

[547] Adorjan, 213.
[548] Rushdie, *The Ground* 54.
[549] Ibid, 187.
[550] Parashkevova, 418.
[551] Ibid.

only signifies the ambiguous double life that a migrant leads but also decentres the Eurocentric attitudes towards the origin of rock music.

This double-consciousness is further clarified later in the text when, following his near fatal car accident, Ormus begins to acquire insight into a parallel world where 'John Kennedy got shot eight years ago…Nixon's President. East Pakistan recently seceded from the union. And the British aren't in Indochina.'[552] As familiar as these events seem to us, the world of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara differs greatly since John Kennedy survives the Dallas assassination but only to be killed later with his brother Bobby Kennedy whilst *The Watergate Affair* is in actual fact a fictional novel with a fictional character named President Nixon.[553] Although dry in humour, the experimenting and fictionalising of historical events in the text is a recurrent motif that questions and plays with reality and truth. Furthermore, when one migrates, truth, at the best of times can be questionable. This is already highlighted in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* when Chamcha is sent to an immigration detention facility outside London where he meets other strange half human half animal creatures who like him all belong to a diasporic community.[554] Reality and truths on foreign land can often be baffling for a migrant. Thus, by reinventing and experimenting with reality, especially one that concerns the realities of world history, Rushdie blurs the lines of truth.

Ormus, Vina and Rai's double migration, firstly to London and then to New York City, is described as a sort of metamorphoses of the self. Chen argues that 'the globalised world is the cause of the need for metamorphosis.'[555] Indeed, if one is to follow Rushdean philosophy

[552] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 350.
[553] Ibid, 225 & 280
[554] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, 164-9.
[555] Chen, 65.

as advocated in his earlier novels, the novelist emphasises the need to be flexible to keep up with a constantly changing world. Certainly, Rushdie's texts suggest that metamorphosis of the self ensures one's survival in a globalised world. On Ormus' flight to London, he experiences the plane journey as it 'lifts from his native soil, so his heart lifts also, he sheds his old skin without a second thought, crosses that frontier as if it didn't exist, like a shape shifter, like a snake.'[556] It can be argued that the transition of self-metamorphosis goes much more smoothly for the likes of Ormus, Rai and Vina due to their lack of needing to place roots. Described as passing through a 'stretchy translucent membrane across the sky, an ectoplasmic barrier…(with) ghostly border guards armed with thunderbolts', the migrant's experience of border crossing in a plane sparks fear, excitement and to a certain extent, anxiety of the impending unknown.[557] Parashkevova notes that 'although the membrane is now permeable, the passage through it involves irreversible transformations.'[558] Ormus welcomes this transformation and is, in fact, aware that London is not his final journey but only the start. This we see in the way he is dressed for his first plane trip, 'arraying his body in the casual wear of America: the Yankees baseball cap, the white Beat generation T-shirt with the ragged cutaway sleeves, the Mickey Mouse watch.'[559] Rai makes it clear in his narration that through his clothes, Ormus is declaring that, 'England may be my immediate destination but it is not my goal, Ormus' clothes announce.'[560]

Migration, the loss of national identity and rootlessness are observed and celebrated in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Although it is a difficult task to make direct connections between text and author, it can be argued that Rushdie's shift in the treatment of diasporic discourse

[556] Rushdie, *The Ground* 250.
[557] Ibid, 253.
[558] Parashkevova, 419.
[559] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 251.
[560] Ibid.

in this text is perhaps due to his own experiences during the Fatwa years before the publication of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Herbert has even gone so far as to make a crude link between the narrator and Rushdie suggesting that 'Rushdie's own post-Fatwa metamorphosis from…the "Salman I know to the Rushdie I often barely recognise" informs his representation of an "alienated, disconnected" narrator.'[561] Mondal too agrees that 'it is difficult not to conclude that Rai, Ormus and Vina are on…occasions mouthpieces for Rushdie himself' as the writer attempts to make sense of his experience in the Fatwa years.[562] Moreover, Rai's dominantly reflexive tone in the text, similar to that of one writing a memoir, mirrors that of an individual who has gone through an emotional rollercoaster of disillusionment and then, at last, found hope. Yet, one cannot help but notice that even though there is much optimism to be traced in the text, there prevails an overarching element of cynicism as well. This shift in articulating the experience of diaspora is best examined with a psychoanalytic lens. One could argue that Rai, Vina and Ormus' preference to lead a life without the necessary placing of roots is due to the protagonists' repression of childhood wounds. Holmes has observed that developmentally 'the lack of an internalised secure base in childhood resonates with the lack of a secure self in adult life.'[563] This Freudian understanding of psychoanalysis is further supported by Bateman and Holmes whom observed that 'in the adult mind vestiges of its evolutionary and developmental history …believed that psychological illness could best be explained by tracing back neurotic symptoms to their childhood origins.'[564] Thus when applying a psychoanalytic lens, one is able to observe how migration is used by the trio to repress the pain from the lack of affection the protagonists experienced as children.

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[561] Herbert, 143.
[562] Mondal, 174.
[563] Jeremy Holmes, *Exploring in security: Towards an attachment-informed psychoanalytic psychotherapy*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 136, Proquest Ebook Central.
[564] Anthony Bateman & Jeremy Holmes, *Introduction to Psychoanalysis: Contemporary Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 49, Proquest Ebook Central.

As a child, Rai has had to compete for his parents' affection with their obsessive love for Bombay stating that their love for the city 'had often oppressed and stifled me.'[565] As a result, Rai's attitude towards a rootless existence in a globalised world stems from an unresolved rivalry between himself and the metropolitan city. Like Rai, Ormus' problematic childhood relationship with his mother, Lady Spenta, gives him a strong incentive to migrate to England. Blamed for the stillborn death of his twin brother, Ormus could never win the affections of Lady Spenta. On the plane to England, Spenta gives him five hundred pounds, articulating the money as her way of 'buying her freedom from him.'[566] Repressing not only guilt put forth by Spenta for supposedly causing the death of Gayomart, Ormus' birth is also blamed for the cricket accident which left his older brother Virus mentally disabled as well as pushing Virus' twin, Cyrus, to becoming a serial killer through Ormus' incessant melodic whistling as a baby. Vina, too, left an abusive parent back in America before heading to India to stay with relatives where she met both Rai and Ormus. Readers are first introduced to young twelve-year-old Vina as 'literally selfless, her personality smashed, like a mirror, by the fist of her life. Her name, her mother and family, her sense of place and home and safety and belonging and being loved, her belief in the future, all these things had been pulled out from under her, like a rug. She was floating in a void, denatured, dehistoried, clawing at the shapelessness, trying to make some sort of mark.'[567] Vina's exposition of childhood mental and physical trauma is further worsened after a bond was formed and then subsequently broken due to a misunderstanding between herself and Rai's mother when she turned sixteen years old. Vina's life continues to include several more abuses through her travels to London and back to America. Consequently, the wounds inflicted on Rai, Ormus and Vina at a young

[565] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 210.
[566] Ibid, 255.
[567] Ibid, 121.

age are repressed in order to survive and reach adulthood. Unable to be loved and thus left damaged by the people who were supposed to love them, the protagonists find initial solace and comfort in each other's company as children.

Yet as adults the idea of migration, liberation and most importantly, the pursuit of happiness leads them to a life of rootlessness and unattachment to land. Chen too agrees that the 'motif of voluntary departure is anticipated tellingly in numerous episodes of failed parenthood.'[568] One can argue that the core issue that lies underneath a rootless attitude to life is the insecurity or instability of the self. For Rai, Vina and Ormus, the fluid nature of their personal identity is a result of unconsciously repressing their childhood psychological wounds. The lack of affection by immediate family members for the three protagonists pushes them to find happiness elsewhere. Delving into the psychological mindset of broken individuals, Rushdie's construction of Rai, Vina and Ormus demonstrates the dysfunction of the modern cosmopolitan world where family dynamics change to adapt to the globalised world.

On top of that, the love triangle between Rai, Vina and Ormus reveals that their psychological wounds extend not only to their life decisions of being rootless global citizens but also to their adult relationships with one another. Vina and Ormus' love story is, for Rai, an epic. Yet their love failed due to the psychological conflicts that afflicted their relationship. In Rai's own words, Ormus believed in 'the idea of there being an eternal and perfect partner whom he might perfectly and eternally love and by whom he might in his turn be rendered perfect and eternal.'[569] In order to achieve the eternal perfection that Ormus yearns for, he uses oaths and vows to support his dedication towards Vina. In one episode,

[568] Chen, 57.
[569] Rushdie, *The Ground,* 190.

he demands that Vina set a time limit as to when she will marry him to which she replies, 'Sure, Ormie. Ten years, the clock's running, three, two, one, go.'[570] From a psychoanalytical perspective, Ormus' preoccupation with oaths and vows is arguably a push for security and stability in his emotional relationship with Vina. Ormus' childhood wound of being made to feel a deep sense of guilt formed a thirst in him to want to be loved. Hence, it is not possible for Ormus to survive this narrative. His constant search for the solid ground beneath his feet runs against the message propagated by the text. By marrying Vina, Ormus is led to believe naively that he has achieved stability. This could not be further from the truth since Vina's promiscuity continues. Moreover, at the time of Ormus' death, which is similar to that of John Lennon's, he is shot by a fan dressed like Vina. This episode highlights the irony as well as the disturbing aspect of living in the age of celebrity hysteria. The Vina lookalike expresses her dissatisfaction at Ormus through extreme violence for betraying Vina's legacy by replacing her with someone that looks like her in the new VTO band.

Vina, on the other hand, suffers from a fear of being abandoned and as a result refuses to commit to a monogamous relationship. Even after her marriage to Ormus, her extramarital affairs continue to the knowledge of her husband. Monogamy, for Vina, is considered to be a prison, 'she loves him, she loves him to hell and back, but she won't put it in writing and sign her name to it. Freed from the nagging pain of her childhood memories, she refuses this new captivity. She offers him the conventional anti-nuptial radicalism of the time. Monogamy is a manacle, fidelity is a chain. A revolutionary not a wifey will she be. A changer of the world not of diapers she'll become.'[571] It is clear that due to her miserable childhood in America and India, Vina does not trust the concept of love within the context

[570] Ibid, 370.
[571] Ibid, 369.

of a monogamous relationship. Her attitude to monogamy reflects the thinking of the 1970s when the concept of 'free love' disseminated through popular culture. Upon positive reflection, one can observe that Vina's feminism is developed and conceptualised not simply as a product of its time but also as a result of the mental and physical abuse that she endured as a young vulnerable girl. It is important to note that her fear of being abandoned is both a core issue that she suffers from as well as a defence mechanism shielding her from getting hurt. Even though Vina admits to loving Ormus in divine proportions and speaks highly of their exalted lovemaking, her childhood experiences developed in her a deep-seated mistrust of others who try to be emotionally intimate with her in addition to securing her affections for them. This is also seen in her relationship with Rai. As her reliable sexual and intellectual companion, Rai too tries to demand exclusivity of Vina. This mistrust of intimacy towards male partners seems to stem from her childhood experiences where even Rai observes that 'in spite of being just twelve, (Vina) had a history of extreme violence towards males who stepped out of line.'[572] Therefore, it is not possible for Vina's love for Ormus or Rai to survive.

As discussed, the cult of celebrity is a significant phenomenon since the mass arrival of television and radio. The post-Vina chapters of the text reveal a disturbing look into society and the individual's psyche. The cult of Vina that arose around the world after her disastrous death reflects that of our own experiences when Princess Diana died in a tragic car accident. This is to a certain extent a commentary on our current reality and how the cult of celebrity has dominated our lives let alone the lives of these celebrities. Vina's death and the grossly publicised nature of her death reflect that of Princess Diana's own tragic fatal car accident in 1997 in Paris while trying to escape from the paparazzi. Subsequently, the funeral, police

[572] Ibid, 112.

investigations and not to mention the various conspiracy theories, documentaries and books written concerning this event were popularised through different media channels. In light of this highly publicised worldwide phenomenon, Rushdie has managed to encapsulate this obsession in the characterisation of Vina Apsara. Like Diana, Vina has strangers referring to her death as a 'personal bereavement'.[573] From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, the personal attachment that society feels towards public figures, be it our fictional Vina Apsara or the late Princess of Wales, is due to our unconscious desire to be in their position of being wanted, the centre of attention and ultimately, fame. In an age of celebrity hype where beautiful people roam the covers of magazines, billboards and television, society's obsession with it comes down to the desire to be just like them. Celebrities are essentially the modern world's very own royalty. Rushdie himself has argued that living in the 'Age of Fame…the intensity of our gaze upon celebrity turns the famous into commodities, too, a transformation that has often proved powerful enough to destroy them.'[574] This is certainly the case for Princess Diana and to a certain extent, Ormus and Vina's death.

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, the obsession of the cult of Vina is further expanded when young girls begin to dress like Vina the singer. Some of these impersonations only mock Vina's style of fashion but some, like Mira Celano, have the ability to almost pull off the real Vina including her voice and mannerisms. In the chapters after Vina's death, the text reveals a disturbing activity of Ormus whereby he instructed his contacts and networks to keep an eye out for a real Vina lookalike. For Ormus, his love and grief for Vina is taken to the next level when he obsessively searches for a Vina lookalike and finds her in Mira Celano. When taking a Lacanian approach, one might be inclined to believe that both Vina

[573] Ibid, 480.
[574] Salman Ruahdie, 'Crash', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 109.

and Mira have become Ormus' *objet petit a*. What Ormus lacks in receiving maternal affections, he replaces with his Vina obsession. Since Vina's death is more or less a perfectly reasonable assumption due to the earthquake at Gudelajara, Ormus is keen to believe that Vina did not in fact die. Moreover, age and drugs has taken a toll on him leaving him weak and behaving more oddly than his usual self. After finding Mira, Ormus begins to return to his almost normal self. The characterisation of Mira Celano suggests an alternative to Vina Apsara. The text makes a point of comparing the two characters suggesting that in a globalised world, metamorphosing oneself and acknowledging the instability of the world we live in is key to survival.

The study of Psychoanalytic theory brings to light the disturbing aspects of human behaviour and action. How we behave and the decisions we make in our life are linked back to how we were brought up. The stress and instability of living in a globalised world may lead to a certain level of dysfunction in the family dynamic. Rushdie does well in decentring the diasporic and gender discourse through the depiction of unstable ground beneath the characters' feet. Rai, Vina and Ormus' attachment to non-belonging is to a large extent a product of their upbringing. Indeed, Rushdie's protagonists are considered to be global citizens since their occupation demands it of them. Nevertheless in undertaking a discourse analysis approach to the text, their lifestyle indicates that society has entered an era where the tyranny of distance is non-existent and advances in technology connect people around the world. Similar to his approach to diasporic discourse, Rushdie's characterisation of women in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* has arguably veered on to a different path. Considering the strong approach to feminist discourse in the text, it does not seem to attract as many gendered analyses as one might think. Indeed, at the centre of this text revolves a love story between Ormus, Vina and Rai. However, it is with great innovation that Rushdie

constructs his female characters within the context of a globalised world. Embracing globalisation as an existential condition, Rushdie undertakes his character construction within this framework. As aforementioned, Rushdie's characterisation of Vina Apsara marks a slight shift in the author's allegedly predictable construction of women. In particular, the construction of Vina Apsara and Mira Celano has strong feminist elements where their independence and right to self-determine their lives is celebrated. On the other hand, we have characters such as Lady Spenta and Antoinette Corinth who seem to be destructive to themselves as well as those around them thus echoing the familiar patterns discussed in previous chapters. Similar to Rushdie's earlier novels, the variety and diversity of female characters found in the text demonstrates the importance of invoking both sides of the ideological spectrum, in this case feminism and patriarchy, in order to show how language operates within this framework. Through the two prominent relationships in the text, Vina-Ormus and Mira-Rai, the destroyer/nurturer dichotomy that is typically seen in many of Rushdie's earlier texts may be challenged. Arguably, the Mira-Rai relationship points toward a reconciliatory ending that is full of optimism and hope even when there is still instability in the world. Furthermore, the likes of minor female characters such as Spenta, Antoinette, Anita Dharkar and Ifredis Wing highlight the diverse beliefs and approaches found in feminist discourse. It may also be worth considering whether Rushdie's approach to female characters post-Fatwa is affected due to past texts' criticisms of his dealing with gender issues. By doing so, one begins to recognise the shift and development in approaching gender issues as well as exploring the ambiguity that exists within our language.

