Chapter VI

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The Indo Anglian novels are no longer novels of 'consent' in their treatment of women. They have become novels of 'dissent' as they reflect the change in the general outlook not just of the reader, but the writer as well. In the ancient history of India women have been deified, glorified and also regarded as myths. However, in reality, the contradictory state of affairs continued. But now, the revolution that began in the far corners of the globe resonates through the women of India. Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique (1984), quotes Margaret Fuller, “What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely, and unimpeded to unfold such powers as were given her.” (82)

This dissertation sought to identify and examine the portrayal of women in the works of Salman Rushdie. Although Rushdie’s prowess as a writer has perhaps been greatly undermined by his own countrymen- the ban of The Satanic Verses (1988) occurred in India first- it has been wholeheartedly acknowledged on many other occasions, nationally and internationally.

In the history of Indian Writing in English, the post-independence era is an epoch making one by strikingly deviating from the conventional and established genre. The reflective and refreshing work of many Indian novelists of this period offers positive ideas with an effort to shape the future based on universal consciousness. Salman Rushdie, with his fifteen works of various genres, occupies a high pedestal among writers of this era. His forte lies in the portrayal of the clash of cultures, complex human relations and realism.
Salman Rushdie is a commentator on the past and the present whose work helps to inaugurate the future of literature by people of South Asian descent and global citizenship. He connects the magical world of the Thousand and One Nights with the Mumbai of his childhood, and this is in turn connected with the Birmingham evoked by Meera Syal, the London evoked by Hanif Kureishi, or the New Delhi or New York evoked by Vikram Seth. Above all, Rushdie's writings offer us a map, a way of navigating through the strange new world of the postcolonial city and its myriad connections in culture, time and space.

Cultural dualism and politico-historical roots provide vital impetus to his aesthetic imagination. His is a dual strategy at many levels, be it narrative technique, plot or language. His fictional strategy is an enriched human context of his subcontinental fictional plots, from their mythical past to the contemporary world. He has employed every theme of postmodernism in his novels. The utilization of language, magic realism, range of topics, music, verse, cross cultural references, craftsmanship and sheer range of styles, and topics distinguish him as a postmodern writer.

The Introduction, traced the origin of Indian Writing and its growth, the history of modernism and postmodernism and the growth of the writer for the research. The books that would be used for the research were decided upon. Aspects of Rushdie's works- the use of language, his cross culturalism were dealt with. The portrayal of women with reference to the roles they play through literary history and in post colonialism was touched upon. The chapter laid out the hypothesis and briefly touched upon the chapter division.
The Second Chapter—The Mother—explored the idea of the biological role of motherhood in the social and emotional realm. It was based on *Midnight's Children* (1995), *Shame* (1995), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1996), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (2000), *Fury* (2002), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008). The characters in these novels were categorised in two main ideas: Maternal and Matriarchal. The conventional woman was the mother, who in her maternal role, chose to go with the flow of tradition. In this, she subsumed her self and her dreams for that of others, especially her children's aspirations and seemed to find peace in it. The maternal mother, being tradition bound was rather prudish and submissive, and was rarely seen or heard.

The emerging woman was the matriarchal mother who revelled in her new found status as mother/mother in law and chose to exercise it, but with caution. This caution could have been a result of her assurance that she was the one with the powers to get things done. She slowly became conscious of her rights, of the concepts of liberation and emancipation and was excited yet nervous by the opportunities ahead of her.

This nervousness could have been a result of many reasons, not least of them, the deep seated patriarchy that exists in society even today. Some women briefly exercised their powers, but then bowed to the patriarchal system and retreated to their old ways. A case in point was Naveed Hyder who showed rebellion in her eloping with Talvar Ulhaq on the eve of her marriage. This rebellious streak however is buried under multiple pregnancies and leads to her desperate act of suicide.

It was observed that Motherhood is held up as the ideal of womanhood. Women characters, like the Shakil sisters embraced their biological role and found fulfilment and
identity within it. But this deep seated contentment was also counter productive when the mother was an almost overbearing presence in the son’s life, like Flora Zogoiby. In the case of Bilquis Hyder, motherhood was connected to shame when it was tainted with barrenness. Her daughter Naveed also suffers from this shame but in her case it was the opposite; the burden of over abundance. Rushdie’s comparisons of the women to goddesses also gave them force of character and made them potent. An analogy that is befitting a migrant writer is the imagery of the country as mother. Rushdie is keenly aware of the loss of country in The Moor’s Last Sigh (1996), where he transmutes Aurora’s loss for her mother into grand canvasses depicting loss for the motherland. While women occupy many roles in Rushdie’s novels, it would appear that the role of the mother finds utterance more often. The writer painted a landscape peopled with women who put children and spouse first and in thus doing so, created ideal pauses for the narrative to progress.

