Chapter III

"I want something more than my husband and my children and my home."

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*
Chapter III

The Rebel

Social pressures harness the vulnerability of women and can either break them or turn them into change agents. Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1989) states: “Humanity is man made and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being...he is the subject, he is the absolute, she is the other” (16). It is believed that the lack of self respect and standing of women as human beings and as females renders them perpetually powerless against man.

Women, as individuals, community, tribe or group bear the worst effects of conflict-war or societal discrimination. Post colonial literature is filled with several characters who are acutely aware of the yoke of a dominating force, the boot heel grinding into the back. While oppression tends to be economic, it would also be fair to say it encompasses other facets as well. Especially for women that could mean being physically uprooted from their homes, facing discrimination or rape, or bearing the brunt of it. Numerous writers have chosen to express this anguish in their writing. When the war is at home, the executor of millions of atrocities, a member of the family, a son, a father, a husband, a daughter, then the pain that shines through speaks eloquently. The militant woman marks the defining moment in the woman’s life, when she detaches herself from her gendered existence and begins to seek a whole new world. This coming into one’s own is a quest she sets off on, a journey and a mission.

Postcolonial feminism encompasses women in both the developing and developed world. Whereas the Eurocentric tendencies of women in the West lead them to see their
societies and cultures as models for the rest of the world, Third World countries have their own active native women's movements concerned with the specificities of their countries. Feminism is not new to India. Incidences are replete with feministic attitudes in Indian epics. For instance, in Manimekalai, the renowned Tamil Epic, the heroine establishes her identity as a learned, independent woman choosing her own career rather than giving in to the overtures of her royal suitor. It can be understood that the concept of gender equality has been very much respected and observed in India in ancient times. But it is unfortunate that the present day awareness of this feminist ideology has to come from the West. As Uma Narayan argues in Dislocating Cultures, Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism (1997), "Colonial history is the terrain where the project of 'Western' culture's self-definition became a project heavily dependent upon its 'difference' from its 'Others' both internal and external."(80). She goes on to state that many third world cultures and communities define themselves as political responses to this history. In addition to this, are other voices on the topic. Elisabeth Bumiller in May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons, (1991) quotes Madhu Kishwar, the editor of Manushi, an Indian feminist magazine, who says, "To talk about Indian women, and women's movements, is ridiculous unless you systematically attempt to understand who these Indian women are." Margaret Alva adds, "For every woman who sits in Parliament, or has done her Ph.D. or goes to the Supreme Court to argue a case, you have thousands who don't even know about their basic rights and that they are equal citizens."(128)

Much of the feminist theory and learning produced by Third World women remains indiscernible in the West, though some feminists from the Third World who live in the West are increasingly making their voices heard. In addition to analysing their own
situations, Third World women are eloquent authoritative critiques of the Eurocentrism of much Western feminism, its amnesia about colonial history and its tendency to replicate colonial forms of representation. The development of a feminism which can take due account of the structural relations that constitute difference, must recognize the often brutal history of colonialism and its role in shaping the modern world.

In traditional South Asian and Muslim culture, the definitions of gender-roles are rigid and in them, the woman is expected to sacrifice and to compromise for the family. Personal desires and dreams become subservient to those of the family no matter how great the personal cost. A woman always had to mould herself to the changing situation. Her exultant assertion was relentlessly stifled; her uniqueness was crushed or effaced by the male-centric culture. She was tutored to feel joy and fulfilment as long as she stayed in the periphery and satisfied the demands of men. In some cultures females were allowed to participate on an inferior level as figures of identification for other females. It served as a useful tool in encouraging them to an enforced cooperation in their own control.

In the Introduction to The Second Sex (1989), Simone de Beauvoir states of women:

> Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man’s, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. In the economic sphere men and women can almost be said to make up two castes. In industry and politics men have a great many more positions and they monopolise the most important posts. (xi).
She adds that even the education system supports this bias and confirms that even as women are coming to the fore in the affairs of the world, it still belongs to men. Orientalism of the 18th and 19th century influenced many cultural choices of the Indian middle class and created a perception that was regarded as the Indian cultural tradition. Indian womanhood was an important part of this perception. Traditions are invented. “The making of a tradition is a dialogue with the past- a perceived past which helps construct history.” (Vaasanthi).