In attempting to write about globalisation in the text, Rushdie has also managed to articulate gender discourse. In doing so, his use of language reveals an unsettling aspect of our communication tool. The ideologies pertaining to gender discourse reveal that we have

feminist as well as patriarchal attitudes in our everyday discourse. Since Rushdie's texts are concerned with the everyday that reflects the cosmopolitan discourse, it would seem fitting to transfer this framework to our own experience with language and discourse. The fact that language holds our values, norms and attitudes suggests that the existence of ideologies within it shapes our way of living. Rushdie's experimentation with writing and language confronts the inherent ideologies within it via the way he constructs his characters. Indeed, with characters as polar opposites as Vina and Lady Spenta, one could argue that Rushdie is playfully invoking the extremities of feminist and patriarchal elements. Futhermore, the characterisation of divergent women confronts fixed stereotypical behaviours and attitudes pertaining to either feminist or patriarchal ideologies.

It is important to note that the female characters in the text are responding to a changing world where the traditional role of women is being confronted. Adorjan has claimed that the 'suppression of distance and the transformation of local ethos into simulacra of neoethnicity…engender a fractal universe, a world in which change seems to occur at an unparalleled rate of acceleration.'[575] In particular, cities like Bombay, London and New York were, at the time, undergoing radical transformations with the speed of globalisation taking family relationships and dynamics to a new level. Vina Apsara is a prime example. Born to a white American mother and an Indian father in Vermont, Virginia, Vina's hybridised cultural identity places her in an ambiguous position where the concept of belonging is immediately damaged. Furthermore, her childhood history of violence and trauma ensures what seems on the surface to be a destructive character. Yet Rai believes upon contemplation that her behaviour can be justified if we are to take into account the context of Vina's troubled childhood. Rai claims that 'if we are to understand Vina's rage,

[575] Adorjan, 9.

which drove her art and damaged her life, we must try to imagine what she would not tell us, the myriad petty cruelties of the unjust relations, the absence of fairy godmothers and glass slippers, the impossibility of princes.[576] Readers will find that Vina's tough girl façade is really 'a kind of masquerade, concealing herself…behind her bitter ironies.'[577] Indeed, from a psychoanalytical perspective, one can discern that her tough and fierce attitude is a defence mechanism which she hides behind. White argues that in the context of migration in a globalised world 'the experience of moving from one country to another tends to increase the likelihood of the use of primitive defence mechanisms as a protection against the difficulties of everyday life and in relationships in the new country.[578] In addition when one fails to address the core issues constructively, that 'can determine our behaviour in destructive ways of which we are usually unaware.'[579] This is arguably seen in Vina's emotional relationship with Ormus.

Vina's lack of dedication as well as disgust at the concept of monogamy injured her relationship with Ormus. On their differing viewpoints, Rai recounts that 'what he (Ormus) calls infidelity, she calls freedom. What looks to him like promiscuity, she provocatively renames democracy.'[580] One can deduce from a psychoanalytical point of view that her aversion towards monogamy stems from her fear of intimacy as well as abandonment. The witnessing of her biological mother's suicide, the abuse she faced from her maternal aunt who adopted her, followed by the abandonment of her biological father, is surely enough reason to justify her inability to have a loving relationship with Ormus. Yet it can be argued

[576] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 111.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Kristin White, 'When migration is used as a defense against painful realities: some experiences of working with English-speaking patients in Germany,' *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy* 27, no. 1 (October 2012): 42, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02668734.2012.760476.
[579] Ibid.
[580] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 384.

that the feminist movement gave Vina the liberation she needed from her childhood trauma which she had not been able to control. Even though her core issues remain unresolved leading her and Ormus' relationship into a downward spiral, Rushdie constructed Vina to be a strong-willed and independent character, and not one who becomes destructive towards herself or the men in her life. In creating a 'symbolic figure', Vina's ideas frequently change.[581] Nevertheless, the text insists that 'for two generations of women she was something like a megaphone, broadcasting their common secrets to the world. Some felt liberated, others exposed; all commenced to hang upon her every word.'[582] The fact that Vina's ideas on female empowerment were organic and constantly changing reflects feminism as an ideology around the world. Indeed, feminism has a common denominator between women around the world as one that is concerned with achieving equality. However, one must note that it is the interpretation of egalitarianism that differs for women around the world as it relates to their own lived experiences. If one was to employ a deconstructionist framework, one might find that the concept of feminism is, like Vina's opinions, varied and constantly changing and growing between men and women and particularly between woman and woman. It has already been pointed out that one woman's idea of feminism can be another woman's idea of sexism. Certainly, we see this in the writings of feminist theorists where interpretations of feminism can differ slightly or even greatly especially when intersected with other forms of oppression (class, race, sexuality and religion to name a few) as experienced by women.

Rushdie's feminist construction of Vina is further extended with her business savvy attitude towards the managing of finance. Here, Vina is pointedly contrasted with Ormus whose

[581] Ibid, 162.
[582] Ibid.

concentration on money matters often leaves him falling asleep.[583] This leaves Vina with the responsibility to manage and learn what it means to be a good businesswoman. With the help of manager and friend, Mull Standish, it is Vina who 'had become a sharp businesswoman, as formidable as many of the big wheels for whose brains she showed an exaggerated respect they usually didn't deserve.'[584] Moreover, with the success of her and Ormus' band, VTO, her political stance grows stronger as she organises the 'Rock the World charity concerts, meeting world leaders to demand action on global famine…demonstrating against health hazards at nuclear processing plants' whilst Ormus focuses on baking bread.[585] One finds that there is a strong sense of admiration for Vina in the text's use of language when Rai describes her as 'Vina of the horribly injured childhood who instead of whining on about it in a million interviews just shrugged her shoulders and made nothing of it at all.'[586] From this analysis, it is clear that the construction of Vina exceeds the roundedness of a powerful feminist character. To a certain extent, Rushdie has improved his construction of female characters. Having said that though, the construction of destructive characters such as Antoinette and Lady Spenta demonstrates how Rushdie invokes the two ideological spectra, feminism and patriarchy, to reflect everyday attitudes in modern day discourse.

When comparing Vina and Ormus' relationship with Mira and Rai, one can see that Rushdie has also made significant improvement in constructing an ending based on optimism and wholesomeness.Ormus and Vina's relationship is often described as magical and eternal and likened to epic love stories which the text reinforces on numerous occasions. On the narrator's musings of Ormus and Vina's relationship, Rai claims that 'this is a story of a

[583] Ibid, 397.
[584] Ibid, 433.
[585] Ibid, 425.
[586] Ibid, 429.

deep but unstable love, one of breakages and reunions; a love of endless overcoming, defined by the obstacles it must surmount, beyond which greater travails lie.'[587] Fairytale elements such as Ormus' allegedly tyrannical (in Vina's opinion) oaths and promises are used in various episodes. It can be argued that it is not only magic and magical creatures that fulfil the necessary requirement needed for a narrative to be considered a fairytale. Vina and Ormus' epic love story can be likened to a fairytale since the language and discourse used concerning their relationship fits the narrative structure of a handsome prince sharing a magical bond with his beautiful princess. However, as great as their love is, it is arguably unsustainable which thus leads to its tragic end. Like a fairytale, one of the most prominently magical episodes is when Vina flies to London upon hearing that Ormus has been in a coma for three years. At the point when Lady Spenta decides to turn the life support machine off, Vina arrives and says his name at which time he immediately opens his eyes.[588] Moments like these reveal the text's use of language as being hopeful and magical. This is especially the case when Rai writes of the miraculous recovery and reunion of Ormus and Vina, 'how shall we sing of the coming together of long-parted lovers, separated by foolish mistrust for a sad decade, reunited at last by music?'[589] The romanticisation as well as divination of Vina and Ormus' love is arguably based on the tragedy and length of their separation. Yet, this 'deep but unstable love' could not work out for various reasons.[590] Indeed, Ganapathy-Dore too argues that 'if Ormus loses Vina for ever, Rai recovers Mira, a Vina look-alike in an alternative reality.'[591]

[587] Ibid, 322.
[588] Ibid, 321.
[589] Ibid, 321.
[590] Ibid, 322.
[591] Ganapathy-Dore, 24.

On the other hand, Mira and Rai's relationship is depicted as being wholesome, pragmatic and to some extent, ironically grounded. Parashkevova argues that the motif of the ground 'denotes stability and gravity, as well as firmness or truth of a viewpoint. Yet, in the text, it also symbolises entrapment, ties, forced belonging, so that shifting ground, disorientation, and the nausea of traveling can have a positive, sobering effect on the characters.'[592] The novel's ending suggests that in a world where change and instability are rife, the one foundation that we can rely on is the relationships we establish with one another. In contemplating his present life with Mira, Rai says, 'here's ordinary human love beneath my feet. Fall away, if you must, contemptuous earth; melt, rocks, and shiver, stones. I'll stand my ground, right here.'[593] Mira's character, though only introduced towards the end of the text, is revealed to be 'Vina's polar opposite.'[594] Mira Celano starts her career as a Vina impersonator. Although there were many 'phoney Vinas' playing in musical gigs after the real Vina's death at Guadalajara, Mira's impersonation of Vina is true to the very last detail of her singing voice.[595] The only difference is that the Vina who died was already in her forties whereas Mira's age depicted a younger Vina in her twenties. Although different in some ways to Vina, Mira Celano's background is to a large extent similar to the dead singer. Orphaned at a young age and moved from one relative to the next, Mira's hybridised identity – her father is Italian whereas her mother is Indian – like Vina places her in between two cultures that did not fully claim her as one of their own. Thus, Mira is a representation of neoethnicity whereby her birth in New York City from migrant parents who belong to two different cultures means that she has never visited the birth countries of her parents let alone experienced the culture fully. This is further argued by Herbert who claims that '*The Ground*

[592] Parashkevova, 416
[593] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 575.
[594] Ibid, 531.
[595] Ibid, 517.

Beneath Her Feet is therefore marked not only by a sense of the migrant's loss…of the homeland, but also by the homeland's rejection of the exile's right to claim such access.'[596] Hence, Mira is by definition born into exile.

Moreover, Mira's self-supported single mother position reiterates the shift in family and gender dynamics in a transforming world. The language and tone of admiration used by Rai to describe Mira is one that readers will find familiar based on his narrative of Vina Apsara. After falling pregnant and having to drop out of college, Mira's father disowned her and bitterly calls her the 'disappointment of my old age.'[597] One would think that after bitter disappointments and failure in receiving love from a young age, Mira's attitude to love would mirror that of Vina. This could not be further from the truth. Unlike Vina, Mira demands 'total engagement, total fidelity…the whole heart or else forget it.'[598] Mira's concern for her daughter Tara justifies her 'all or nothing' position.[599] One must take note that Mira's narrative is only taken up in two chapters and thus, may render Rushdie's characterisation of her as two-dimensional. On the other hand, one can argue that Rushdie has managed to construct a well-rounded character by acknowledging the fact that Mira's flawed nature in the past (her drug use after the suicide of her daughter's father) as well as the fact that Mira is Rai's present and future suffices to convince readers of the nature of her character. The respect that Rai has for Mira's bravery and pragmatic attitude to life comes through strongly in the text. In addition, the narrative is focused on Rai's past and Mira is his present and future. One could argue that this is the discourse of the modern age of

[596] Herbert, 146.
[597] Ibid, 521.
[598] Ibid, 531.
[599] Ibid.

transformation where both pragmatism and enterprise become strong ideological driving forces.

The fracturing of family dynamics in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is arguably what shapes the gender discourse. For women like Vina and Mira, the broken homes of the past have influenced their behaviours and attitudes to life even if it is in divergent ways. However, characters such as Lady Spenta, Antoinette Corinth and even Persis Kalamanja tend to reinforce patriarchal norms and attitudes. One can observe that the construction of these characters reflects how globalisation has transformed familial relationships in a way that allows time and space to help accommodate patriarchal ideology. As illustrated at the beginning of the chapter, Lady Spenta spent an early part of her life resenting her son, Ormus Cama. On reading the exposition of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, readers can be pardoned for having to think that here Rushdie's female characters are again reinforcing patriarchal stereotypes. Spenta is described as 'a placid individual, an astigmatic endomorph, heavy-spectacled and heavy-bodied…(whose) unflappability of a soul (is) fully occupied on the spiritual level.'[600] Her treatment of Ormus as well as her murderous son Cyrus suggests that Spenta's unnatural indifference towards her troubled children stems from a learned cultural behaviour that is typical of upper-class Parsees living in Bombay. In addition, the miscarriage of Ormus' twin brother, Gayomart, as well as her ignorance of Ormus' existence which she thought to be 'death trying to be born, so that she could be united with her lifeless child at once' contributed to the cold distance she placed between Ormus and Cyrus.[601] Spenta's migration to London sparked the beginning of a build-up of guilt, initially on the plane and more so afterwards when Ormus is almost killed in a car accident. Spenta then

[600] Ibid, 24.
[601] Ibid.

'wishes nothing more than to make eternal reparation for a lifetime of poor mothering.'[602] When taking care of Ormus while he is in a coma, Spenta 'resolves for the one hundred and first time to make it up' to Ormus hoping that it 'must not be too late for redemption.'[603]

Antoinette Corinth, on the other hand, does not seek any form of redemption. Mother to the Crossley brothers who are Ormus' colleagues on Radio Freddie, she is portrayed as a cruel, vindictive and manipulative woman whose worst crime is arguably drugging Ormus and the Crossley brothers, causing the car accident that killed one of her sons, Hawthorne Crossley. Owner of a boutique that is allegedly visited by models and musicians such as Mick Jagger and John Lennon, Rai's psychoanalysis of her describes Antoinette as 'a demagogue: self-righteous…she sounds like somebody covering up, using the half-digested rhetoric of the age's lunatic fringe to lend colour to a life story of whose painful banality she is perhaps afraid.'[604] Depicted as a strong and independent woman, Antoinette was 'disowned by her wealthy family for marrying the clubfooted Standish, and then abandoned by the bastard with two small children and no income, she dragged herself out of the gutter by her own talents and round-the-clock work.'[605] Certainly, her use of addictive substances on herself as well as on the children in addition to her bohemian lifestyle and various lovers, indicates her need to self-medicate to numb the pain of not being able to deal with her emotions.

The episode of the car accident sees Standish accusing Antoinette of infanticide, believing that she has been vindictive ever since he became close with his sons, Waldo and Hawthorne, after two decades of desertion. On the day of the accident, Ormus and the Crossley brothers

[602] Ibid, 311.
[603] Ibid, 314.
[604] Ibid, 286.
[605] Ibid, 295.

went for a picnic that was prepared enthusiastically by Antoinette to celebrate Ormus' Colchis record deal. The text seems to indicate strongly that the boys were drugged with 'high levels of the hallucinogen lysergic acid diethylamide 25' and that in the wreckage, 'a thermos flask has been found…[and] this flask is not retained in police possession, or subjected to any kind of examination by the authorities.'[606] The text continues to suggest that the flask is never found and Standish's finger blatantly point towards Antoinette. The dialogue between Standish and Antoinette is full of bitterness and blame on the day of Hawthorne Crossley's funeral. Even more so, Antoinette vengefully made the suggestion that 'they (Ormus and her sons) put the stuff in there themselves. To die and take your lover boy with them. Poor darlings. They couldn't even get that right.'[607] Here we can observe that Antoinette's character reinforces patriarchal belief that women can become both the nurturer and destroyer of men. Although the text brings to light the struggles she faced at the beginning, the construction of Antoinette reaffirms the patriarchal attitude of how financially powerful women can be driven by maternal deviancy as a way to justify their past struggles. The language used in the text to describe Antoinette is conflictual; at times the tone can be full of admiration and the rest of the time confusion mixed with disgust. Khanna has argued that Rushdie's use of language 'enacts the heterogeneities and contradictions of a Third World postcolonial metropolis, acquiring in the process the multi-tonality that it embodies.'[608] It is possible to extend this argument to include the contradictions we find in Rushdie's representation of women in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*.