The Third Chapter- The Rebel- explored the concept of whether women lived the roles set by society or rebelled against the norms that are thrust on them. The chapter was based on characters in the following novels: The Satanic Verses (1988), Midnight’s Children (1995), Shame (1995), The Moor’s Last Sigh (1996), The Ground Beneath her Feet (2000) and Fury (2002). Rushdie’s women characters rebelled against their sex in a bid to negate it. Arjumand Harappa believed this was necessary for her to be accepted in the realm of politics. This downplaying of femininity was her bid to be the right companion to her father. This combination of man like qualities in overwhelming womanliness made her a study in contrast. But Rushdie does not suggest that she was forced to follow this course of action. She was portrayed as a woman with a mind of her own.
Women fought against society and the characters used to depict this aspect of rebellion came from the servant class of society. The maid played a pivotal role in creating movement in the novels. But this fight against society was also combative in the form of the female terrorist Tavleen who was the most brutal amongst the group and whose actions sent out a clear message of her seriousness. Women also fought against society for the men they had chosen. Women carved their own identity by being successful businesswomen, whether it was in running a small café or an empire of health products and music. There was a negative portrayal in the character of Sufiya Zenobia whose rage caused her to create an identity that was enraged and deranged. Naveed, who had been portrayed as the outgoing sister, is in contrast to Sufiya Zambia, her idiot sibling. Although brought up conservatively, she had a mind and a will all her own, often using them with devastating results. Characters used the traditional spaces they traditionally dominated to create rebellion. This was usually done with the denial of food or in the taking of all pertinent decisions in the domestic realm. Men were saved physically, mentally and monetarily by the intervention of their companions. The liberated woman was the social activist, the feminist who fought for equal rights. In doing so, she fought against society’s strictures and this made her an outsider. Her inability at being accepted by society resulted in her anger, which in turn strengthened her resolve to rebel. She went from a, “You will not mind.” attitude, to a “Who will mind?” one which is assertion outside and hollowness and emptiness inside. This hollowness is filled with anger and hatred. A case in point is Arjumand in Shame (1995) who was “many rebels” all at once. She shunned society, her own sex and creates an identity of her own. She was stung by criticism of her appearance by people and used that hurt to deadly effect.
In the Fourth Chapter- The Beauty and the Sex Object- research was conducted into women's attitude to themselves in relation to others and how this feminine sexuality is used to manipulate surroundings and circumstances. Research was made into understanding how women characters use these traditional male dominated concepts in their lives. The novels taken into consideration for this chapter are Midnight's Children (1995), Shame (1995) The Moor's Last Sigh (1996), The Ground Beneath her Feet (2000) Fury (2002), Shalimar the Clown (2005) and The Enchantress of Florence (2008).

The observations concluded that it was possible to infer that Rushdie perpetuated the image of woman as witch, the darker side of Devi. Rushdie attached a certain degree of shame and scandal to the act of sex. At the same time, he also bestowed on characters, an enormous degree of liberated views that belie the trepidation with which he seemed to treat the act. He also perceived women to be those whose lack of education or orientation towards work does not count for as much as their looks and their allure. There is incest in some of his novels, like Fury (2002) and The Moor's Last Sigh (1996). The escapist are those who sometimes used sex and beauty to escape the nothingness of their lives. Women like Vina Apsara who, in her promiscuity, also revealed her deep yearning for her one true love, Ormus Cama. Rushdie turned the man-made concept of beauty on its head and equipped the woman with her own awareness of her looks and sexuality and how they might be used.

The Fifth chapter, Language and Style- focussed on his unique style of writing and the technique he made popular- magic realism. Both his sense of language use and this specific device he uses to put his ideas across served to enhance the over all aura and readability of his novels. It was observed that Salman Rushdie used a wide range of
techniques in his writing, making his language use a separate entity in his work. Salman Rushdie's language and style is characterised throughout by an exuberance and playfulness that evoke a comical mood. His striking originality is a mix of satire, irony and poetic flights of imagination, begging the inevitable comparison to Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll. His narrative technique is most intimately based on realising the world of political and domestic history in a moment of simultaneity; a post-modernist practice. The most striking achievement of his mastery of language is his ability to create an Indian atmosphere and Indian world by the use of idiomatic British English without the translation of Indian idioms into English or literally transposing the Indian physical world into the fictional world. His intentional subversion of language is quite evident in his deliberate distortion of the conventional sequence of events- the events are deliberately distorted and literally forced out of shape. The recurrent use of the synecdoche and metonymy is a common trait in Rushdie's work.