In the colonial context, cultural tradition became imperative, from a nationalistic point of view, to counter the colonial impact. Edward Said talks about the position of Palestinian women in “On Palestinian Identity: A Conversation with Edward Said”, an essay that features in Imaginary Homelands (1992):

> With few exceptions women seem to have played little more than the role of hyphen, connective, transition, mere incident. Unless we are able to perceive at the interior of our life the statements women make, concrete, watchful, compassionate, immensely poignant, strangely invulnerable – we will never fully understand our experience of dispossession. (180)

This dispossession resulted in a change of persona. The strong women, of dignity and daring, of the epics and the story telling tradition became diffident and deferential women who were pliant and accommodating of the lines drawn by male hierarchy. Original traditions were thus subject to many additions and interpolations, in which edifying texts were added focussing on social obligations.

The most important social obligation for a woman is to bear children and protect genealogies which had to be pure. The only way to ensure this purity was to guard or
control the sexuality of the woman, who alone could assure the continuation of the line. Being a mother, to a male child at that, meant immediate privilege. In this role, she cherishes her autonomy and has no issues asserting her freedom and demanding her rights. Anne Wilson Schaef, in her book, *Women’s Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* (1985), further explains,

As soon as a woman gives birth to a son, she is responsible for teaching him that he is an innately superior being. As some lead, she treats him with the deference befitting his station and prepares him to take his rightful place in the world. She had better—because if for some reason he fails, it is all her fault! (80)

The objective of this chapter is to explore whether the woman lives in these roles or rebels against the norms that are thrust on her. The researcher has chosen to study the concept of rebellion against the background of the following characters in the novels of Salman Rushdie: Naseem Aziz, Amina Sinai, Brass Monkey, Mary Pereira and Parvathi in *Midnight’s Children*, (1995) Tavleen, Hind and Alleluia Cone in *The Satanic Verses*, (1988) Rani, Arjumand Harappa, Sufiya Zenobia, Shahbanou and Hasmat Bibi in *Shame*, (1995) Aurora, Philomina and Uma in *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1996) Vina Apsara and Persis in *The Ground Beneath her Feet*, (2000) Mila Milo, Neela Mahendra and Eleanor Masters in *Fury*. (2002) The women characters will be argued against five main heads:

- Women fight against their Sex
- Women fight against Society
- Women save Men
Women rebel within the traditional roles they occupy

Women carve their own Identity

Rushdie’s main protagonist in most novels is the man and so the man goes the choicest roles. Whether it is causing a revolution, or being a bystander in the events that shape history, the man is responsible for the actions to move forward. The woman is a support staff; she hovers in the periphery of the man’s life and does not form the centre of his existence. She may be wife, mother, daughter and all the other roles her sex expects her to play but never equal, never a partner. But Rushdie’s words in Shame (1983) belie the minor role his women characters play, “Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise: dictators are always- or at least in public, on other people’s behalf- puritanical” (173).

Thus there is more to these women than a minor part in the scheme of things. This chapter aims to explore whether she is indeed a silent spectator. If she is not, does she cause the action to happen, either in a direct or indirect fashion. The aim is to see if the woman strives to see the light of emancipation despite cataclysmic trials and tribulations of life. The woman might be someone like Qara Kız, in The Enchantress of Florence (2008) “a woman who had forged her own life, beyond convention, by the force of her will alone, a woman like a king.”(309). Alternately, she might be like Jodha, in the same novel, who asks, “Was her will free of the man who had willed her into being? Did she exist only because of his suspension of disbelief in the possibility of her existence? If he died, could she go on living?” (49)
To rise above her gender, her 'mere' sex will enable women to fulfil their potential. When women are seen merely by their biological roles then there will also be the need to conform to the rules therein. The woman is to have 'womanly' qualities and any breach in this code can be perceived as unbecoming. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1984), denies this idea in these words, "(But) by choosing femininity over the painful growth to full identity, by never achieving the hard core of self... these girls are doomed to suffer ultimately that bored, diffuse feeling of purposelessness, non-existence, non-involvement with the world that can be called *anomie*, or lack of identity..." (181)

In *Midnight's Children* (1988), the character of Brass Monkey, or Jamila Singer as she called herself later, is one of many such angles. As Saleem's sister, she willingly takes on the 'unfeminine' role of trouble maker so that her brother, by default, becomes the 'good guy'. Saleem's most important relationship is the one he has with his sister and Rushdie fleshes out this relationship by few well placed sentences and incidents. For instance, when Saleem is caught by his mother in the washing chest she forbids him from speaking for a day. It is Brass Monkey who keeps track of the curfew and reminds her mother to liberate Saleem from his vow of silence.