It can be argued that minor characters play a significant role in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Rushdie's constructions of minor characters in his works reflect a cosmopolitan feel

[606] Ibid, 309.
[607] Ibid, 312.
[608] Khanna, 399.

that readers will easily relate to. After all, our lives are full of minor characters that come and go. Yet, their small role does not necessarily mean their impact on our narrative to be any less significant. Similarly, in the world of Rushdie's fictions, one can comprehend the running theme of the text through the analysis of the construction of minor characters. Like Lady Spenta and Antoinette Corinth, Persis Kalamanja, too, is an example of a patriarchal stereotype invoked in the text as a form of contrasting other female characters such as Vina and Mira. Persis is described in the text as one of the most beautiful girls in Bombay, who will eventually be married to Ormus Cama. In India, such betrothals are common among close friends. Ormus, however, has eyes only for Vina. Even though she is aware of Ormus' rejection of her, Persis continues her devotion to Ormus and refuses the advances of any other suitable bachelors in Bombay. Such is her devotion that even when Vina left Ormus in India and he begins his philandering through Bombay's youth, Persis never stops loving him. Her utter worship and passion for Ormus is arguably unhealthy and her characterisation exposes the patriarchal attitude that confines traditional Indian women to believe that women should not step outside the betrothal agreement whilst the men are allowed to womanise, under the pretence of seeking intimate experiences. In contrast, Rai's past lover, Anita Dharkar, represents the modern urban Indian woman with liberal values who is also comfortable with her own sexual identity. Though introduced at the onset as being a political editor who helped Rai's exposé against Piloo Doodhawalla's corruption, her subsequent mention later in the text reveals that she is now a popular celebrity much to the dismay of Rai. Nevertheless, Anita has also overcome struggles of rape and extreme violence from helping Rai with the exposé. Instead of running and hiding, she braved the world and continued down her chosen career path.

One could assume that the women of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are depicted to be complex and well-rounded due to past criticisms of Rushdie's texts. The likes of Spivak, Cundy and Grewal have made strong comments against Rushdie's lack of strength in his characterisation of women. Thus far, this thesis has focused on his earlier works and taken into account these notable critics' analyses of his texts. The variety of female characters seen in this text as well as previous works suggests that Rushdie intends to encapsulate the wide spectrum of human behaviour and interactions. Some readers will find it uncomfortable for a female character to be illustrated along the lines of reinforcing patriarchal attitudes. However, if we are to consider the traditional cultural context of characters such as Padma and Zeeny Vakil, one can observe that these characters challenge the norm of their own patriarchal culture. The characterisation of powerful women such as Vina, Mira and Anita as well as the language used to describe their admirable traits suggest that Rushdie's endeavour to develop better, more complex female characters is beginning to have an effect. It is a strong possibility that in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* we see Rushdie taking his past criticisms on board. He is, after all, a celebrity in the literary world. He does not only interact with editors and publishers but his position in the academic world gives him the space to freely interact with academic critics. Thus, it would not be wrong to assume that Rushdie's development of female characters is due to interactions and engagement with his critics. An understanding of this development through Jauss' aesthetics of reception theory illustrates that readers and critics can play a significant role in the way texts are received and thus potentially impact on change and development in future literary works. Moreover, Rushdie's lectures and public interviews in universities such as Emory University and New York University suggest that he has engaged with criticisms of his past works and especially that of his female characters. This is evident in chapter five's analysis of *The Enchantress of Florence* where Rushdie includes a full bibliography at the end of his well researched novel.

Chapter 5: Social and sexual taboos in *The Enchantress of Florence*

Magic realism is never far from Rushdie's work and *The Enchantress of Florence* is no exception. In using this approach, Rushdie experiments with historical figures such as the Mughal emperor Akbar the Great in his quest to reinterpret history. This form of reinterpreting history highlights issues that even now are still prevalent in the twenty-first century. Although the narrative spans two different empires in two different time periods, it is centred on the history of Qara Koz/Angelica. In his commitment to connect the East with the West, Rushdie has intricately woven a narrative that celebrates hybridity and universality through cosmopolitan settings such as the Mughal Empire's Fatehpur Sikri and Renaissance Florence. Cosmopolitan settings are a space where ideas can flourish and societal developments and innovationsoccur. This is certainly the case when one examines elements of the *The Enchantress of Florence* as it celebrates discourses, debates and difference. It is because of the openness of cities like Florence and Fatehpur Sikri, that ideas such as gender and sexuality have the capacity to develop and grow. Qara Koz's transgression of royal protocols and gender boundaries in these cosmopolitan cities ensures her survival. Moreover, the removal of Qara Koz from Mughal history since leaving the royal house permanently suggests that her departure is indeed un-Princesslike. However, just as she is easily removed from the official history books, she is smoothly reinstated with the confirmation of the matriarchs in the House of Akbar. Her story manages to capture the entire population of Fatehpur Sikri to the extent that everyone begins to dream of her and to use her story as a vessel to describe their beliefs and values subconsciously in their sleep. The strength of Qara Koz's story is very much reflected in the person that she is. As opposed to Rushdie's female characters in earlier texts, the representation of Qara Koz does not reinforce the nurturer/destroyer dichotomy. However, one must note that ambiguity in the representation of female characters is still prevalent in this text. The trace of ambiguity found in the

construction of the female characters in *The Enchantress of Florence* is arguably a result of a language that contains patriarchal and feminist ideologies within it. Furthermore, the representation of diverse sexualities indicates the text's engagement with taboo topics that again challenges gendered discourse. Hence, this chapter demonstrates the development of Rushdie's female and male characters as the novelist strives to articulate and place gender issues in a manner seen as refined and improved. Critic Ivancu too observes that 'in *The Enchantress of Florence*, probably the novel with the most powerful female characters written by Rushdie, the journey to the Other and the journey to the self announces as the main theme.'[609] As mentioned in the previous chapter, this development is arguably symptomatic of a writer who engages with his readers and critics. Regardless, *The Enchantress of Florence* provides a comparison to earlier novels analysed in this thesis as it traces the development of Rushdie's treatment of gender.

As seen in previous chapters, in order to better understand gender issues, one must examine the male characters as well as the female characters. It is interesting to note that Rushdie's early texts during the 1980s represent male characters who are weak by nature and to a certain extent emasculated by the female characters. This, of course, has changed as seen in the construction of characters such as Umeed 'Rai' Merchant in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Emperor Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Saleem Sinai's misogynistic impulse in his narrative proves to be transparent and challenged by his very own listener, Padma, whilst Omar Khayyam Shakil's role as the peripheral-protagonist is subsequently demolished as the strength of Sufiya Zinobia overtakes him. The distinct change seen in Rushdie's male characters can be accounted for by Rushdie's time during exile when his life was under threat by the theocratic Iranian regime. Novels published in the post-Fatwa era

[609] Ivancu, 83.

articulate a more sophisticated approach to gender issues. Furthermore, one is also able to trace the change in Rushdie's ideas from migration and diaspora to globalisation and a sense of unrootedness. This was clearly illustrated in the previous chapter where the impact of globalisation led to a feeling of unrootedness towards the concept of home. This theme of unrootedness is further explored in the characterisation of Qara Koz in *The Enchantress of Florence* which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The portrayal of various female characters in the text, who reinforce varied notions of feminist and patriarchal elements, reflects the current state of contemporary gendered discourse. Ortner notes that the 'feminist movement has gone through many changes since that time [here she refers to the earlier feminist movement in the 1970s], under the impact of challenges from minority, queer, and third world women. One way to summarise these changes is to say that the issue of male dominance or patriarchy has become on the one hand more muted, and on the other hand more complicated, more intertwined with other forms of inequality like race, class, and sexuality.'[610] Within the context of contemporary feminist movements, one can observe that the construction of Qara Koz reinforces feminist ideology whilst the characterisation of Jodha Akbar and Angelique the Messenger contains strong traces of sexist notions as the male gaze reinforces certain potentially harmful stereotypes. This is not to say that Rushdie is a misogynist, as implied by critics such as Verma and Cundy. The ability for Rushdie to present a novel that highlights the two ideologies suggests that within language and discourse, patriarchy and feminism can at times dictate the structure of how we communicate with one another. Indeed, Joseph and Taylor have both argued in their introduction to *Ideologies of Language (RLE Linguistics A: General Linguistics)* that language has the capacity to contain 'an "ideology" (that) necessarily involves the

[610] Ortner, 533.

imposition of external social and political values.'[611] Furthermore, Phillips has noted that 'a direct causal relation between ideas about language and actual use of language in interaction is posited. Language ideologies constrain what people actually do with language.'[612] However, this constrain does not necessarily present a static use of language. Feminism especially when used as a tool with discourse analysis can lay bare the ways in which language and discourse become oppressive in reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

Although the text is set in the past, the gender issues examined in this text are currently valid in the modern age of globalisation. The portrayal of Qara Koz in the text highlights the transgressive nature of the Princess to the extent that she defines and redefines gender boundaries. Her ability to move from one country to the next and to determine her own destiny indicates how the modern woman struggles with the shifting gender boundaries as dictated by globalisation. The movement of people across the globe hybridises different values, norms and attitudes. Qara Koz's survival in Florence and the New World indicates that her flexible nature to accommodate different ideas and values enables her to live freely within a male dominated and structured world. Certainly, her experiences in Florence as propagator of women's freedom earned her widespread respect from the bourgeoisie. Yet, the character of Jodha Akbar is particularly seen as reinforcing patriarchal values. Pătrașcu has observed that Jodha's 'identity is strictly definable in relation with the will of her creator, Akbar the Great. She never crosses the boundaries of the space delimited by the emperor, she is the queen whose biography is ordered and modelled from outside, whose existence is closely dependent on the emotional and volitive acts of her creator…the attempt of the

[611] Joseph & Taylor, 2.
[612] Phillips, 557.

imagined queen to adopt independent attitudes and emotional states is at least ironic.'[613] Since her ideas are aligned with Akbar himself, she is subsequently subjected to the very same interpretation of the worldview as the Emperor which is mainly within the confines of patriarchy. Henceforth, as a result of Akbar's magical and imperial power as well as the narrative of Qara Koz growing stronger, the imaginary queen becomes weaker to the extent that she finally disappears into thin air as the form of the lost Mughal Princess materialises. In this respect, one can see that Akbar is intrigued more by the strong and independent nature of Qara Koz than by Jodha's dependent self. On the other hand, the construction of Angelique the messenger reveals how the body of a woman, especially that of a slave woman, is ultimately controlled by men. The story of Angelique grotesquely illustrates how patriarchal power entitles men to control the female body to the point where Angelique, needing to take back control of her body and future, commits suicide. However, this exposé is portrayed ambiguously since the very same people who are incensed at Angelique's exploitation become the same perpetrators who continue to sexually violate her. This is further explored later in the chapter.

Rushdie exploits social taboo topics to continue to question and challenge Western society's liberal-focused values system. In experimenting with sexual discourse, Rushdie demonstrates how the questioning and confronting of taboo topics can reveal uncomfortable truths of human nature. Sexual desires are confined to values, norms and attitudes of society. In contemporary Australia, one's sexual identity and preference is still confined within strict government legislations and this is evident in the recent marriage equality laws that were passed in November 2017. Judith Butler, invoking Foucault's understanding of power in

[613] Ecaterina Pătrașcu, 'Feminism and Femininity in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence,' Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2014): 553, EBSCO.

discourse, extends this observation to include sexuality noting that it too is 'part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls.'[614] Hence, it becomes all the more important for literature to deal with such topics in order to unpack the politics in sexual discourse. Lesbianism, polyandry and incest are topics explored in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Cosmopolitan spaces such as Fatehpur Sikri and Florence provide a space for transgressive sexual ideas to be normalised. In queer theory, sexuality is understood to be fluid and subject to change. As such, the fluid and changing nature of cosmopolitan cities such as Fatehpur Sikri and Florence provides a space where sexuality can be explored safely without fear of physical or emotional persecution. The polyandry relationship between Qara Koz, her Mirror and Argalia is another example of the fluidity of sexuality as it changes during an individual's life. An incredibly taboo notion with which Rushdie experiments in the text is incest. As the narrative progresses one becomes aware of how the narrator of Qara Koz's story, Niccolo Vespucci, is born out of an incestuous relationship. In dealing with a taboo topic, the text questions how incest can be reinterpreted as a norm when one's authoritative structure is non-existent. In the New World where there are no authority figures and the fundamental structure of society is broken down, new rules are created in which, as suggested by the text, incest becomes normalised. This is of course a highly controversial statement that the text seems to convey to its readers. However, one must also remember that novels such as *Heart of Darkness* have also toyed with the idea that when laws and regulations cease to exist on new foreign soil, new rules are created and this is mostly concerned with satisfying fundamental primal desires. These desires then become a driving

[614] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

force in both the Congo in *Heart of Darkness* and in the New World in *The Enchantress of Florence*.

In order to understand how conflicting ideologies frame the discussions around sexuality, it is important to examine the male gaze. Indeed from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*, stories of women are narrated by male protagonists (via a male writer). From a specific political agenda to an experimentation of the aesthetics, one could argue that Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* is an in-depth analysis of storytelling. The exploration of narration has been a running interest in Rushdie's previous texts. As a historian, Rushdie has adopted an approach to narrativisation by using principles of New Historicism. In doing so, the author reveals that 'narrative is not, as one might presuppose, a mimetic art in which a copy of an original ideal is represented in its exactitude.'[615] In this respect, Rushdie makes a point of uncovering the lack of stability in the process of storytelling because, the further a story is passed from one narrator to the next, the more the story itself changes, taking on new meanings and values. This interpretation of history, especially that of the Mughal empire as well as the Renaissance period in Florence, provides Rushdie with the space to explore not just the aesthetic aspect of literature but also the concept of truth. Indeed, Rushdie has, in previous works, demonstrated his skill in rewriting historical events. This form of experimentation brings to light the fact that 'literature is the space in which the tension between real and unreal remains as a constant question that predicates reading.'[616] The characterisation of Akbar the Mughal emperor illustrates the ambivalence in storytelling especially that of retelling a historical story. Interestingly,

[615] Martin McQuillan, ''Illuminated by a ray of the sun at midnight': *The Enchantress of Florence*'', in *Salman Rushdie: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, eds. Robert Eaglestone & Martin McQuillan (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 90.
[616] Ibid, 97.

Akbar's flawed character is not portrayed as weak unlike Rushdie's previous male protagonists, as the Great Emperor searches for universal truths. Henceforth, by offering a comparative analysis of Akbar with Rushdie's previous male characters such as Saleem Sinai, Omar Khayyam Shakil, Saladin Chamcha and Rai Merchant, this thesis demonstrates how Rushdie's male characters have developed over a period of time. An understanding of the characterisation of Rushdie's male protagonists ultimately brings to light how the author manipulates the ambiguities that already exist in language.

Many critics agree that Saleem Sinai's character from *Midnight's Children* is seen to be misogynistic. In comparison to Akbar, Saleem's agenda is aptly summarised at the end of *Midnight's Children* when he claims that 'women have made me; and also unmade.'[617] It is important to note that as chapter one has previously demonstrated in contrast to the argument of critics such as Charu Verma, Saleem's misogyny is not a direct influence of Rushdie's own personal views on women. When looking into Rushdie's early works from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*, it can be argued that Rushdie is exploring ways to articulate a method of representing a variety of women. The female characters are often subjected to a representation within the confines of the male gaze. Saleem's representation of women is arguably framed within the context of a patriarchal culture. Therefore, the construction of Saleem as an Indian middle-class first-born male arguably shapes his patriarchal attitudes towards the women in his lives. By constructing this character, Rushdie reveals the patriarchal elements found in some parts of Indian culture. As Nicole Weickgenannt argues, the deliberate misogyny in Saleem's representation is, on the part of Rushdie, a 'conscious and multi-layered strategy.'[618] It is also worth noting that to a certain

[617] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 565.
[618] Weickgenannt, 65.

extent, Saleem is considered a weak construction since his blatant misogyny has on many occasions left readers disturbed and confused. Arguably, Rushdie's strategy in revealing the inherent patriarchal norms and attitudes in aspects of Indian culture through the characterisation of Saleem is a failure.

Saleem Sinai's recounting of his early memories with his mother, Amina Sinai and *ayah* or nanny, Mary Pereira, depicts a baby in the centre of two loving mothers' attention. Saleem claims that as a baby he 'became…the battleground of their loves; they strove to outdo one another in demonstrations of affection.'[619] In representing the two women as rivals for his affection, Saleem demonstrates the privilege in being the first-born male child in the family. With this privilege come the prejudice and assumptions of how he should be treated and how women should treat him. One can extend the argument further in suggesting that the Oedipal complex seen here – Saleem's strong fixation upon his mothers – is reflected in his teenage and adult experiences with other women. Bilal Shah argues that 'when Saleem's telepathic gifts give him an inside view of women, he uncovers maternal adultery.'[620] Here, Shah is referring to Saleem's biological parents – Vanita the street singer and William Methwold the owner of Saleem's childhood home Methwold Estate – whose indiscreet affair led to his birth. This is the start of Saleem's suspicions towards women that in time turns into a form of misogyny. This is quite unlike Akbar the Mughal emperor who is more or less an admirer of strong and intelligent women such as his imaginary queen Jodha and his mother Hamida Bano.