All of Rushdie's central characters in the novels are isolated, rational and self-punishing men who try to come to terms with their own selves. The men try to understand and unite with independent, passionate and enigmatic women. Rushdie says in Shame (1995), "It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to- that their stories explain, and even subsume, the men’s." (173). Being his own narrator of the novels taken for this thesis, Rushdie seems to transfer his own inability at understanding the feminine mystique to the pages. One would therefore expect the portrayal of women in literature, created and dominated by man to be mere role fulfilsments.

"The woman in life and in literature had no existence save that of a shadowy, suffering, pathetic creature", says Meera Shirwadkar. The writer has not taken women's
portrayal as his focal theme. In fact, he uses the man as his protagonist in every book. But the impetus behind the man’s activities and thoughts is the woman in his life.

This woman could be wife, mother, partner or any of the multitudinous roles women play in the course of their lifetimes. All his central characters are manipulated by women. Ultimately these women play a major role in helping the men to evolve as persons, to comprehend and accept the responsibility of their freedom. The male character is always limited, with partial understanding. To help him overcome this handicap, he tries to operate in a world where he can be the master.

Three of Rushdie's most important works, Midnight's Children (1995), Shame (1995) and The Satanic Verses (1988), draw heavily on the theme of migration. By examining the life of the migrant, Rushdie explores the universal mystery of being born and the puzzle of who one is. One can understand Rushdie's quest for identity by examining his life, his deliberately chosen style of prose, the theme of "double identity", "divided selves" and the "Shadow figures" in his novels and in his personality, and the benefits that many characters reap from being migrants.

This concept of ‘migration’ applies to his women characters as well, who shun and don old and new selves. The transformation from the shy, retiring bride to a woman who takes charge of situations is a migration of sorts, and like with any migration, here too, there is a yearning for what was left behind, that which was lost in the bid to get ahead. The women, while being emergent are also hesitant. They seem to enjoy who they have become, but are made to reconsider their choices by society in some cases, by family in others.
The researcher is of the opinion that the ideal of womanhood as exemplified in the novels of Salman Rushdie is more appropriate in the Indian context than the pronouncements of the Western and European feminists. In a world where celebrated feminists like Elaine Showalter and Kate Millet's works are being called to question, it is imperative to see what makes Salman Rushdie's women relevant today. Though he is neither a radical nor an overt feminist, Rushdie affirms in his portrayal that woman is not the weaker sex. It is clear that having chosen a family drama the women have already been provided with the leading roles, of course without Rushdie's own consciousness. In Shame (1995), there are no men, but the sisters bear children. This in itself is a reflection of the relative lack of importance the men hold in the scheme of things in his books. Rushdie says this:

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale, a saga of sexual rivalry, ambition, power, patronage, betrayal, death, revenge. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me to couch my narrative in all manner of sinuous complexities, to see my 'male' plot refracted so to speak, through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side. (173)

In his words in Shame (1995), "So it turns out that my 'male' and 'female' plots are the same story, after all." (173). Rushdie exhorts the idea of equality between sexes, with differences in their sphere of importance and responsibility. He wants to prove that within the traditional roles woman can accommodate her other roles as human being not
through alienation but through expansion and communion. Hence his women conform to and rebel against tradition. The representation of women in his works does develop from being idea specific to being character specific. In Shame (1995) we have female characters who are a quintessential manifestation of the notions of 'sham' (shame) and 'izzaf (honour). They come across as two-dimensional figures—mere shadows of what they could have been as complete individuals. He seems unable to make up his mind as to how to represent them. His work is essentially from a man's perspective even though he acknowledges that women are marching in from the peripheries demanding their own stories to be told.

This dual mould of woman proves his conviction that they should conform to tradition and culture until their womanhood faces crisis. Facing crisis does not mean giving up of identity, individual identity is crucial to human existence. Life without it would be synonymous with death. CD Narasimhaiah said, “Sita and Savitri was not docile as criticised by feminists but so full of dignity in their carriage, a dignity achieved through self-denial and profound concern for the other and thus imparted stability to society and gave civilisation itself a continuity”(5).

Early in the novel Fury (2002), Rushdie writes: “Life is fury, he’d thought. Fury—sexual, Oedipal, political, magical, brutal—drives us to our finest heights and coarsest depths. Out of furia comes creation, inspiration, originality, passion, but also violence, pain, pure unafraid destruction, the giving and receiving of bows from which we never recover. The Furies pursue us; Shiva dances his furious dance to create and also destroy”.(76) This may well be a testament to his kind of writing.
In his deft handling of many issues, the works of Salman Rushdie seem to be inexhaustible as topics for further research. It would be interesting to do a comparative study between his works and GV Desani's work. The use of language and stylistics in the novels of Salman Rushdie is an area rich with possibilities. The predicament of man could be studied too. The aspect of women as wife/companion can yield rich results as well. Rushdie's works can be analysed for their satire and humour content. He is also a visionary in his idea of society and that topic can throw up some interesting observations.