To demonstrate the loyalty of sisters: when the twenty-four hours were up, on the dot, the Brass Monkey ran into my mother's bedroom...

'The time's up!' she exclaimed, shaking my mother out of sleep. 'Amma, wake up: it's time: can he talk now?' (164)

In another instance, Saleem is ostracised by the family for claiming to hear voices and Brass Monkey, anxious to maintain the family peace, chooses to become the family scapegoat once more.
Even the Brass Monkey was satisfied by my show of contrition— in her eyes, I had returned to form, and was once more the goody-two-shoes of the family. To demonstrate her willingness to re-establish the old order, she set fire to my mother’s favourite slippers, and regained her rightful place in the family doghouse. (169)

Born with the preordained disadvantage of having a celebrity for a brother, it seems that all her life, Brass Monkey has to grapple with establishing her own identity and place in the family. The place she chooses for herself is that of the hell raiser, with a penchant for burning shoes.

Rushdie also depicts women characters who physically, segregate their sex. This stems from revulsion of being woman, a self loathing, perhaps, or a belief that being woman holds them back from being their fullest. This is witnessed in the character of Arjumand Harappa in *Shame* (1983). Arjumand is called Virgin Ironpants, because of her cold demeanour to men and suitors. Rushdie says:

Arjumand, the famous ‘Virgin Ironpants’, regretted her female sex for wholly non-parental reasons. ‘This woman’s body,’ she told her father on the day she became a grown woman, ‘it brings nothing but babies, pinches and shame. (106-7)

When the person she admires the most, her father, says to her, “It’s a man’s world, Arjumand. Rise above your gender as you grow. This is not a place to be a woman in.”(126), then Arjumand takes it seriously. Rushdie says:
... his daughter takes him at his word, and when her breasts begin to swell she will bind them tightly in linen bandages, so fiercely that she blushes with pain. She will come to enjoy the war against her body, this slow provisional victory over the soft despised flesh... (126)

Sadly this was only an off the cuff remark made in reference to something wholly unconnected to her but it strikes a deep chord with the young woman who begins to transform herself. Of this process Rushdie says:

> Loathing her sex, Arjumand went to great lengths to disguise her looks. She cut her hair short, wore no cosmetics or perfume, dressed in her father's old shirts and the baggiest trousers she could find, developed a stooped and slouching walk. (156)

Mrinalini Sinha in her book, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995), cites Sir Lepel Griffin, a senior Anglo-Indian official, who states that "the characteristics of women which disqualify them for public life and its responsibilities are inherent in their sex and are worthy of honour, for to be womanly is the highest praise for a woman, as to be masculine is her worst reproach."(47). But Arjumand turns this idea on its head, believing that to be a true companion to her father she must perforce give up on her womanness.

Arjumand is in the periphery of womanness and of motherhood, a character that is determined to wipe out all traces of her femininity. This almost fatal flaw alienates the one man she falls in love with- Haroun Harappa. The turn of events is described in the following way:
... she cultivated in Haroun's presence that attitude of scornful condescension which quickly persuaded him that there was no point in his trying where so many others had failed. He was not insensible to her fatal beauty, but the reputation of the Virgin Ironpants, when combined with that terrible and uninterruptedly disgusted gaze, was enough to send him elsewhere... Haroun Harappa was the only man, other than her father, whom Arjumand ever loved, and her rage in the days after his betrothal was awful to behold. (157)

Even when his engagement to another woman breaks off, Haroun rejects Arjumand's feelings, and she channels all her devotion elsewhere:

The rejection of the Virgin Ironpants by Good News's jilted fiancé engendered in that formidable woman a hatred of all Hyders which she would never lose; she took the love she had intended to give Haroun and poured it like a votive offering over her father instead... 'There are times', Rani thought, 'when she seems more like his wife than I do'. (172)