[619] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 64.
[620] Bilal A. Shah, 'Nation and Narration: A Study of *Midnight's Children,' Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, NO. 1 (2013): 85, EBSCO.

Shame's protagonist, Omar Khayyam Shakil, is very much like Saleem Sinai. Shakil is to a certain extent the start of Rushdie's construction of weak emasculated male characters. He is the quintessential anti-hero of the text and most readers will have trouble sympathising with or relating to his character. Indeed, the narrator shapes our understanding of the protagonist when he labels Omar as 'dizzy, peripheral, infatuated, insomniac, stargazing, fat: what manner of hero is this?'[621] David Hart argues that 'Rushdie mimics the ideology of protagonist-as-hero and then mocks this literary convention.'[622] Rushdie experiments with this literary convention by adapting Omar Khayyam Shakil's name from a historical literary figure, the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, as well as constructing his protagonist to be the stereotypical ignoble hero. Although he is a doctor, Omar's anti-hero protagonist status is further perpetuated when his marriage to the intellectually disabled Sufiya Zinobia worsens her medical condition turning her from beauty to beast. Even more so, his marriage to her is a result of intentionally wanting to climb the social ladder since she is the daughter of the leader of the state. However, it can be argued that Omar's character is constantly being pushed to the margins as other characters such as Raza Hyder and Iskander Harappa overtake his narrative. Hart continues to observe this experimentation of the literary convention in claiming that 'by telling a virtually absent anti-hero's story, Rushdie lampoons the narrative convention that suggests that the supposed protagonist actually *is* the protagonist.'[623] One can easily mistake Omar for a minor character but for the narrator's specific labelling of him as the protagonist. Regardless, Omar's narrative functions as a supplement to the narratives of the two political figures, Raza and Iskander.

[621] Rushdie, *Shame*, 18.
[622] Hart, 10.
[623] Ibid, 11.

Omar Khayyam's three mothers brought him up to be devoid of shame. Cultural norms dictate how society behaves towards transgressions. Falling pregnant outside of marriage is one where characters in *Shame* are taught to feel ashamed. The Shakil sisters conceived Omar out of wedlock and being aware of this cultural offence, insisted on raising him within the parochial confines that prioritised and valued shamelessness. Omar remembers his childhood 'with hatred instead of love; not with flames, but icily, icily…it would be easy to argue that he developed pronounced misogynist tendencies at an early age. That all his subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers.'[624] Here it would seem that Omar's hatred of his mothers and his subsequent mistreatment of women is the result of the Shakil sisters' closeness with one another. The Shakil sisters, acting as matriarchs of their household, Chunni, Munnee and Bunny, are depicted as inseparable and it is this intensity of their relationship with one another as well as their uncompromising decision to keep Omar locked in the house away from the town of Q until he turns twelve that contributes to his hatred for them. Samir Dayal observes that it is 'inadequate to say that *Shame's* masculinisation of women is problematic…or that what we are looking at is a familiar misogyny in Rushdie's characterisation of women as monstrous and castrating.'[625] Instead, Dayal raises the question of whether the novel is 'simply substituting male aggression with male self-loathing.'[626] Evidently, the novel would then suggest that the masculinisation of the Shakil sisters' parenting style is the main cause of Omar's own misogyny. This is hardly the case if one is to compare the great respect that Hamida Bano receives from Akbar.

[624] Rushdie, *Shame*, 35.
[625] Dayal, 52.
[626] Ibid.

Saladin Chamcha from *The Satanic Verses* is also constructed in a similar fashion to Omar Khayyam Shakil. Not an especially likeable character at the beginning, he is represented as an Indian migrant living in London suffering from the cultural cringe. His embarrassment at his own culture is quite evident when he visits his family in Bombay after a lengthy period of separation where his mother observes how he complains about Indian food and refers to Indian people as 'junglee people.'[627] However, the difference between Omar and Saladin is the flawed humanity in Saladin that readers are able to empathise with in the text. Saladin's development from being a sycophantic migrant looking for ways to assimilate into whiteness to one who accepts his heritage and culture brings to light the internal conflict that diasporic communities often face. In contrast to Saleem Sinai and Omar Khayyam, the construction of Saladin's character is much improved. Saleem's misogyny and Omar's peripheral anti-hero protagonist status are seen to be weaknesses. Admittedly, each character is framed within his own novel's thematic as well as the time period in which the text is set. Parashkevova agrees that in *The Satanic Verses* the 'male characters in Rushdie's novel flirt with, and embrace or reject, a number of essentialist notions.'[628] Nevertheless, Saladin's character can be regarded as another swift turning point in Rushdie's construction of male characters. The emasculation and the subsequent strengthening of Chamcha's character towards the conclusion of the text demonstrate the growth in Rushdie's male characters.

Saladin's cultural cringe problem is ironically highlighted when he marries the politically left-wing Pamela Lovelace who also suffers from her own version of cultural cringe. Unfortunately for Pamela, her English voice is 'composed of tweeds, headscarves, summer pudding, hockey-sticks, thatched houses, saddle-soap, house-parties, nuns, family pews,

[627] Rushdie, *Verses*, 46.
[628] Parashkevova, 439.

large dogs and philistinism.'[629] As a result, she is constantly pursued by those that she despises and is at the same time regarded with suspicion by the 'greenies and peacemarchers and world-changers with whom she instinctively felt at home.'[630] By marrying Saladin, she had hoped it would distanced herself from upper-middle class British. The irony, however, lies in the fact that Saladin married her for what her physicality as well as her voice embodies: being British. This is revealed to her when 'she had woken up one day and realised that Chamcha was not in love with her at all, but with that voice stinking of Yorkshire pudding and hearts of oak.'[631] For Chamcha, his desperate attempt to inhabit and metamorphose into Britishness eventually led him to marry someone he does not truly love. He had fallen in love with what she symbolised. Amrit Biswas claims that Chamcha and Pamela's relationship 'testifies to the "liminal reality" which arises from the ambivalence between the colonial Self and its Otherness and which makes it possible to cross, even to shift Manichean boundaries.'[632] In metamorphosing into Britishness Chamcha hopes to escape his past and his own culture. However, as observed by Parashkevova, 'Pamela dies a death that is necessary for Saladin, symbolic of his rejection of the image of the "goodandproper Englishman" and of his choice of a route to a reconfigured Bombay.'[633] His acceptance and reconciliation of his migrant status as well as his past and culture marks the survival of what seems on the surface to be a weak character. Akbar, on the other hand, is more concerned with syncretism and universal harmony and understanding. As one who is inclined to philosophical musings, Akbar propagates cultural and religious tolerance throughout his Empire and no single culture or religion is seen to be better than the other.

[629] Rushdie, *Verses*, 180.
[630] Ibid, 387.
[631] Ibid.
[632] Amrit Biswas, 'The Colonial Subject and Colonial Discourse: Salman Rushdie's critique of Englishness in *The Satanic Verses,' World Literature Written in English* 40, no. 2 (2004): 94, EBSCO.
[633] Parashkevova, 450.

The narrator/memoirist Umeed 'Rai' Merchant from *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is different to Rushdie's earlier male protagonists. Certainly, like Omar Khayyam Shakil, his own narrative sits on the periphery so as to make way for the epic love story of Vina and Ormus. Yet Rai is constructed as a well-rounded albeit marginal protagonist. Likable and empathic, Rai's tone of narrative is similar to that of *The Enchantress of Florence* in that it is often calm and to a certain extent confessional. Complex and somewhat flawed, Rai's reflexive tone and philosophical musings on his past bring to light the regrets, ironies and revelations of personal and public experiences. Rai's narrator/protagonist status captures the lens of world history and connect it to his own personal life. Highlighting the beauty and flaws of globalisation, Rai's photojournalism encapsulates a time of significant change where the lives of ordinary people are now affected by those in power with no sense of distance whatsoever. Rai's images through the beauty of Rushdie's writing engage readers with the turbulent happenings of the 1970s when concepts such as feminism, politics and globalisation were being confronted through activism, music and the global media, and thus challenge the status quo. Herbert argues that 'Rushdie places a photographer-narrator – who is also a migrant – at the centre of tensions between aesthetics and politics and, in turn, offers a radical renegotiation of the relationship between the cosmopolitan migrant artist and the homeland which has been a central concern of his work thus far.'[634] Here we see the importance of Herbert's argument to connect Rai's photojournalistic career with his relationship to Bombay since the migrant's spatial and temporal distance from the homeland shapes his/her double-consciousness and consequently perspective on life.

Rai's role as narrator, memoirist and photographer means that he is able to reflect on not just existential questions, but also the capacity to observe and examine the people he meets. In

[634] Herbert, 140.

an episode where Vina wakes Ormus from his three-year coma, Rai recounts how the subject of Western and Eastern medicine is argued heatedly between Pat Kalamanja and Vina Apsara. When debating with Lady Spenta regarding the best treatment for Ormus' quick recovery after his near fatal accident, Vina is given an aggressive lecture by Pat Kalamanja on her lifestyle, 'who are you to speak of old learning? ...this same Ayurveda you praise is expressly opposed – diametrically and inalienably opposed – to your brand of debauched activities. Music, drugs, television, sexual aggression, exciting movies, pornography, personal stereos, booze, cigarettes, the physical arousal of bodily rubbing in nightclubs and discotheques.'[635] Although Vina is in favour of using traditional Eastern practices to help Ormus recover as opposed to his mother's preference for Western medicine, Kalamanja's criticism on Vina's celebrity way of living highlights the irony that exists during that period of time. The indulgences of consumerism, sexual exploitation and drug-induced intoxication are contradicted by Vina's generation's advocacy of social justice, vegetarianism and the importance of clean eating. Rai's analysis of the 1970s through his narrative demonstrates not just the beauty of hybridity and the mixing of various cultures together; it also brings to light the controversies, ironies and conflicts of a globalised world. The episode above provides evidence that even though Vina practices purity through her use of Ayurvedic medicine and being vegetarian, she still belongs to a culture that celebrates drug-taking and polyamorous relationships. This is something that Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence* can relate to since his ideas and longing for cultural syncretism are also challenged by the paradox of his own sovereignty.

It is important to note that the male characters described here are constructed to fit their particular text's meanings and themes. Since this dissertation considers Rushdie's female

[635] Rushdie, *The Ground*, 334.

characters and how they have developed over time and space, it is necessary to look into the development of the male characters. After all, the stories of Rushdie's women are essentially being told through the gaze of the male characters. Yet it should be noted that although the male characters have the power of description, the ambiguities in language allow space for women to take back some form of control of the narratives. Admittedly, the central male characters: Saleem Sinai, Omar Khayyam Shakil, Saladin Chamcha and Rai Merchant, are constructed to convey the themes and messages of their respective texts to the reader. But when these characters are observed alongside each other, it is clear that there is a sense of progress and development in the way they are constructed and how they represent other characters. And it is because of this that we can also discern the development of Rushdie's male and female characters as a consequence of the development of his own literary experimentation. This is especially evident in the characterisation of Akbar in *The Enchantress of Florence*.

It can be argued that Rushdie has constructed his own Renaissance Prince in Akbar the Great Mughal Emperor. He is constructed to be a complex individual, both a philosopher and a warrior. He is described by the narrator as being

> A barbarian philosopher and a crybaby killer, but also an egotist addicted to obsequiousness and sycophancy who nevertheless longed for a different world, a world in which he could find exactly that man who was his equal…with whom he could speak freely…a world in which he could forsake the gloating satisfactions of conquest for the gentler yet more taxing joys of discourse.[636]

In personalising the historical figure of the Mughal emperor, Rushdie has created a deeply complex character. Just as he is depicted in the history books, Akbar's rule over the Mughal dynasty concentrated on cultural hybridity and universalism that propagated religious tolerance. Thus, Akbar is to a large extent of particular interest to Rushdie as he represents

[636] Salman Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 68-69.

the very ideas that the author himself propagates in his fiction and non-fiction texts. As one of the main protagonists, Akbar's narrative is told through the omniscient narrator who connects the great emperor's Mughal reign (1556-1605) to that of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) in Renaissance Florence. Jorissen argues that 'the two cannot have been in contact with one another, but it is through the narrator that their life…[and] some of their ideas are put into one context.'[637] This proved to be an excellent strategy since Akbar's approach to philosophy is quite similar to that of Machiavelli. This connective motif is further illustrated in the representations of the two prostitutes in Fatehpur Sikri and their counterparts in Florence emphasizing 'the similarities between the two cultures.'[638] Even more so, the concept of connecting the East and the West has been a device employed by Rushdie in previous texts such as *East, West* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Akbar is best described by Nicole Weickgenannt as being 'open to the voices of the marginalised and to listen to those who are not usually deemed worthy to be heard; he is willing to learn lessons in hybridity from foreigners, his enemies, his female relatives, and his imaginary lovers, by allowing himself to be curious about other ways of living.'[639] This is true in the case of admitting an audience for the foreigner and storyteller Niccolo Vespucci. However, Akbar is also conscious of the fact that his sovereign status is often in conflict with his ideas on egalitarianism and his desire for questioning absolute truths.

The nature of Akbar's reign even runs as far as opening a House of Adoration also known as 'a house of disputation where everything could be said to everyone by anyone on any

[637] Engelbert Jorissen, 'Travelling through Times and Spaces: Making to Meet Akbar with Machiavelli. Some Considerations about Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of* Florence,' *Kyoto University Reasearch Information Repository* 54, (2009): 52, Google Scholar.
[638] Burcu Tercan, 'Fatehpur Sikri and Florence in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence,' International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 8, no. 8 (2015): 105, EBSCO.
[639] Nicole Weickgenannt Thiara, 'Enabling Spaces and the Architecture of Hybridity in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46, (2011): 422, EBSCO.

subject, including the nonexistence of God and the abolition of kings.'[640] This, however, is in direct opposition to him being the Universal Ruler. In allowing the people to question his role as supreme leader of the empire, the people hence quote him as being mad.[641] Indeed, Martin McQuillan argues that in his 'commitment to freethinking, Akbar is every bit the Enlightenment monarch and centuries in advance of his visitors from Renaissance Europe.'[642] Yet, Akbar's aspiration for a freethinking society is still hampered by his own sovereign rule of which he is thoroughly conscious. In this respect, his flaw is also one to be admired. Placed in a position of power, Akbar's elitist philosophy does not discriminate. Therefore, he is not a weak male protagonist. His conscious understanding of his own limitations as ruler and what he desires seems to strengthen the character and the narrative. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Akbar and the Mughal Empire's deterioration arguably begin when he admits Vespucci to an audience. The revelations that subsequently occur and Akbar's actions afterwards of sacrificing Vespucci and conjuring his great-grand aunt Qara Koz leads to significant criticisms and the drying up of the golden lake symbolising the end of the Mughal empire's golden years. He is still, however, a 'fully drawn character…(with) many sides to his regal self.'[643]

Just like his female characters, Rushdie's male characters have arguably improved significantly over a period of time. One does tend to wonder whether it was his post-Fatwa experience or the criticisms of his peers and readers that contributed to this mature development in characterisation. Nevertheless, the constant experimentation with characters strengthens not only the message but also the linguistic aesthetic of the text. When

[640] Rushdie, *The Enchantress,* 71.
[641] Ibid, 70.
[642] McQuillan, 91.
[643] M. Madhusudhana Rao, 'Rushdie, the Enchanter of Tales', *The IUP Journal of English Studies* 5, no. 4 (2010): 25, EBSCO.

comparing Saleem Sinai to Akbar the Great, it can be argued that Rushdie's male characters have certainly improved. Rushdie's concerns remain the same: migration, hybridity and multiplicity and in this text, humanism. Ultimately, the texts deal with the struggle to understand a globalised world through a humanist perspective. This is perhaps seen even more so in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Although the themes are similar, there is sophistication in how the characters are constructed. The language used in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence* is similar as it encapsulates differing ideologies be they feminism, patriarchy and globalisation in order to convey its message of celebrating hybridised global culture, even when there is cultural homogeneity to fear. Rushdie's texts illustrate the ambiguities in his characterisation as a result of the differing ideologies that operate within language and discourse.