It may be claimed against Rushdie that as he chiefly deals with an impersonal historical reality, he is not constrained to articulate subjective feelings, which require a greater ring of authenticity. It may be clearly stated that even as his movement from the historical to the ahistorical world of sensory perception alternates, his English expression is equally at home in both cases. Madhusudhana Rao in *Salman Rushdie's Fiction: A Study* (1992) says:

> The fact that his achievement speaks for itself of his mastery of English, with such abundant creativity, is a sure contribution to the Indian fictional prose by Rushdie. The most striking achievement of Rushdie is his ability to create an Indian atmosphere and Indian world by the use of idiomatic British English without so painfully resorting to the practice of translating of Indian idioms into English or literally transporting the Indian physical world into the fictional world. (165)

There has been a perceptible change in Rushdie's depiction of women characters. In *The Satanic Verses* (1988), there is a plethora of strong women who take great strides in business and life. The power they wield ranges from the clout of a queen, in the case of
Hind and the deadliness of a suicide mission, in the case of Tavleen. Whether it was the cataclysmic reception accorded to the novel or a change in his own attitude, it is hard to assess but with his next novel, *Midnight's Children* (1995), Rushdie is careful to create a woman in the domestic scene- a marked difference from his previous work. The women here are mothers- Naseem and Amina, for instance- comfortable in their home life and yet not independent outside of it. When they do step out, it is clandestine, for instance Amina at the races. They also cling to the culture and decorum that typifies the Indian woman- Jamila Singer who sings publicly, but from behind a veil. The women are also companions, Padma and Parvati and in this aspect they provide vital support to the men. The book, set as it is, in India, carries in its pages the concept of motherland. *In Shame* (1995), there is an almost overpowering presence of motherhood, as though it were a carry over from the previous work. The women seem to embrace the ultimate idea of womanhood- motherhood. The three Shakil sisters and Naveed Hyder, in the initial years of her marriage, typify this concept. The novel seemed to present women in a cloistered, unnatural way, as in the case of the raging Sufiya Zenobia. The powerful woman is the big mother, Bariamma who controls the fate of other women.

*The Moor's Last Sigh* (1996), creates women who carry a saltiness and free spiritedness about them. In generation after generation, one is greeted with strong and wilful characters, whether it is the matriarch Epifania or Aurora. Rushdie also returns to embrace the concept of India as Polaris, with which he marks his bearings. The women in the novel have careers, whether it is art or law. This too is a departure from the previous work. In *The Ground beneath her Feet* (2000), the main protagonist Vim Apsara is multi-faceted. She is a recording artist and a shrewd businesswoman. She is also the vital Muse.
of Ormus Cama, the life-spring of his music and his creation. She is portrayed as promiscuous and tortured about the choices she makes in life although she has a semblance of domestic bliss in her union with Ormus Cama.

While Rushdie's initial works did not dwell on this aspect, his novels post *Shame* (1995) have done so. *Fury* (2002) contains women with careers. In the case of Neela Mahendra, she is a media person and Mila Milo has a flourishing internet business. One sees a marked 'typification' of women, in the many references to beauty and in the character of Little Brain, a doll that is created by the protagonist of the novel, Malik Solanka. In *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) Rushdie moves away from the urban, gentrified society and creates the ambitious village girl Boonyi, who defies society and marriage to pursue her dreams, with disastrous results. Perhaps he is unable to break completely with his familiar hunting grounds and so creates a glamorous life for Boonyi's daughter, India, far away from Kashmir. It is Rushdie's own journey from Kashmir to America that finds echo in the journey of the women in the novel.

It is in Rushdie's latest book, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) that one sees a clear shift towards women as main characters. The introduction to the book states that it is a "story of a woman attempting to command her own destiny on a man's world". Perhaps these lines hold true for all of Rushdie's novels where his women characters attempt and mostly succeed in holding their own in a patriarchal society.

*The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) in these lines seems to sum up Rushdie's ideology in these present times:

The need for a woman to cure the loneliness of murder(...). To wipe away the guilt of victory or the vainglory of defeat. To still the tremble in the
bodies. To dry the hot tears of relief and shame. To hold you while you feel
the ebbing tide of your hatred and its replacement by a form of higher
embarrassment. To sprinkle you with lavender to hide the scent of blood
on the fingertips and the gore stinking in the beard. The need for a woman
to tell you that you are hers and to turn your mind away from death. (215)

Rushdie elevates women to this position in his latest book and it has been a long
journey of self discovery where reluctance has given way to acceptance. He calls Qara
Köz, “a woman who had forged her own life, beyond convention, by the force of her will
alone, a woman like a king.” (309). Despite the inevitable male comparison, this line is a
fitting tribute to all the women in his books, one who emerge strong and victorious in the
end game.