Rushdie bases this character on Indira Gandhi/ Benazir Bhutto and indeed one can see many similarities between the two women - a daughter devotee to her father and determined to enable his political aspirations. She moves into his house and becomes the official hostess, while her mother, Rani, languishes in Mohenjo. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1984), says, "The daughter who devotes her life to her father is also making a satisfactory feminine "sublimation". Only activity of her own or originality, on a basis of equality deserves the opprobrium of "masculine complex". (121)
While Arjumand is a devoted daughter and gives up her own life to serve her father, it is also true that she does not consider it a compliment being compared to a man. The choice she makes is her own and in doing so, she rejects not only her gender but also society's expectations of the gender. Her character is intriguing and typical at the same time. Intriguing, because of her complete negation of self to become who she wants to be. Typical, because of her possessiveness of the men in her life—her father and Haroun. She resents her mother and the years they spend in exile fail to bring them close. She tracks the movements of Pinkie Aurangzeb, her father's mistress and after that, tracks Naveed, Haroun's ex-fiancée and her increasing progression of babies. She shares this information with the men. She is ruthless but still cries when she is sent a crude reminder of her nickname in the form of the lower portion of an armoursuit.

Thus Arjumand is a study in contrasts, a beautiful woman who denies herself and her sex, but at the same time is admired for her beauty. She typifies the concept of androgyny, the idea that sex-roles are not rigidly defined, a state in which 'the man in every woman' and the 'woman in every man' could be integrated and freely expressed'. Used more frequently in the 1970's, this term was used to describe "a blurring, or combination of gender roles so that neither masculinity nor femininity is dominant." She has man like characteristics in her womanliness, thereby straddling both worlds.

In talking of this approach, Neluka Silva in the work, "The Politics of Repression and Resistance in Salman Rushdie's Shame" says:

Her approach raises questions about the validity and appropriateness of such a mode of resistance. In a social system where the practice of 'veiling' defines a woman's self-worth and identity, Arjumand's
repudiation of it and the social institutions it represents seems to cripple her just as much as her mother's compliance with these systems circumscribes the latter. (159)

In *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) one encounters Margaret Rhodes, who as Grey Rat is an extremely successful spy. In describing her Rushdie says, "That the Rat was beautiful was obvious enough, even though she did her best to hide it." (68)

Marching away from society’s rules and conventions, the women in Rushdie’s novels defy the norms of the realm they live in to carve their niche. This rebellion becomes their stance against society. If society imposes harsh rules on women, it does so in an arbitrary fashion.

The concept of subservience-to society and the patriarchy- is double fold in the case of a servant or maid. In this context, the domestic help’s role becomes relevant and it is pertinent to go through it here.

Nowhere is the role of the maid more important than in *Midnight's Children* (1988). The fate of two children is turned upside down forever by one act of mutiny. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the story, owes his whole life to the doing of one woman- Mary Pereira. A nurse, she is afraid that her lover, a revolutionary, Joseph D Costa is moving away from her and that too, to her sister Alice Pereira, and decides to make a grand gesture to show him her feelings are true. That grand gesture is to switch two babies, both born at the stroke of midnight, in the hospital she works in. Thus, Hindu becomes Saleem and Muslim becomes Shiva:
She did it for Joseph, her own private revolutionary act, thinking that he will surely love me for this, as she changed name-tags on the two infants, giving the poor baby, a life of privilege and condemning the rich-born child to accordions and poverty. "Love me Joseph!" was in Mary Pereira's mind and then it was done. (117)

She then becomes ayah at the Sinai house thereby guarding the child and the secret. Her final act of confessing the crime, "O God my hour has come, my darling Madam, only let me go peacefully, do not put me in the jailkhana!" (279), takes the family, and more importantly Saleem to Pakistan, where more adventures and experiences await.

Jaya He', the woman who takes care of Moor and his siblings in The Moor's Last Sigh (1995), routinely fences the items she steals from the household. Moor is aware of this since she takes him on her expeditions but is sworn into secrecy by her. When he tells her husband, Lambajaan about her thefts, she plots revenge on Moor and the family. She fills Aurora's ears with poison about Moor's teacher Dilly and ensures she is dismissed and that she never wants to meet Moor again.

Shahbanou, Sufiya's Parsee Ayah, asks Shakil of his intentions and is sceptical when she hears that he has no desire to impose himself on her and demand his marital rights. She comes to him instead of Sufiya, for her an act of devotion so that her ward can be safe.