Rushdie's obsession with experimenting with language continues as he finds new ways to articulate different feminisms in *The Enchantress of Florence.* The main attraction to the plot revolves around the character of Qara Koz or Lady Black Eyes since she is known for the 'extraordinary power of those orbs to bewitch all upon whom they gazed.'[644] It can be argued that Rushdie's representation of women has improved in the characterisation of Qara Koz. Admittedly, his previous works illustrate ambiguities in the female characters as they repeatedly fall into a formulaic nurturer/destroyer dichotomy. Previous chapters have demonstrated that the construction of characters such as Padma, Sufiya Zinobia, Zeeny Vakil and Alleluia Cone shows that his use of language demonstrate the tensions of conflicting ideologies in discoursethus reinforcing patriarchal tropes. As a result, some critics have too quickly misjudged these characters as a failure on the part of the author.[645] On the other

[644] Rushdie, *The Enchantress,* 238.
[645] Catherine Cundy, Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad, Inderpal Grewal, Charu Verma.

hand, one can observe that he has refined his exploration of gender issues in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence*. In this sense there have been significant improvements in his characterisation of women as evident in the analysis of Vina Apsara and Mira Celano in chapter four. This too is the case for characters such as Qara Koz, the imaginary queen Jodha Akbar and Angelique the Messenger. Although the female characters in *The Enchantress of Florence* differ greatly from Rushdie's early works, there are still traces of patriarchal elements in this text.

Before analysing Qara Koz, Jodha Akbar and Angelique the Messenger, it is important to place their stories within their cultural context. Like many of Rushdie's texts, *The Enchantress of Florence* is full of minor characters such as Jodha Akbar and Angelique the Messenger who play a significant role in contributing to the overall theme of the text. First and foremost, *The Enchantress of Florence* reinforces the importance of storytelling. Having read History at the University of Cambridge, Rushdie is aware that this discipline is also another form of storytelling. Facts are often exaggerated, manipulated and exploited to deliver its core message. The story of Qara Koz who is a lost and disowned Mughal princess is conveyed through Niccolo Vespucci to the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Additionally, Vespucci claims to be Qara Koz's son and thus of royal blood. However, the end of the novel sees Vespucci's claim being recanted by Akbar and his death is ambiguously suggested in the text. Coming from a direct descendant of Genghis Khan, Akbar is said to possess necromancy powers which he uses to conjure an imaginary wife (even though he already has real wives in his palace) named Jodha. However, Jodha's imaginary existence is subsequently faded into non-existence when the Emperor's interest towards Qara Koz grows to the point that he conjures her from the dead to reconfirm Vespucci's claimed heritage. This, Qara Koz denies and reveals that it is her servant the Mirror who is Vespucci's true

biological mother. Vespucci is only the vessel for Qara Koz's story to enter back into Mughal historical records. Lastly, the character of Angelique the Messenger takes a minor space in the text. Vespucci's narrative of Qara Koz begins in Renaissance Florence where he tells the story of three childhood friends: Antonino Argalia, Niccolo il Machia and Ago Vespucci. Argalia's adventures abroad led him to meet Qara Koz. Angelique's role as messenger is to recount the story of Argalia's overseas adventures to his other two friends Ago Vespucci and Niccolo il Machia(also known as Machiavelli). The three characters, Qara Koz, Jodha Akbar and Angelique draw to light the text's treatment of gender succinctly. Again one finds that Rushdie's treatment of gender issues, though improved, is ambiguous. Whilst Qara Koz is depicted as a progressive woman who transgresses cultural and gender boundaries, Jodha Akbar is portrayed as a strong woman but decidedly confined to patriarchal norms and attitudes. Angelique, on the other hand, illustrates a subjugation that is familiar for the period in which the text is set. Iser too makes the point that 'literature operates along the borderlines of the systems of meaning dominant in that epoch…it is up to the reader to recode the familiar values and thus arrive at those concrete selections and decisions on his or her own.'[646] Although the text is set at a time that did not prioritise the rights of women, Rushdie's text written within our contemporary discourse brings two conflicting ideologies to the forefront, that of patriarchy and feminism. As a result, recoding the text through a gendered lens, it can be argued that Rushdie's treatment of women and gender issues continues to be ambiguous. Moreover, Qara Koz, Jodha Akbar and Angelique highlights how women in history books have always been subjected to the interpretation of men in power.

[646] Iser, 'Texts and Readers, 329.

Critics and book reviewers alike have often made the comparison of Qara Koz's character to Rushdie's fourth ex-wife, Padma Lakshmi, much to the displeasure of the author.[647] After all, characters from previous novels have been based on his past lovers. This is noted in Rushdie's recent memoir, *Joseph Anton,* where he claims that some characters from *The Satanic Verses* were inspired by the people in his lives, 'here, reinvented, was Clarissa (*Rushdie's first wife*), given the Richardsonian name of "Pamela Lovelace", and here, transformed from desert walker into mountaineer and from Christian into Jew, was an avatar of Robyn (*Davidson*) named Alleluia Cohen, or Cone.[648] This is not the first time that Rushdie has fictionalised his own personal experience.[649] Nevertheless Qara Koz, also known as Lady Black Eyes in Fatehpur Sikri and Angelica in Florence, is an exceptional character who transgresses geographical, cultural and gender boundaries. Born with exceptional enchantress-like powers, her fate is depicted in the text as always being at the mercy of powerful men. Even though she is a product of her time, Qara Koz manages to exploit her power, beauty and privileged position to survive. It is interesting to note that the tone of the text allows for a feeling of acceptance of not just Qara Koz's exploitation of men and by men, but also of her seductive beauty. Niccolo Vespucci, the storyteller and one of the main protagonists, first introduces her as being the lost Mughal princess which is quickly confirmed by Emperor Akbar's well-respected mother, Hamida Bano and his aunt Gulbadan Begum. Qara Koz's role in the narrative is to link the two disparate cultures, East and West, together. Preferring the life of a migrant, Qara Koz's name too begins to change as she moves from one place to the next. Since 'she preferred life among foreigners to an honoured place in her own home', Qara Koz was ostracised and erased from the official family history.[650]

[647] Andrew Anthony, 'Salman Rushdie: Finishing my Book When Padma Left Me,' *The Huffington Post*, April 14, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/04/06/salman-rushdie-finishing_n_95283.html.
[648] Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*, 170.
[649] See chapter three page 156.
[650] Rushdie, *The Enchantress,* 217.

This form of transgression not only defies royal protocols but also empowered her position as being one of the few pioneers to connect Western culture with the East.

Qara Koz's migration throughout the world is reflected as being quite an achievement for a woman of her time. However, this achievement is circumscribed by the fact that her alliances have to be constantly replaced for the sake of protecting herself and surviving in a patriarchal world. Weickgenannt has observed that Qara Koz's 'ability to replace the protection of one man for that of another…comes across as manipulative and as a femme fatale for all men who fall for her.'[651] It would be simplistic to fit her character within the Rushdean dichotomy of nurturer/destroyer which is by now familiar to many critics. Instead, the text makes concession for the cultural limitations placed on women at the time whilst explicitly stating that what Qara Koz does is a 'radical act.'[652] Moreover, Qara Koz's love of living among foreigners is described as being a 'wandering thing in her, the unrooted thing.'[653] Certainly, Rushdie's texts are known to celebrate 'unrootedness' and hybridity as a result of migration. Dana Badulescu also agrees that 'any Rushdie text is a celebration of hybridity, pluralism, and what Rushdie himself calls, "unrootedness"…like his characters, Rushdie believes that to cross borders means to be transformed.'[654] Hence, the characterisation of Qara Koz is constructed as a positive impact on the narrative rather than destructive. In this respect, we see a significant improvement in Rushdie's representation of women through his use of language.

[651] Weickgenannt, 425.
[652] *The Enchantress*, 436.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Badulescu, 97.

Qara Koz's determination to not live within the bounds of her own cultural norms, values and traditions transforms her into a powerful and intelligent enchantress who changes her name to Angelica once she reaches Florence with her captor and lover Argalia the Turk. Changing one's name after crossing borders is a familiar trope explored by Rushdie in previous novels such as *The Satanic Verses* in the character of Saladin Chamcha. The changing of a migrant's name as they cross borders/cultures signifies the change in their personal identity. For Qara Koz who is now known as Angelica, changing her name reflects the process of transformation that she is undergoing as a migrant. Her arrival in the city of Florence is announced by Argalia who states that Qara Koz-now-Angelica 'comes here of her own free will, in the hope of forging a union between the great cultures of Europe and the East, knowing she has much to learn from us and believing, too, that she has much to teach.'[655] Here is an example where the text's portrayal of Angelica's will and determination are what set her apart from other female characters. This leads her to explore exotic parts of the world. It is not through patriarchal means of capture, slavery or marriage but it is through her 'own free will.'[656] In one episode following her arrival, Angelica begins to explore the city with her servant the Mirror thus 'relishing their new unveiled existence.'[657] By participating in everyday activities such as going to the markets and sightseeing, 'making herself visible as no great lady of Florence had ever allowed herself to be', Angelica and her Mirror begin to win the heart of Florentines with their transgression of cultural norms.[658] Moreover, the text suggests that the actions of Angelica and her Mirror encourage other young Florentine women to be unveiled and 'come out of an evening to promenade in twos and fours.'[659] Weickgenannt claims that 'historically, women's relation to urban space is

[655] *The Enchantress*, 565.
[656] Ibid.
[657] Ibid, 567.
[658] Ibid.
[659] Ibid.

characterised by restrictions that limit unhindered movement, especially for upper-class women in Renaissance Italy and to an even greater extent at the Mughal court.'[660] Not only are Angelica and the Mirror's actions considered radical, her ability to encourage others to follow suit suggests that her actions have the potential to be revolutionary. Her ability to behave outside of her own culture's norm let alone the culture of the Florentines suggests that Angelica is constructed to be a woman who is ahead of her time. Her decisions, behaviour and actions are shaped to fit a cosmopolitan migrant.

The narrative of Qara Koz/Angelica's migratory journey around the world from Persia to Florence to the New World as told by Niccolo Vespucci affected the people of Fatehpur Sikri proving that 'her powers were undiminished by the passage of the years and her probable death.'[661] Akbar's official royal painter Dashwanth is so affected and infatuated by the story and by the leading lady that he eventually 'turned himself into an imaginary being' by crossing the borders of real and unreal and entering into the border of the painting where he forever lay 'in the margins of history' and thus in the margins of Qara Koz's narrative.[662] Dawhsawnth's obsession with Qara Koz's narrative and beauty pushed him so far to the edge on the brink of psychological collapse that the only way for him to survive this extreme bout of melancholia is by placing himself in the last painting of the lost Mughal princess. In this instance, one can argue that Qara Koz's enchanting beauty proves to be destructive to men thus reinforcing the familiar Rushdean trope of how powerful women can lead to the destruction of men. Yet this episode also stresses how Qara Koz is pushing to be recognised in the royal Mughal historical records and thus regain control of her story and her history, as well as her ancestry. The so-called destruction of Dashwanth is inevitable as is the fall of

[660] Weickgenannt, 426.
[661] *The Enchantress,* 396.
[662] Ibid, 253-4.

Niccolo Vespucci since both characters act as vessels to Qara Koz's transgressive narrative and ultimately, to correct an injustice, by claiming her rightful place in the Mughal history books.

Qara Koz's narrative not only affected the people of present day Fatehpur Sikri. Her narrative reached the Mughal court and into the dreams of its patrons. Pătrașcu observes that 'Qara Koz's image invades both the reality and the imagination of the inhabitants of Sikri, becoming a corollary of their existence, engulfing their desires and frustrations, their projects and their assets, their doubts and certitudes.'[663] Emperor Akbar begins to have dreams that symbolically suggest his itch or desire for a happy ending in his life which turns out to be marriage. The women of Fatehpur Sikri too are significantly affected by the story of Qara Koz. Emperor Akbar's mother, Hamida Bano, is characterised as a widely admired and well-respected woman who is known to be pragmatic and conservative and believes in royal duties and protocols. Hence, when Qara Koz entered her dream, she is represented as 'a paragon of Muslim devotion and conservative behaviour.'[664] In addition, Hamida Bano's manifestation of Qara Koz forged an identity of a girl who is pure and whose 'separation from her people caused her great anguish.'[665] Her story spread far and wide in Fatehpur Sikri and it even reached the House of Skanda, the cosmopolitan city's designated brothel. These examples highlight how the men and women of Fatehpur Sikri use the story of Qara Koz as a vessel where their deepest desires, longings, beliefs and values are expressed safely in their dreams. Certainly, one can argue that Qara Koz's bravery at defying her royal protocols and stepping outside of the cultural boundaries inspired people such as the Emperor Akbar, Princess Gulbadan Begum and the Skeleton. The story of Qara Koz is enough to infatuate the

[663] Pătrașcu, 555.
[664] Ibid, 396-397.
[665] Ibid, 397.

audience without the need to see her physically. Here we can see how the power of narrative manages to captivate its audience to the extent that she becomes the vessel for which their true desires and beliefs surfaced.

Qara Koz's history of cultural transgression is arguably admired within cosmopolitan cities such as Fatehpur Sikri and Florence. The novel highlights the importance of Otherness and how diversity can be celebrated in cosmopolitan spaces. Weickgenannt, too, argues that 'the most promising places for the creation of something new are cosmopolitan spaces that are confident in their own cultural distinctiveness and curious about otherness.'[666] In this respect, the lost Mughal Princess satisfies the criteria of otherness through her enchanting beauty, bravery and what is believed to be her power as an enchantress. Certainly, the language used in the text circulates the feel of magic, fairy tales and those who possess power. Stories surrounding Qara Koz even while she is still living in Florence become a 'testimony to her creative and enduring powers of enchantment.'[667] Her confidence and force of will and determination leads her to decide her fate and destiny. On account of baring her unveiled face to the world, Niccolo Vespucci states that 'no man ordered Qara Koz to bare her face…she freely made her own decision, and the Mirror made hers.'[668] Again, this transgression of cultural norms can only be tolerated in cosmopolitan spaces. It can also be argued that Rushdie has been vocal against the Islamic veil seeing it as a form of patriarchal subjugation.[669] Although many feminists, including myself, would disagree with him on this occasion, it is interesting to note how Rushdie places this subtle argument into the text in the shape of an individual who transgresses the culture and values she has been brought up in.

[666] Weickgenannt, 426.
[667] Ibid, 427.
[668] *The Enchantress*, 474.
[669] 'Salman Rushdie says Muslim veils "suck"', *Evening Standard*, October 10, 2006, http://www.standard.co.uk/news/salman-rushdie-says-muslim-veils-suck-7209529.html.

One of the main motifs in the text is its use of mirror and reflection. The most obvious being Qara Koz's Mirror, a slave girl whose beauty matched hers. Weickgenannt observes that 'the image of the mirror is…closely linked to the novel's representation of women.'[670] Similarly, Hamida Bano has a mirror named Bibi Fatima who echoes her every move. The prostitutes in Fatehpur Sikri, Skeleton and Mattress from the House of Skanda, mirror the prostitutes in Florence, Scandal and La Matterassina. Rashmi Bhatnagar observes that 'given the novel's emphasis on mirroring between characters, events, cities and languages it is probable and even logical that the second sense in the novel's title of a Renaissance city as a space of enchantment extends to the mirror city of Florence in Sikri.'[671] One could extend the argument to include the fact that the novel is using the mirror as a literary device to tie in with one of the themes of the text: the universality of the human condition. In the case of Fatehpur Sikri and Renaissance Florence, the separation of time and space did not necessarily mean that the two cosmopolitan cities are the polar opposites of one another as one would expect. In fact, the text dramatises the mirror trope significantly to highlight the strong similarities between the East and West. Pătrașcu has observed that 'the purpose of bringing together situations, characters and reactions typical to different spaces and times – the case of the two enchantresses being one out of many – is to underline their correspondence and similarity.'[672] Niccolo Vespucci sums it up by calling it 'the curse of the human race…not that we are so different from one another, but that we are so alike.'[673] Pratap Dash too makes the connection that 'the novel reflects a special kind of comparative culture and cultural history, by mirroring places and times, which in history lay so much afar

[670] Weickgenannt, 424.
[671] Rashmi Dube Bhatnagar, 'Bastard Mongrel Army on the Move, Urdu', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 4 (2011): 574, EBSCO.
[672] Pătrașcu, 560.
[673] *The Enchantress*, 266.

from themselves, but are made, humanly, so similar in the novel.'[674] Although the narrative is told from a male perspective, it can be argued that the female characters here play a significant role in conveying the message of the text. Universalism and humanism are propagated at an unusual level for Rushdie and hence the female characters play a central role in advocating these threads.