The ayah's is a pivotal role in Rushdie's books. Hasmat Eibi, in Nishapur facilitates the sisters' withdrawal from the world before Shakil's birth. She is also one of the first to agree to be hypnotised by Shakil, an action that eventually leads to her death.
Shahbanou, the maid who has taken care of Sufiya since her childhood, offers herself in place of Sufiya in the nuptial bed and this act of sacrifice also sets off a chain of events that leads to Shakil’s murder at the hands of Sufiya; whose subconscious mind seems to sense that she must have a relationship with Shakil, her mind takes cognizance of the fact that he is a husband, even if she is unable to understand the full extent of what it entails.

But not all the women rebel against society in a slavish fashion. The Satanic Verses (1988) is femininity in its combative form. No where is this more starkly illustrated than in the persona of the lone woman Tavleen, in a team of terrorists that highjacks the jet, Bostan. Rushdie remarks on the incident thus:

... the young men were too squeamish, too narcissistic, to want blood on their hands, they would find it difficult to kill; they were here to be on television. But Tavleen was here on business.” (80).

Tavleen is also the most violent of them all, breaking a dissenter’s jaw to show she means business. She kills a man to send a message to the world. She reveals the quantum of bombs she carries on her person,

When a great idea comes into the world, a great cause, certain questions are asked of it. History asks us: what manner of cause are we? Are we uncompromising, absolute, strong, or will we show ourselves to be timeservers, who compromise, trim and yield? Her body had provided her answer. (83)

And the final act of setting off the bombs is also performed by her, cementing the impression of how serious she is about the whole scheme.
Then in the instant when she rose up it was as if everybody awoke, it became clear to them all that she really meant business, she was going through with it, all the way, she was holding in her hand the wire that connected all the pins of all the grenades beneath her gown, all those fatal breasts, and although at that moment Buta and Dara rushed at her she pulled the wire anyway, and the walls came tumbling down. (89)

This violence can also be seen in another character in the novel, Hind who is the wife of the Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahilia. Of her Rushdie says:

She was Hind, who had joined the Jahilian army disguised as a man, using sorcery to deflect all spears and swords, seeking out her brothers’ killer through the storm of war. Hind, who butchered the Prophet’s uncle, and ate old Hamza’s liver and his heart. (373)

It is she who bargains with Mahound in a blasphemous deal that involves her temples dedicated to three goddesses. Calling her husband weak, she ridicules him for not doing anything about the many lovers she takes. “I am your equal and also your opposite” (123) she says to him.

If you are for Allah, I am for Al-Lat...The war between us cannot end in truce. And what a truce! Yours is a patronizing, condescending lord. Al-lat hasn’t the slightest wish to be his daughter she is his equal, as I am yours. (123)

Many years later when Jahilia is slowly crumbling into oblivion, Hind seems to be the same and has not aged at all. This enhances her reputation of being a witch.
. . . while Jahilia decayed, in short, Hind remained unwrinkled, her body as firm as any young woman's, her hair as black as crow feathers, her eyes sparkling like knives, her bearing still haughty, her voice still brooking no opposition. Hind, not Simbel, ruled the city now; or so she undeniably believed. (373)

Her persona and her physicality remained unchanged and undiminished. Her vibrancy is in contrast to her husband's fatigue. His is a condition of "dilapidation and defeat" (372). In some ways she seems to control Time and its effect on her. She writes a series of bulls to the people of Jahilia and is seen as the avatar of the city and its people: "Who could resist? For her eternal youth which was also theirs; for her ferocity which gave them the illusion of being invincible."(373)

This precept of mutiny is also seen in The Moor's Last Sigh (1996), where Aurora is mutinous but does not believe in the sacrifice that comes with it. Except at the altar of her art, for which she goes to great lengths. But her history has been one of taking what she desires. When she falls in love with the much older Abraham Zagiby, a manager in her family's spice empire in Cochin, she is quick to seduce him away from his clingy mother and Jewish heritage. She rejects his vow that he will take care of her, and since she is beginning to be an artist, claims that, "... the most important part of me I can take care of myself."(91). Abraham has to settle for taking care of her basic (but of course essential) needs.

Her mutiny extends to Abraham when she learns of his deal with his mother, in return for her jewellery, to raise funds for business; he must give her his first born son. When she is made aware of this, Aurora bans him from her bedroom, and takes him back.
only when his mother dies. She is not bogged down by the demand of society as is obvious, but she also espouses whatever causes she sees fit. Her casual, “Okay, fine, Abie! Mind of the store” (116), is a precursor to her long absences from Cochin. Rushdie says,

... Aurora Zogoiby grew into a giant public figure we all know, the great beauty at the heart of the nationalist movement, the loose-haired bohemian marching boldly alongside Vallabhbhai Patel and Azam Kalam Azad when they took out processions. (116)

Distrusted by Gandhiji, loathed by Indira Gandhi, her arrest after the Quit India resolution in 1942, made her a national heroine. (116)

Like Arjumand and Brass Monkey Aurora she too, does not fit the 'regular' woman idea. She deals with confusion in her own way, “she drank, grew raucous, hostile and obscene.” (174). Not just that, classily dressed and seated on expensive furniture, she smokes beedies - hardly the epitome of grace. But none of this distracts one from the genius of her work. Neither can Aurora be distracted from finding subjects for her art.

When the family moves to Bombay, she takes to riding in the car with her driver, Hanuman, to the seedy side of the city searching for new material to paint. Talking to his son Moor, Abraham says

Crazy woman', Abraham Zogoiby marvelled many years later. Your mother, my boy... Even in Bombay it is no small thing for unaccompanied ladies to sit in the public thoroughfare and stare men in the face, go into bad-area gambling dens and get out a portrait pad. (130)
In her paintings, Aurora is at her mutinous best, painting her son and herself in polemic poses.

Aurora was often at her most iconoclastic, her most *epikanunte*, when she was most light-hearted; and the high voltage eroticism of all these works, which she did not exhibit in her lifetime, created a posthumous shockwave that only failed to grow into a full-scale tsunami because she, the brazen eroticist, was not around to provoke decent folks by refusing to apologize, or even to express the merest scrap of regret. (225)

Like her mother, Aurora’s youngest daughter also rebels. But Philomina Zogoiby does so by qualifying as an advocate and then joining a “radical all-woman group of activists, film-makers and lawyers whose purpose was to expose the double-scandals of invisible people and invisible skyscrapers...” (212). Mynah, as she is called in the family, is a “dedicated secularist Marxian feminist” (243), with an “inexhaustible commitment to the struggle” (243). Even her voice is mutinous, “her anti-civic-corruption lawyer’s cross-examination voice, her fighting-against-murder-of-girl-babies, no-more-sati-no-more-rapes loud-hailer-instrument.” (269)

Moor is caught between his mother and his lover Uma Saravati. Of his first meeting with her he says, “The woman who transformed, exalted and ruined my life entered it at Mahalakshmi racecourse forty-one days after Ina’s (his sister) death.” (237). An artist herself, Uma was part of the group Philomina (Mynah) was with and is introduced to the family as such. While she manages to spend time with all members of the family, she says to Moor in a private moment:
There is a young guy in there, I can see him looking cut at me, what a combination, yaar. Youthful-spirit, plus this older-man look that I must tell you I have gone for all my life. Too hot, men, I swear.

Moor says,

Now I am nobody’s man, and also wholly, immutably and for ever, hers.

She took away her hands; leaving behind a Moor in love. (245)

Uma is also a free spirit like Aurora, and is answerable to no one, including Moor who she instructs to not ask her any questions or demand to see her work. She manipulates him to doubt every member of his family, and his mother especially, claiming that she has been unfaithful with many men. It is only when Moor is given irrefutable proof of her unfaithful ways and her deception that he realizes the extent to which his attitude to his family is mentored by Uma.

All at once I realised that many of the judgements I had recently made about my family were based on things Uma had said. Was it true about ...? And if not, then it must be true that Uma- O my best beloved!-had sought deliberately to damage my opinion of those to whom I was closest, so that she could insert herself between me and mine. (267)

He ends their relationship, only to resume it again. She now plays her final card and convinces him that she will convince his parents about them. The next day, when Moor goes to see his parents, he is told to get out of their sight and to never see them again. (He understands much later that she has given them a tape full of his poison words, uttered during the throes of sex and which she has recorded. He says, “I spoke in
the privacy and complicity of the act of love. Which, too, was a part of Jma's deception, a necessary means to her end." (321)). When he returns to Uma she is fevered, angry and on her urging, they enter into a suicide pact, that claims her life and not his. The tablets she has consumed were poison, while Moor's were sugar. The mystery of whether this was her revenge, to kill him or to die, and have him suffer the consequences is one that is never answered.