The characterisation of Jodha Akbar is arguably one of mixed ideologies. Introduced at the start of the novel, Jodha is constructed to be intelligent, quick-witted, confident, 'so perfectly attentive, so undemanding, [and] so endlessly available.'[675] Created by the Emperor Akbar, Jodha is hated by the Emperor's other wives for 'her theft of their histories.'[676] The perfection of her characteristics makes her an impossible rival to match for the other queens, reinforcing sexist notions of pitting women against each other. Furthermore, Jodha's character is made up of every single attribute that favours the Emperor and in turn the companionship she provides satisfies their relationship. In his review of the text, Deresiewicz argues that Jodha is 'central to Rushdie's thematic conception that men create women to fall in love with but he leaves her stranded between imagination and reality. She is more than an idea for Akbar but remains less than a full person. She has interiority, but she has no agency, no force in the world.'[677] His presence, the text argues, gives her the freedom to be 'free, as everyone was, within the bounds of what it was in their nature to be and do.'[678] Jodha's beliefs and values are arguably an extension of her creator, Akbar.

[674] William Deresiewicz, "Meetings, Purchases, Pleasures." *Nation* 287, 7 (2008): 33-36, EBSCO.
[675] *The Enchantress,* 87.
[676] Ibid.
[677] Dash, 6.
[678] *The Enchantress*, 95.

Her character resembles that of many of Rushdie's previous female characters such as Padma from *Midnight's Children* and Arjumand Harappa from *Shame*. Jodha's outspokenness and liveliness is similar to that of Padma and Arjumand. In addition, her characterisation reinforces both feminist and sexist ideologies as exemplified by her values and actions. Being the progressive emperor that he is, Akbar's intention of constructing a strong female companion is so that she could please his visual senses whilst debating and challenging him on philosophy, thus pleasing his intellectual senses. Certainly, Jodha does fulfil this requirement to a certain extent. But what Akbar does not realise is that Jodha's values and belief system remains the same as his, so she could never challenge or inspire him the way that Qara Koz manages to do towards the end of the novel. For example, upon Akbar's return from one of his many military expeditions, Jodha gives him a lecture on how women think and how often they think of their men. She proceeds to give advice that reinforces patriarchal stereotype: 'all women need all men less than all men need them. This is why it is so important to keep a good woman down. If you do not keep her down she will surely get away.'[679] From a gendered perspective, the belief that women should be categorised between good and bad reinforces the Madonna/whore dichotomy that is seen in literature and popular culture. The fact that this idea is still being propagated goes to show that the discourse of patriarchy in our language is largely prevalent in western society. *The Enchantress of Florence*, however, arguably employs both patriarchal and feminist ideologies in shaping characters. In doing so, the characters reflect how the two conflicting ideologies operate within language and the discourse we use everyday. Qara Koz's transgression indicates that the developing of feminist ideas and actions is only able to grow outside of her culture and hence the need for her to be situated outside of her culture physically and psychologically. On the contrary, as a manifestation of Akbar's values and beliefs Jodha's character

[679] Ibid, 99.

exemplifies how one cannot escape the patriarchal elements that have been profoundly embedded in language and culture for generations. Her attitudes and understanding of femininity and female power means she could not have survived the narrative.

The characterisation of Angelique the Messenger is similar to that of Jodha Akbar. As a minor character, Angelique's role is to recount Argalia's adventures since he left Florence as a child. What is interesting, however, is the way Argalia has made all of Angelique's own memory smaller in order to replace it with his life story. It is only after Argalia's adventures have been recounted to Machiavelli who is the intended recipient that Angelique's memory will return. Before readers are informed of the messenger's identity, she is known simply as the Memory Palace or 'le palais des souvenirs.'[680] Her identity, history and free will are taken from her the moment she becomes a memory palace. According to Machiavelli, a memory palace is a 'technique invented by the Greeks…(where) you build a building in your head, you learn your way around it, and then you start attaching memories to its various features.'[681] However, as Martin McQuillan observes, 'le palais des souvenirs takes this architectonic principle to a new height, making her body the warehouse of Argalia's memoires.'[682] In recounting Argalia's tale of adventures through his dealings with kings, pirates and giants, the Memory Palace is stationary like a statue while her mouth does the storytelling. She is characterised as a beautiful mercantile daughter from Montpellier who is kidnapped by pirates after the death of her father. It is believed that a certain necromancer in Stamboul who is 'adept in the mesmerist arts and the building of memory palaces' took her into his possession and she is then given to Argalia as a gift from the Sultan.[683] Upon

[680] Ibid, 323.
[681] Ibid, 325-6.
[682] McQuillan, 88.
[683] *The Enchantress*, 375.

recalling all her memories, Angelique commits suicide by throwing herself out of the window of the House of Skanda.

The construction of Angelique or the Memory Palace suggests a very disturbing practice in which those from the lower class are exploited by treating them as objects through the removal or magically recessing their memories, identity and for Angelique, her free will. Argalia's friends and recipients of the Memory Palace's message, Ago Vespucci and Machiavelli, are both quite unsettled and at one point incensed at the manner in which the message is being conveyed.[684] This anger directed at Argalia indicates that the exploitation and the objectifying of Angelique is seen as unacceptable. Having said that though, Machiavelli is still unable to contain his lust for her and fondles her breast while she continues to tell Argalia's story in a monotonous tone. It leads readers to question whether the text intends to make a statement that men will continue dominating women regardless of the gender injustice at play or whether the text is situating itself within a time period where this sort of behaviour was still somewhat acceptable. This physical assault on Angelique's body and the story is an example of how centuries of patriarchal domination mean that it becomes a challenging feat for society to change what it has internalised as the norm. Thus, regardless of how incensed Vespucci and Machiavelli are at Argalia's method of relaying his story, they nevertheless feel entitled to dominate Angelique's body by sexually assaulting her.

The language used in the text to highlight the violence exacted on Angelique's body and mind is one of shocking curiosity. While the ability for a foreign memory to take over an individual's entire body is intriguing, the inhumanity of the technology is regarded as cruel

[684] Ibid, 375.

and dehumanising. As Angelique slowly regains her memory through the gradual disposal of Argalia's, the omniscient narrator explains her suicide retrospectively by observing that 'while you were anaesthetised to the tragedy of your life you were able to survive. When clarity was returned to you…it could drive you mad. Your reawakened memory could derange you, the memory of humiliation, of so much handling, of so many intrusions, the memory of men. Not a palace but a brothel of memories.'[685] Here, one can argue that although the text's tone is distant and on the surface factual, the words used such as 'humiliation', 'intrusions' and the phrase 'the memory of men', brings to light the tone of sympathy for Angelique's unfortunate circumstances that led to her sexual and psychological assault. Here the text shows how the raping of Angelique's memory as well as body highlights patriarchy's need to possess and control a woman's body. McQuillan also argues that 'the rebooted Angelique…is not a sovereign narrator in command of her destiny…she is rather a gramophone, written upon and repeating a terrible inscription.'[686] The characterisation of Angelique highlights the subjugation and exploitation faced by poor lower class women during the patriarchal period of the Renaissance, when they could be kidnapped and sold to the slave trade. As a way to regain some form of control over her body and destiny, Angelique commits suicide.

Rushdie's representation of women in *The Enchantress of Florence* is much improved from his early texts, and his recent texts are arguably more concerned with the issue of globalisation and universalism. The improved portrayal of women is a result of this change. Deresiewicz has observed that 'as a portraitist of women, he (Rushdie) has always done much better with matriarchs than with love objects; his mothers and aunts are the solidest

[685] Ibid, 384.
[686] McQuillan, 90.

characters in his work.'[687] His writing on women and the representation of female characters is still arguably ambiguous. This is because language itself is ambiguous and never fixed. Characters, like human beings, are fluid by nature and therefore ambiguous. By using binary ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy, Rushdie decentres and destabilises the concept of singular truths. Rushdie's experimentation with language and literature is further explored through varying sexualities. Interestingly, Rushdie does not usually experiment with ideas of sexuality that pertains to practices such as lesbianism and incest (with the slight exception of *Midnight's Children*). However, in *The Enchantress of Florence* these concepts are examined in the relationship between Qara Koz and the Mirror.

Not only is *The Enchantress of Florence* an advance for Rushdie in terms of his representation of female characters, he has also explored different strands of sexuality through his characterisations. Lesbianism, polyandry love and incest allow Rushdie to push the boundary of his norm to explore various shades of truth. Arguably, the setting of cosmopolitan cities such as Fatehpur Sikri and Florence creates the spatial capacity to explore taboo practices in the discourse of this work. As a writer who is familiar with controversy Rushdie's exploration of taboo concepts, especially those related to sexuality, is another form of literary experimentation. Although the tabooistic term 'incest' has been discussed in literature such as Nabokov's *Lolita*, the distant tone in the language used in Rushdie's text detaches the negative connotations associated with it.[688] Similarly, the narrative's observation of various sexual practices outside of heteronormative practices is seamlessly included in the text. Sexual discourse is discussed explicitly, at length and on many occasions. Thus it is fitting to provide an examination of Rushdie's experimentation

[687] Deresiewicz, 35.
[688] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, (London: Penguin, 2008).

with sexual discourse through his female characters. Tercan has observed in this text that 'women profoundly explore their sexual potential. We see Qara Koz, the prostitutes of Fatehpur Sikri and Florence, and Jodha Bai practising their sexual skill.'[689] At a time when an individual's sexual identity is regulated by governments, Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* provides a representation of sexuality as being fluid and flexible, not rigid, categorised and regulated. This connects with emerging academic studies on queer theory that come from the understanding that identities – often linked with sexuality and desires – are subject to movement and change. Ford understands queer theory as 'a political and existential stance, an ideological commitment, a decision to live outside some social norm or other.'[690] Gopinath too has argued that queer readings 'allow us to read nonheteronormative arrangements within rigidly heterosexual structures…to recognise the ways in which queer articulations of desire and pleasure both draw from and infiltrate popular culture.'[691] Queer theory helps us to understand the complex nature of how our sexuality and desires operate within discourse. By analysing Qara Koz's sexual relationship with her Mirror and the ways in which they permit men into their intimate space, the text demonstrates how language and discourse can be used to confront and challenge our own preconceived ideas and prejudices against love, healthy relationships, sexuality and identity.

Rushdie's works have, for the most part, attempted to confront and challenge fixed ideas and established systems of thought. Only by doing this is it possible to practice self-reflexivity and question our own prejudices, beliefs, values and norms. Through Akbar, Rushdie insists that blasphemous discourse should be entertained as depicted in the House of Adoration. For

[689] Tercan, 105.
[690] Richard Thompson Ford, 'What's Queer about Race?' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 479, EBSCO.
[691] Gopinath, 473.

Akbar, the House of Adoration is a safe space for people to debate and argue against established and normalised beliefs and thoughts such as the divine right of kings and the existence of God. Rushdie has propagated this form of freethinking and freedom in discourse since before the Affair began in 1989. Before the Fatwa, he was already accustomed to his books being censored or entirely banned in countries such as India, Pakistan and some parts of the Middle East. To censor or quell arguments, discourse and even ideas related to social taboos would ultimately obstruct the flow of newness to enter the world, stunting the growth of literature which could have an adverse effect on the development of human beings. It is within this framework that Rushdie confronts us with his language and representations. In an episode describing the re-conjuring of Qara Koz in Fatehpur Sikri, she is likened to divinity. The narrator claims that for the 'non-Islamic polytheists, whose gods were too numerous to count, the arrival of one more miraculous being was of little concern, because the divine population was already too big a crowd to comprehend, everything contained gods, trees contained spirits, and so did rivers, and heaven alone knew what else, there was probably a god of garbage and a god of toilet, so if a new spirit was abroad it was scarcely worth discussing.'[692] Here, we can see that Rushdie's use of language is satirical and most certainly sacrilegious for some when he mockingly suggests that there could be a 'god of garbage and a god of toilet' for polytheist believers.[693] The sardonic tone above is of course not simply intended to make fun of polytheism but to institutionalised religion in general. This can be quite confronting especially for readers who are religious. That said, the text's blasé narrative tone suggests the insignificance of the divine being which is in line with the overall humanist theme of the novel.

[692] *The Enchantress*, 672.
[693] Ibid.

Qara Koz's special attachment to her Mirror raises an interesting element in the text. The Princess' relationship with her Mirror is one that, on the outset, seemed to be embedded with hierarchy and power struggle, as the Mirror is a slave girl. Readers are first introduced to her as Qara Koz's 'playmate and maidservant…a young slave girl who was just as beautiful and looked so much like her mistress that people started calling her "the princess' mirror."'[694] The Mirror is also said to echo the voice of the Princess. McQuillan too has observed that 'like Qara Koz and her Mirror, each world reflects the other but not as equals. They are alike in beauty but not the same, one slightly imperfect in relation to the other.'[695] This imperfection is only due to the Mirror's class status as a slave girl in Mughal society. This power struggle between Qara Koz and her Mirror is further emphasised when the Princess' sister, Khanzada, is taken by the Shah of Persia as a bounty for winning the war against the Mughals. In turn, Khanzada takes Qara Koz with her who in turn takes her Mirror. This episode in Qara Koz's life is painted by Dashwanth, Akbar's official royal artist, and is described by the narrator as 'an allegory of the evils of power, how they pass down the chain from the greater to the lesser. Human beings were clutched at, and clutched at others in their turn…Dashwanth had completed the chain of hands. The Mirror, the slave girl, her left wrist captured in her young mistress' firm grasp, with her free right hand had seized hold of Khanzada Begum's left wrist. They stood in a circle, the three lost creatures, and by closing that circle the painter suggested that the clutch or echo of power could also be reversed.'[696] This circle of feminine power demonstrates how the nature of masculine power operates, through taking advantage of those with lesser power, strength and capabilities. In addition, at times of war it is those on the margin – women, children and slaves – who become the spoils. As a slave girl, the Mirror has no free will to do anything but the bidding of her

[694] Ibid, 217.
[695] McQuillan, 91.
[696] Ibid, 246-7.

master. The text seems to foreshadow the ending of the narrative by suggesting how power has the capacity to be reversed. And it is towards the end when readers find out that it is the Mirror who has the capacity to reproduce a child, a daughter who as it turns out is Niccolo Vespucci's mother, and rewrite history by claiming Qara Koz's ancestral history as her own. Although Akbar's conjuring of Qara Koz creates a space for her to finally redeem her story, for two generations her Mirror had the power to manipulate and exploit the Princess' history in the New World in which they live. This foreshadowing in the early part of the text highlights Dashwanth's painting as power is depicted as fluid and interchangeable.