The lessons Moor learns from this episode are very different to the ones he learns from his tutor Dilly Hormuz, who teaches Moor the facts of life in The Moor's Last Sigh (1996). After she gets over her fascination for his condition- which makes him grow faster physically than his mental self- she begins to caress him, first with tentativeness and then with confidence. Moor says, "She was the first human being to make me feel, for those stolen moments, whole..." (190). This relationship is taboo in the eyes of society and comes to an abrupt end by conditions beyond the control of both people involved.

In The Ground beneath her Feet (2000), Rushdie gives us another frondeur in Vina Apsara, the music star who is known, loved and reviled for her quirkiness. She lives her life in complete opposition to society's norms and is unabashed about her life choices.

The willingness of Vina Apsara to talk publicly about private matters- her catastrophic childhood, her love affairs, her sexual preferences, her abortions- was as important as her talent, perhaps even more important, in the creation of the gigantic, even oppressively symbolic figure she became.
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. (176)

Vina's persona is worlds apart from these lines that appear in The Feminine Mystique (1984) that suggested, "... women need not seek their own autonomy through productive contribution to society—they might better help their husbands hold on to theirs, through play." (180)

Rushdie's women characters, in contravention to this diktat of being idle standers-by create a position for themselves, apart from the members of their circle. One of the common ways they do this is by initiating and conducting businesses successfully.

Vina Apsara is a successful businesswoman, belying people's ideas of her as being only a 'fast talking broad'. Of her phenomenal ride with her business ventures, Rushdie says:

Her diet books and her health and fitness regime will become worldwide best-sellers. Later, she will successfully pioneer the celebrity exercise video and licence a range of organic vegetarian meals, which, under the name Vina's Vegetable®, will also succeed.

She is the woman most cited by the world's young women to be their rôle model. (433)

A good example of using skills is Hind, in The Satanic Verses (1988) who is the proprietor of the Shaandaar Café, her success assured by her splendid culinary skills. Hers is a metamorphosis on many levels, from the quiet, obedient wife of Sufyan, an
erudite scholar to being “cook, and bread winner, and cheifest architect” (257) of the café. It is her cooking that makes a living for them in a strange land, not her husband’s ‘book learning’ (256). She buys the entire building and begins to rent rooms.

It was: her cooking. ‘Shaandaar’, it was praised. ‘Outstanding, brilliant, delicious.’ People came from all over London to eat her samosas, her Bombay chaat, her gulab jamuns straight from Paradise. What was there for Sufyan to do? Take the money, serve the tea, run from here to there, behave like a servant for all his education. O, yes, of course the customers liked his personality, he always had an appealing character, but when you’re running an eatery it isn’t the conversation they pay for on the bill. Jalebis, barfi, Special of the Day. How life had turned out! She was the mistress now.

Victory! (257)

Here there is a clear indication of the self validation she feels from capitalising on her skills, which makes even the role of her husband redundant in the business.

But running a business, doing something positive is not how Rushdie always portrays his rebellious characters. In the case of the most mutinous of them, Sufiya Zenobia, the process of carving her own identity is one she is not even aware of doing. Rushdie portrays her character as one that performs involuntarily. As a child she blushed as though she blushed for the world and that became her identity. This redness is symbolic of the rage she feels that consumes her and those she perceives as those betraying her. She seems to mirror the shame her mother has felt in her life. Bilquis was embarrassed first when a raging fire tore her clothes from her, then for taking long to
conceive and then the shame of giving birth to the 'wrong miracle', a girl, instead of a boy. The shame of a cheating husband and a daughter who becomes an idiot after a virulent bout of fever at the age of two - Sufiya takes all of it and blushes.

The reddening of the cheeks is only a precursor of the rage she feels towards the end of her life. Shame turned inward breeds monsters, and that is what happens to Sufiya Zinobia; she becomes a hideous monster strong enough to wrench the heads off men and animals with her bare hands before disemboweling them. This becomes her identity - a being that is animalistic and destroys with tremendous rage.