As her story progresses, we find that Qara Koz's relationship with her Mirror is not just based on the master/slave dichotomy nor is it founded simply on sisterhood and friendship. During her years of living with the Shah of Persia in the capital city of Safavid, seventeen-year-old Qara Koz and her Mirror are known to play normal games such as backgammon and also 'other games…behind locked doors in her bedchamber [where] the two girls giggled and shrieked and many courtiers believed them to be lovers.'[697] This blunt suggestion of the Princess' sexual relationship with her Mirror is further confirmed later in the text when they begin to share male lovers. It can be argued that Rushdie's attempt at articulating an improved form of female representation extends to sexuality. Qara Koz's relationship with her Mirror illustrates a bond that no man could begin to understand let alone represent. Adrienne Rich has argued that 'the realm of literature…depicts woman bonding and woman identification as essential for female survival.'[698] This is something that Rushdie acknowledges in his text when the intimacy of the lost Mughal Princess and her Mirror is subtly referred to but not so much detailed in the narrative. It is also interesting to note how

[697] Ibid, 434.
[698] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism,* ed. Vincent B. Leitch (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2001), 1763.

the text observes the mysteriousness in the relationships between women. Towards the end of Qara Koz's life in Florence as Angelica, her reputation slowly disintegrates from enchantress to witch. The narrator contemplates how 'the distance between enchantress and witch was still not so great. There were still voices that suggested that this new incarnation of Woman-wizard through whom the occult powers of all women were unleashed was a disguise, and that the true faces of such females were still the fearsome ones of old, the lamia, the crone.'[699] Indeed, the positive and negative connotations toward words such as 'enchantress' and 'witch' bring to light the gendered space that circulates within the language and discourse of magic. Whilst the double meaning of 'enchantress' includes one who is beautiful as well as possessing magic or sorcery, the word 'witch' has for centuries been related to a woman who possesses magical powers that are thought to be evil. One can argue that this form of gendered language in the discourse of magic reinforces patriarchal notions of how women with unexplained powers are immediately labelled as witches. Certainly, history books have noted the persecution of witches in Medieval Europe. The intimate and sexual relationship of Qara Koz and the Mirror not only stirs gossip in Florence but it also fuels the allegations of her being a witch. However, one must note that the omniscient narrator is aware of the fluid and ambiguous nature of language when he says, 'what a short journey from enchantress to witch. Only yesterday she had been the city's unofficial patron saint. Now there was a mob gathering at her door.'[700]

Qara Koz and the Mirror's homosexual and polygymous relationships reflect that of the prostitutes in Fatehpur Sikri and Florence. The two prostitutes in the House of Skanda at Fatehpur Sikri, Skeleton and Mattress, are also mirror images to the prostitutes in the House

[699] *The Enchantress*, 572.
[700] Ibid, 609.

of Mars in Florence, Scandal and La Matterassina. As their names suggest, the size of their body reflects that of their name. Both teams of prostitutes are used to sharing the one client for them to 'enjoy the two extremes of what the female form had to offer, first the unyielding dominance of bone and then the flesh that engulfed.'[701] Similarly, Qara Koz's sexual relationship with the Mirror and their lover Argalia is depicted in the text as full of eroticism and love. When Argalia doubts the Princess' sexual and emotional love for him, the Mirror echoes it, 'she (*referring to Qara Koz*) can charm the snakes from the ground and the birds from the trees and make them fall in love and she has fallen in love with you, so now you can have anything you desire.'[702] Afterwards, the Mirror joins them in bed together and it is at this point that all doubt about Qara Koz's love or intention ceases for Argalia. The narrator observes that 'in the face of such an outflanking assault the only course left to a man was unconditional surrender.'[703] The tone of this episode in naturalising the three-way lovemaking indicates the normality of varied sexual behaviours and preferences. It should be argued that the episodes containing the prostitutes' three-way lovemaking emphasises the text's celebration of diverse sexualities portraying a discourse that is normalised and accepted. Tercan, however, sees instances such as these as a power play to manipulate men.[704] From a queer perspective this episode brings to light the text's focus on transgressive sexuality which Donan and Magowan argue is 'an enticing and hazardous proposition for reorganising human agency, perception and action as its inherent sense of crossing limits, amplifying margins and repositioning power can extend and transform the boundaries of the social body, social order and the self.'[705] It can also be argued that by depicting variations

[701] Ibid, 114.
[702] Ibid, 454.
[703] Ibid.
[704] Tercan, 105.
[705] Hastings Donan & Fiona Magowan, "Sexual Transgressions, Social Order and the Self," in *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters*, eds. Hastings Donan & Fiona Magowan (New York: Bergahn Books, 2009), 3, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcmr7.4.

of sexual behaviours, the text is suggesting that there are inadequacies in heterosexual relationships. The text seems to suggest that it is only by transgressing society's sexual norms and practices can one find adequate and satisfying relationships.

Varied sexualities are further explored in the incestuous relationship of Qara Koz and Akbar. The Mughal emperor's obsession with Qara Koz's story and with the Princess herself is taken to the next step when she is conjured by him which consequently diminishes his imaginary queen Jodha. Her beauty and bravery as recounted by Niccolo Vespucci's tale enchanted Akbar to the extent that he is able to replace Jodha with the lost Princess for the sake of being the Emperor's entertainment and companionship, the very thing that Jodha was used for. The episode of Akbar conjuring Qara Koz created a diverse range of reactions from the people of Fatehpur Sikri. Most notably are those who object to the Emperor bringing the dead back to life since 'only the Almighty had power over the living and the dead.'[706] Moreover, these critics are also the ones who take control of categorising Akbar's new relationship as being incestuous. When contemplating his relationship with the newly conjured Qara Koz, Akbar mused on how 'generations blurred, merged, dissolved. But she was forbidden to him. No, no, she could not be forbidden. How could what he felt be a crime against nature? Who would dare forbid the emperor what the emperor permitted himself? He was the arbiter of the law, the law's embodiment, and there was no crime in his heart.'[707] Here, one can observe that Akbar's logic becomes skewed due to his lustful feelings toward Qara Koz and the ideologies she embodies: newness, bravery, independence and hybridity. In using his 'omnipotent fancy' as well as status of emperor, Akbar attempts to justify Qara Koz's post-death existence to his critics regardless of how morally wrong this relationship

[706] *The Enchantress*, 673.
[707] Ibid, 733.

is.[708] Yet, one can argue that the text is suggesting that Akbar and Qara Koz's relationship is a new form of desire where neither morality nor cultural norm have a say in the matters of the heart. Regardless, the moral consequence places this notion in a highly contested discourse. Ironically, Akbar's interpretation of Vespucci's ancestral history (of which he believed Vespucci to be Qara Koz's daughter's son that stemmed from an incestuous relationship between the daughter and Ago Vespucci, 'ignorance of his true origins…that one word, incest, placed him beyond pale') leads him to formally declare that Niccolo Vespucci 'could not be recognised as a member of the royal family.'[709] Indeed, this is seen as hypocritical since later in the text Akbar himself indulges in incestuous behaviour with Qara Koz. Nevertheless, Rushdie's role as a writer is to push the boundaries of discourse by questioning and contradicting ideologies, social norms, values and attitudes. In experimenting with social taboos such as incest, Rushdie seeks to confront and question moralities. As a result, this episode highlights how one society's idea of right is another society's idea of wrong. One can also further extend this notion by arguing that the concept of morality itself is fluid and ambiguous, as depicted in Akbar's idea of incest as being hypocritical.

The discourse of incest continues with the truth of the Mirror's family finally being revealed by the newly conjured Qara Koz towards the end of the novel. Niccolo Vespucci's mother is not Qara Koz as she is known to be barren. As Qara Koz herself claims, 'I was a princess but she (the Mirror) became a mother.'[710] The Mirror gives birth to a daughter in the New World whilst Qara Koz died childless. The daughter who looks like the mirror of her own mother, the Mirror, is then brought up to believe that she is of royal Mughal blood. In the

[708] Ibid.
[709] Ibid, 712.
[710] Ibid, 730.

New World where the structures of law and morality do not necessarily exist, boundaries are being broken. Qara Koz herself narrates to Akbar that 'the blurring of generations, the loss of the words father and daughter, the substitution of other, incestuous words. And the thing you dreamed her father did, yes, that was so. Her father who became her husband. The crime against nature was committed.'[711] Here, the text suggests that words such as 'father' and 'daughter' are loaded with meanings that create structure and boundaries in society. In the blurring and disappearance of such words, new laws and structures can exist, thus changing the word 'incest' from possessing negative to positive connotations. Again, this is an example of Rushdie challenging preconceived notions of sexuality by confronting readers with the normality of incestuous behaviour. Yet, this concept is also directly challenged as seen in the quote above as Rushdie illustrates how the removal of structural and hierarchical terms such as 'father' and 'daughter' breaks down the family dynamic and leaves relationships open to interpretation. From Qara Koz's perspective, this is indeed a crime against nature. Having said that though, one must remember that the Princess' migration through space and time did not necessarily break down the fundamental structures of morality. However, Ago Vespucci's sense of morality is questionable since his life in the New World gives him independence. The lack of official authorities to name and shame Vespucci gives him the right to manipulate and exploit what is right and wrong.

The use of the word 'incest'has, from the beginning of the text, been interrogated and used on multiple occasions. This is arguably a technique to confront and, to a certain extent, normalise the tabooistic nature of the term and more importantly, ease readers into a disturbing ending. At the beginning of the text, the word 'incest' is used within a married context. Before Ago Vespucci went on a journey to the New World with Qara Koz and the

[711] Ibid, 731.

Mirror, he was an unhappily married man in Florence with a depressing outlook on life. For example, when having sexual intercourse with his wife back in Florence, he felt like he was sleeping with his sister. In fact, this incestuous notion 'was the only thing that could arouse him when he lay with her. I am fucking my sister, he told himself, and came.'[712] One might be able to forgive Ago Vespucci's carnal desire for his wife as being somewhat unconventional if one is to apply a queer approach to this episode. Indeed, the term 'incest' is discussed so frequently that by the time readers reach Akbar and Qara Koz's taboo relationship towards the end of the novel, the word has become to some extent normalised. Words can create structure in relationships and in a society. The word 'incest' creates a conflict in the discourse of morality and one can argue that in a text such as *The Enchantress of Florence* where everything is called into question, our understanding of the word 'incest' challenges society's notions of right and wrong. In the context of a New World where the laws and structures of propriety have not reached its community, the concept of morality is then left to its inhabitants to create anew. *The Enchantress of Florence* not only highlights the fluid nature of sexuality, it has also attempted to highlight the fluid nature of morality especially when one is building a new society on foreign and undiscovered ground.

This chapter has demonstrated the improvement of Rushdie's treatment of his male and female characters from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*. Akbar as opposed to Saleem is portrayed as a powerful leader albeit at times sexist. The ambiguity found in the male and female characters is typical of the pattern already seen in Rushdie's texts. This is bound to happen: language can often reflect the structures we live in, and which are arguably patriarchally dominated, although at times resisted through feminist ideologies. Indeed the varied sexualities explored in this text indicate that women are still eroticised and

[712] Ibid, 486-7.

subjected to the patriarchal gaze for the benefit of the man. Furthermore, some would see Rushdie's blasphemous discourse in his works as being nothing more than mischief making. Others, however, will give credit to the man who dares to write, question, confront and more importantly, provoke ideas outside of the norm. Sexuality is a concern that has been dealt with intricately in *The Enchantress of Florence*. In pushing the boundaries of sexual norms and behaviours, Rushdie has paved the way for questions to be raised rather than achieving concrete answers. In approaching his text with a queer framework, one begins to understand how language and discourse operates in the way we behave, think and value. Socially acceptable traits, values and norms are enforced within the everyday discourse. The narrator of the text is highly conscious of this notion which thus leads to its slow and gradual build-up of the word and action of something as culturally prohibited as 'incest'. As a result, Akbar's justifications and righteous but philosophical musings are an example of how language can be manipulated and exploited to create new meanings and in Akbar's case new values.

Conclusion

On the subject of what makes an artist, Pablo Picasso declared:

> What exactly *is* an artist, in your opinion? An idiot who, if he is a painter, only has eyes to see and, if he is a musician, only has ears to hear and, if he is a poet, only has a lyre on which to strum the different humours of his heart…? Not a bit of it! He is also a political entity, who lives in constant awareness of the destructive, burning or joyous events of the world around him and is altogether a product of these events… I tell you, painting was not invented to decorate the insides of houses! It is a weapon…[713]

Art, be it literature or fine art, is a powerful weapon that is used to confront and question established institutions. One must remember that even the pioneers of Abrahamic religions have used writing as a form of freedom from oppression. Whilst critics such as Harold Bloom and T.S. Eliot have a preference for the aesthetic quality of literature, it is undeniably true that many writers such as Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy feel it to be a necessary obligation to produce works that reflect the current socio-political situation of the world. Writing is itself a political act, an exposer of preconceived, unspoken and internalised ideas, values and attitudes of societies and cultures. Moreover, writing can reveal how language operates within the confines of ideas, values and attitudes of societies and cultures. In this context, this thesis focuses on the changing and developing representation of women in the novels of Salman Rushdie and the relationship this bears to simultaneously emerging feminisms.

As a writer aligned with progressive politics he is recognised as holding controversial views on religion, politics, history and more importantly for this thesis, gender. Gender representation in Rushdie's works is one of the most controversial aspects since many critics choose not to focus on it and those who do frequently find him to be misogynistic in his

[713] A poster of a quote by Pablo Picasso entitled *What is an Artist* at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum Berlin.

representation of women.[714] Although he is considered a master of literary expression, Rushdie's experimentation with literature reveals the embedded patriarchal ideologies found within language and discourse. It reinforces the key messages of feminist linguists such as Spender and Lakoff.[715] Patriarchal conception of power can be traced to the 'world's first known civilisations with written records.'[716] Scientists, biologists, anthropologists and psychologists have all used their field of expertise to 'formulate general explanations for the differences that societies create around issues of gender.'[717] Although matriarchy exists in some cultures, patriarchy is arguably a dominant ideology that is found all around the world. In particular, the onset of religions such as Christianity and Islam embedded patriarchal ideology within certain cultures. hooks in particular refers to '"Christian" culture' as being responsible for perpetuating the notion that women are inherently created by god as inferior to men.[718] Of course, this thesis is only concerned with Rushdie's works. However, it has shown that 'languages are considered already constructed systems'.[719] When applying this in literary works, one can find that texts and its readers share 'prevailing systems of norms and meanings in social "reality"'. [720] As such, through the analysis of Rushdie's selected novels this thesis demonstrates that the language and discourse used to construct his female characters is shaped largely by a battle between two conflicting ideologies, patriarchy and feminism.

[714] Catherine Cundy, Charu Verma, Inderpal Grewal Singh, Aijaz Ahmad and Timothy Brennan.
[715] Dale Spender, *Man made language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). Robin Lakoff, 'Language and Woman's Place,' *Language In Society*, no. 1 (1973): 45, JSTOR.
[716] Sarah Shaver Hughes and Brady Hughes, 'Women in Ancient Civilisations', in *Agricultural and Pastoral Societies in Ancient and Classical History*, ed. Michael Adas (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 118.
[717] Ibid.
[718] hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 2.
[719] Cintia Rodriguez, 'The Connection between language and the world: a paradox of the Linguistic Turn,' *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science* 49, no. 1 (2015): 95, EBSCO.
[720] Iser, 'Texts and Readers', 328.

In recent decades feminism has uncovered the injustices that patriarchal ideology imposes on women. Feminism has affected all cultures from England all the way to South Asia. Feminism from the early twentieth century was a political act. Nowadays, feminism is not only circulated within academic forums and journal articles, it is circulated within mainstream culture and social media platforms. The widespread circulation of feminism has led to many opinions, often jarring opinions, as to what defines the ideology. A disappointing characteristic of the debate though is the number of female critics, writers and celebrities who distances themselves from feminism. hooks identifies this as the 'political indifference of masses of women and men who are not well enough acquainted with either side of the issue to take a stand.'[721] The lack of engagement on the issue of gender justice and the misunderstanding of the movement being specifically anti-male contribute to this sentiment. Meagan Tyler's *The Conversation* article on 'choice feminism' portrays the danger of diverting the feminist movement from 'talking about the larger power structures and social norms that restrict women, in many different ways, all around the world.[722] The core idea of feminism is to advocate for equality between men and women. Certainly, some may find that one individual's idea of feminism is another individual's idea of sexism. This is especially the case when sexuality is being represented in literature and popular culture or in the debate concerning choice in sex work. Rushdie has integrated ideas of plurality, hybridity and multiplicity in his texts as a celebration of different cultures rather than an imposition of fixed singular and absolutist ideologies. This we can extend to his interpretation of feminism. In exploring how language operates, Lacan questions whether one can 'really see these as mere figures of speech when it is the figures themselves that are

[721] hooks, *Feminist theory*, 162.
[722] Meagan Tyler, 'No, feminism is not about choice,' *The Conversation*, April 30th, 2015, https://theconversation.com/no-feminism-is-not-about-choice-40896.

the active principle of the rhetoric of the discourse that the analysand in fact utters?'[723] This we can apply to Rushdie's interpretation and representation of feminism through his female characters. As opposed to representing one form of feminism, Rushdie has included many to reveal the diversity that one can find in an ever-shifting ideology such as feminism.

Language, discourse and ideologies such as patriarchy and feminism are in a constant state of flux. In discourse, we can often find patriarchy and feminism to be in conflict with one another: Rushdie's texts reflect this conflict. On the one hand, he attempts to reconfigure women's stories in his texts to highlight the inequities and injustices they face. Yet there are times when this reconfiguration reshapes into a position of reinforcing sexism through stereotyping and drawing on patriarchal tropes in the characters,revealing the two disparate ideologies in a constant state of tension. This is even more apparent when a conscious attempt by the author fails, as in the 'feminist' text *Shame*.

To analyse Rushdie's language is to highlights how these two binary ideologies – patriarchy and feminism – operate. It is with and through language that we connect to others. This ideological conflict that we see operating in language enables the intricate nature of social discourse to be revealed. The psychoanalyst Donnel Stern makes sense of language as 'constitutive of experience, [that] also seduces us into accepting a mythology of the world around us that is based—circularly—on the properties of language itself. In these ways, language and culture set the limits beyond which even creative disorder cannot spread.'[724] Indeed, Noam Chomsky argues that 'the term "language"…refer['s] to an *individual* phenomenon, a system represented in the mind/brain of a particular individual. If we could

[723] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, undated), 169.
[724] Donnel B. Stern, 'Unformulated Experience – From familiar chaos to creatve disorder,' *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 19, no. 1 (1983): 91.

investigate in sufficient detail, we would find that no two individuals share the same language in this sense, even identical twins who grow up in the same social environment.'[725] We can extend Chomsky's idea of language to incorporate ideology and this is perhaps why critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Charu Verma have at times labelled Rushdie as a misogynist. What Chomsky propagates is the very basis of Deconstruction: no two individuals will provide the same interpretation of a word or story. Rushdie portrays women's differing understandings of injustice through their lived experiences. When approaching feminism through a Deconstruction lens, one can observe that there are many interpretations of feminism especially when it is intersected with other forms of oppression such as race and class. No two women's view on feminism will be identical since variable factors such as geographical location, economic and social experiences and injustices will contribute significantly to understanding feminism. Rushdie's experimentation with the women in his texts depicts a feminism that is varied and reflects the character's own lived experience.

It is important to understand that Rushdie is deeply concerned with writing women into his narratives. *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence* have all displayed a variety of women, depicting their strengths, struggles as well as how they cope living and resisting within the bounds of a patriarchal culture. Subjected to Rushdie's power of description, characters such as Padma, Sufiya Zinobia, Alleluia Cone, Vina Apsara and Qara Koz are indeed confined by the male gaze. Yet, this gaze does not confine them to the margins. This is arguably Rushdie's intention in including them in his narratives. A related question discussed at length in this

[725] Noam Chonsky, *Language and Problems of Knowledge*: *The Managua Lectures* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1988), 36.

dissertation is whether there has been any development in Rushdie's interpretation of gender issues. Indeed, Rushdie's concern about including women's stories in his texts means that he is always experimenting and exploring new ways to articulate gender issues. By observing the five texts, the conclusion can be drawn that his awareness of gender issues and his representation of women have significantly changed over a period of time.

Rushdie's representation of female characters is diverse and can be read as ambiguous. On the one hand, we have characters such as Reverend Mother and the Widow reinforcing patriarchal values. Yet characters such as Padma and Parvati-the-Witch offset the patriarchal element in the text and arguably can be seen as representing a form of feminism that is less progressive than characters seen in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Nonetheless, these characters portray the patriarchal structure that they live within yet continuously resist. As we have seen in chapter one, the portrayal of Naseem Aziz illustrates the complex nature of a woman born into a traditional Muslim family that is steeped in patriarchal values. The construction of Naseem highlights aspects of patriarchy as well as feminist ideology thus creating a sense of ambiguity in her character. The episodes of Naseem meeting her future husband highlight how patriarchy has been profoundly embedded in religion and thus Indian Muslim culture. However, the transformation of Naseem into the matriarch Reverend Mother accentuates to a large extent the reinforcing of patriarchy in the text. The ambiguity seen in the construction of Naseem/Reverend Mother is a prime example of how two contrasting ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy operate in the text.

It is important to remember that the misogynistic claims made by the narrator, Saleem Sinai, are not an extension of Rushdie's own ideological leanings. As chapter one demonstrates, the misogynistic musings of Saleem are a narrative strategy that cautions readers about the

narrator's unreliable narrative. Certainly, his claims are succinctly opposed by Padma when she says 'they are just women, that's all.'[726] As a literary device, the construction of Padma brings to light the ambiguous nature of the text since her role in the narrative is to counterbalance certain patriarchal stereotypes highlighted in some of the female characters of the text. Padma and Parvati-the-Witch both provide alternatives to the narrator's evident predilection for dehumanising the women in his life. Even though Padma and Parvati-the-Witch are still confined within the patriarchal boundaries of Indian culture, the text manages to highlight their struggle to be heard as well as to be in control of their lives. Padma's interjections are included in Saleem's narrative and Parvati-the-Witch's control of her destiny is very much admired by Saleem. The actions of characters such as these suggests that the women in *Midnight's Children* are not constituted by a single fixed ideology but that they are inclined to the fluid and ambiguous disposition of many differing ideologies, including feminism and patriarchy.

In chapter two it is established that Rushdie's experimentation with the fairytale genre *Beauty and the Beast* is employed to suggest the oppression faced by women in Pakistan. The characterisation of Sufiya Zinobia, Rani Harappa, Arjumand Harappa, Naveed 'Good News' Hyder and Bilquis Hyder indicates the mental and physical oppression that is endured by women in theocratic patriarchal regimes. It could be argued that this text reinforces patriarchal domination of women through its characterisation and language. However, as demonstrated by the analysis of *Shame*, the text highlights how gender oppression is carried out in Pakistan and the impacts on its people and in particular those in the ruling class. By situating the text in the period after Independence, Rushdie has managed to explore how a young nation such as Pakistan survives corruption and dictatorship within the confines of a

[726] Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 568.

strict patriarchal interpretation of Islam. In establishing the concept of shame or *awrah* as an Islamic value and virtue, the text depicts how shame is used politically to manipulate and control the mindset of society. Sufiya Zinobia personifies the concept of shame in the literal and Islamic sense. She is constructed for the purpose of highlighting the extreme violence of which an individual is capable when under extreme oppression of the mind and body. Although critics such as Ahmad are not able to sympathise with Sufiya as she is ultimately metamorphosed into a beast, one must not forget the strong emphasis placed by the narrator on how the injustices faced by women result in a justifiable revenge. For *Shame,* the journey to correct histories of gendered subjugation and oppression leads to violence.

The variety seen in the female characterisations of *Shame* indicates that Rushdie seeks to portray different aspects of justifiable revenge as well as highlighting different forms of oppression. Rani Harappa's political act in the form of her infamous shawl titled 'The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great', is arguably a quiet revenge against her dictatorial and deserted husband as it depicts all the horrors, corruption and scandals he perpetrated during his time as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Rani's dignified protest highlights not only the patriarchal oppression faced by women but also suggests the ways in which they struggle to insist that their oppressed voices be heard. Thus being on the margin of society does not necessarily make their situation seem hopeless since there are different means by which they can express their oppression. In the case of Rani's shawls, it does not simply depict the oppression faced by her but it also exposes the criminality and hypocrisy of those in power. On the other hand, Rani's daughter Arjumand 'Virgin Ironpants' Harappa is constructed in a way that reinforces patriarchal notions of how women in power are masculinised and become agents of destruction in society. Arjumand's rise to power and refusal to

acknowledge her father's political crimes shapes her as a woman who continues the dictatorial heritage that has engulfed Pakistan since independence.

This pattern continues into chapter three with characters from *The Satanic Verses* such as Alleluia Cone, Zeeny Vakil and Mishal Sufyan. Rushdie's attempt at depicting different varieties of feminism is clearly illustrated in these female characters. Their social environment and context coupled with their family upbringing shapes the kind of feminism that Alleluia, Zeeny and Mishal propagate in the text. In doing so, feminism as an ideology and a way of living is shown to be subject to a person's interpretation and lived experiences. The plurality and fluidity in feminism is found in these female characters, which ultimately reflects the world. Alleluia and Mishal's migrant background reveal how diaspora in the West can shift gender dynamics. The hybridity that occurs during the process of migration enables newness to occur. It is within this framework that Rushdie operates and with that comes a commentary on what defines feminism in the late 1980s. Zeeny Vakil's Bombay upbringing demonstrates the ability for a cosmopolitan city to allow space for a controversial idea such as feminism to develop. Critics have argued against the two-dimensional characterisation of Zeeny. Yet, as chapter three has demonstrated, the construction of Zeeny Vakil is arguably Rushdie's first attempt at articulating modern urbanised Indian feminism. Zeeny's ideological and philosophical leanings are very much parallel to Rushdie's approach to writing. The three female characters contribute significantly to the eclectic diversity as well as ambiguity found in *The Satanic Verses*.

The Satanic Verses has its fair share of female characters who reinforce patriarchal values in their actions and mindsets. More importantly, these characters are for the most part devout religious women. *The Satanic Verses* is known for its controversy in confronting

fundamental beliefs of Islam. This is further extended by depicting how patriarchy works with established religions such as Islam in the portrayal of characters such as Ayesha the Prophetess and Hind Sufyan. Politically, the role of religion is to control the thoughts and actions of its followers which arguably supports patriarchal ideology in its most fundamental sense. In trying to expose the patriarchal interpretation of Islam that some cultures propagate, Rushdie has also revealed the ideological conflict that already exists in language and discourse. On the surface, the characterisation of Ayesha the Prophetess subverts the Abrahamic tradition of revealing its divine message to men. As a lower class orphaned girl, Ayesha has been chosen by the archangel to lead the villagers of Titlipur on a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, the eroticisation of Ayesha after she is given the divine message indicates how the text is to a certain extent demeaning the character. Even worse is when Ayesha's promise of parting the sea for the pilgrims fails which leads to the drowning and eradication of an entire village. Admittedly, the eroticisation of Ayesha is meant to suggest the seductive nature of religion. However, here the two oppositional ideologies of patriarchy and feminism are revealed, thus generating ambiguity in the characterisation of Ayesha. As a result, Rushdie's characterisation of Ayesha reinforces dominant patriarchal attitudes in depicting the destructive nature of a woman in power.

When observing all five novels examined in this dissertation, one cannot help but notice Rushdie's attempt at experimenting with and refining his female characters. This is seen in chapter four's analysis of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The construction of Vina Apsara and Antoinette Corinth within the background of the popular feminist and civil rights movement in the 1970s reveals the strange dichotomy that exists in language. On the one hand strong feminist characters like Vina Apsara, Mira Celano and Anita Dharkar indicate Rushdie's attempt at improving his female characterisations, but then there are characters

such as Antoinette Corinth and Lady Spenta who are depicted as calculating and manipulative to the extent that they are willing to exploit their children to get their own way. This chapter has illustrated that Rushdie is no stranger to his critics and that the refinements found in the characterisation of Vina and Mira reflect this sentiment. However, this thesis has shown how language operates within a structure that is patriarchally dominated and thus this is portrayed in the diverse range of female characters found in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The concept of globalisation is experimented within the same background of the 1970s movement. In doing so Rushdie creates a space for varying ideologies such as feminism and patriarchy to play out in the events that occurred during that period. Vina's popularity with the public allows her the space to be a megaphone for her beliefs which are aligned with the political left including feminism. The graphic detail of Vina's sexual and intellectual prowess does not undermine her character. Instead, readers are inclined to admire her confidence and bravery. Particularly when readers become aware of her troubled and broken family history. In contrast to Vina, Mira Celano represents a different form of feminism. Both, however, depict the fluidity and variation in feminism and its constant need of interpretation and re-interpretation based on a woman's lived experiences. Although the unifying core belief in feminism is egalitarianism, the ideological and philosophical perspective must be for the individual to interpret based on her/his social context and experiences.

One of the key features of chapter four is exploring how diaspora has grown and shifted to 'unrootedness' in the age of globalisation. This concept has of course been exploited by Rushdie to include the diaspora of Indian people in the United Kingdom and even in the Americas. With the rise in migration and the global movement of people, Rushdie has capitalised on this interpretation of the diaspora in his previous texts such as *Shame* and *The*

Satanic Verses. In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* he has attempted to transform diaspora into a feeling of unrootedness which is in line with globalised theory. The idea of not belonging anywhere and belonging everywhere is a result of a shrinking world where there is an increased accessibility of moving from country to country. Although the reason for migration varies from escaping persecution to studying or seeking a better opportunity abroad, Rushdie has chosen to focus on a group of people whose national identity is constantly shifting. In doing so, gender dynamics has also shifted and opened to new interpretations. In this chapter, New York City is seen to reflect not as a melting pot but as a place for migrants to gather and participate in the creation of newness. Yet, Rushdie has also taken this opportunity to satirise the bohemian culture of the 1970s. The characterisation of the Norwegian beauty Ifredis Wing is a clear caricature of how some women in the 1970s exercise their freedom to love without cultural boundaries impinging on their lifestyle and choices. The ability for people from all over the world to congregate in New York City and begin a life where new sets of values and attitudes can be created without the constraints of their past impinging on the migrant's lifestyle choices marks a new form of unrootedness. This sense of unrootedness demonstrates that gender dynamics too are changing and that the portrayal of gender is varied and multiple.

Chapter five's *The Enchantress of Florence* follows from similar themes explored in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. This chapter demonstrates Rushdie's treatment of gender and its development from *Midnight's Children* to *The Enchantress of Florence*. The chapter finds that there is improvement in his characterisation of men and women yet certain characters remain ambiguously represented. This is symptomatic of the patriarchal structure that dominates discourse. Furthermore, the discussion on unrootedness and migratory experiences continues to interrogate and challenge values, norms and attitudes. The cities of

Fatehpur Sikri and Florence depict how women such as Jodha Akbar and Qara Koz/Angelica have the ability to match the intellectual abilities of men. Following in the same lines as Rushdie's previous texts, *The Enchantress of Florence* portrays a variety of women with a diverse understanding of feminism. Although Qara Koz is portrayed as manipulative in her relationship with men, this is justifiable since her exploitation of men guaranteed her survival in a period when the lives of women were dictated and controlled by men. Qara Koz's calculating behaviour in the text is not so much denigrated as it is admired especially by the narrator. The ability for her to decide on her destiny and transgress cultural imperatives as well as royal protocols makes her the heroine of the text. In contrast, Jodha Akbar's origin of existence is firstly controlled by the Emperor which makes her character a derivative of Akbar's own idea of the perfect woman. Regardless of Akbar's progressive and liberal nature, Jodha's humanity is questionable since her actions, behaviours and attitudes are all within the limits of what Akbar himself believes. To a certain extent, Jodha's beliefs can even be seen as reinforcing patriarchy. However, this is very much aligned twith the argument put forward in this thesis: language and discourse contain conflicting patriarchal and feminist ideolgies.

One key feature in Rushdie's exploration of feminism is the emphasis in writing on sexuality. Cultural taboo topics such as lesbianism and incest are dealt with subtly and honestly. Rushdie's constant need to confront culturally challenging ideas is portrayed firstly in the relationship between Qara Koz and the Mirror. The natural bond of the Princess and her mirror is portrayed without a tone of judgement or proscription. This is even so when the text contemplates the possibility of their relationship being sexual. This is arguably another form of cultural transgression that could only take place in a cosmopolitan context. The mystery and mysticism surrounding the bond between women is then illustrated in characters

such as the two prostitutes in Fatehpur Sikri, Skeleton and Mattress, and Emperor Akbar's mother and aunt, Hamida Bano and Gulbadun Begum. It is only through spaces such as Fatehpur Sikri and Florence where unconventional ideas and relationships can flourish and develop. The text goes even further when it reveals that Niccolo Vespucci is born out of incest in the New World. The New World signifies a space where fundamental structures have been broken down and deconstructed to create new values, norms and attitudes. In the case of Vespucci's heritage, the new norm is what Qara Koz herself calls 'a crime against nature.'[727] Emperor Akbar too finds himself committing a form of incest after conjuring the late Princess in order to enjoy her company. His lust for Qara Koz is clearly stated when the text narrates that 'the past was meaningless. Only the present existed, and her eyes. Under their irresistible enchantment, the generations blurred, merged, dissolved.'[728] Although the text explores the topic of incest, Akbar's empire certainly suffers from this unnatural crime as a result of rumours spreading about his conjuring of the late Princess. Rushdie's experiment in exploring sexuality is arguably an attempt to push cultural boundaries to the next level. His determination to include women as more of a driving force than as passive participants in his texts suggests the significant role women play in history.

Language dictates the way we think thus shaping our beliefs, norms and attitudes to politics, religion, history and ultimately the way we interpret the world. Lakoff has suggested that 'it should be recognised that social change creates language change, not the reverse; or at best, language change influences changes in attitudes slowly and indirectly, and these changes in attitudes will not be reflected in social change unless society is receptive already.'[729] The two are not mutually exclusive and rely on each other to create change. Rushdie's concern

[727] Rushdie, *The Enchantress*, 348.
[728] Ibid, 732.
[729] Lakoff, 76.

for writing women into his texts and more so into history reveals two conflicting ideologies found in language: feminism and patriarchy. Patriarchy occurs everywhere around the world.[730] It is the way patriarchy is implemented that differs from culture to culture. Through a gendered analysis, patriarchal tropes, attitudes and stereotypes are revealed. More importantly, it can highlight how patriarchy has changed over space and time. Patriarchal ideology is part of the history of our language and discourse. Patriarchal ideology is as organic as feminist ideology in that it will continue to expand, grow and adapt to new environments in the future.[731] The development seen in Rushdie's body of work attests to him reflecting on the criticisms he has faced for his earlier texts. By continuously exploring and experimenting with gender, Rushdie has shed light on the nuances that exist in the language of representation.

[730] Leti Volpp, 'Feminism Versus Multiculturalism,' *Columbia Law Review* 101, no. 5 (June 2001): 1217.
[731] Ortner, 533.

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