"I had thought," writes Rushdie in one of his typical intrusions, "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." (103)

Even the final act of revenge that concludes a tale full of such acts is performed by women - the three sisters, now aged crones, who had given birth to the nonessential hero of Shame (1995).

Sufiya Zenobia's rage seems to stem from an idea in another person's mind. She attacks Talvar Ulhaq at his marriage to Naveed because she senses the deep shame and anguish he has brought to her parents. She slaughters two hundred and eighteen turkeys being reared in a neighbouring plot because she senses her mother's distress at their presence.

What forces moved that sleeping three-year-old mind in its twelve-year-old-body to order an all-out assault upon feathered turkeys and hens? One can only speculate: was Sufiya Zenobia trying, like a good daughter, to rid her mother of the gobbler plague?..What seems certain is that Sufiya
Zenobia, for so long burdened with being the mira*ce-gone-wrong, a family’s shame made flesh, had discovered in the a*byrinths of her unconscious self the hidden path that links sharam to vio ence... (139)

If Sufiya is one who charts her own destiny, violent and bloody as it is, Ayesha, in The Satanic Verses (1998) is one who urges others to help fulfil hers, and in the process fulfil their own destinies as well. She claims to receive revelations from the Archangel Gibreel and entices all her village community to embark on a foot pilgrimage to Mecca, claiming that they will be able to walk on foot across the Arabian Sea.

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. (243)

To undertake this pilgrimage, she uproots the entire village, children and old people included and leads them in a relentless march, which takes many lives and demands many sacrifices.

When her orders to walk are defied by a few of the villagers, she disappears for a day and a half. When she returns, she claims “that the archangel was displeased that the people of Titlipur had been filled up with doubts” and promises them calamity in return. The villagers are quick to tow the line and realise that “the girl who was leading them with an absolutism that had begun to frighten them as much as it impressed.”(496)
Ayesha’s faith in the archangel puts her on a collision course with her followers too but she is calm and defiant and says, “Those who listen to the Devil’s verses, spoken in the Devil’s tongue, will go to the Devil in the end.” (498). She gives them stricter regimens to follow as an answer to what she sees as blasphemy.

Ayesha is often seen cloaked by a cloud of butterflies and these creatures are seen as a validation to her extraordinary powers. But they too disappear on the day the group is to enter “Sarang, the outermost suburb of the great metropolis on the Arabian Sea” (503). There, they face stiff opposition from hostile people who block their mute and are ready to create trouble for them. Rushdie says of this confrontation:

Ayesha walked towards the mob as if it did not exist, and when she reached the last crossroads, beyond which the clubs and knives of the enemy awaited her, there was a thunderclap like the trumpet of doom and an ocean fell down out of the sky. (505)

It would seem like the gods too have validated her defiant stance and that her pilgrimage had divine sanction. For after a while, the butterflies return. And not a single member of her group perishes in the floods that follow the downpour. It could be this divinity that gives her the confidence to be mutinous or it could be the confidence of a charlatan who misleads people and knows that she does. But she does predict the cancer in the other woman who stands out in this saga- Mishal Akhtar. Mishal then defies her husband and later her mother too, to walk the way with the other villagers and becomes Ayesha’s greatest supporter.

By day, Mishal worked ceaselessly among the pilgrims, reassuring them, bolstering their faith, gathering them together beneath the wing of her
gentleness. Ayesha had started retreating deeper and deeper into silence, and Mishal Akhtar became, to all intents and purposes, the leader of the pilgrims. (499)

She seems to take on Ayesha’s personality after a while, looking at life with the same calmness that the kahin displays. In a confrontation with her husband, there is a stark contrast between his bellowing and her tones.

“Listen to yourself,” she said in a voice which had begun to fade into a kind of smokiness, an opacity. ‘Always anger. Cold anger, icy like a fort.’(499)

Ayesha and her group reach the sea and walk into it and are never seen again. The pilgrimage ends in a catastrophic climax as the believers all walk into the water and disappear, amid disturbingly conflicting testimonies from observers about whether they just drowned or were in fact miraculously able to cross the sea. Whether the pilgrimage actually ended with them entering the perfumed gardens, the fact remains that Ayesha’s identity of leader made believers of an entire community.

Not just on such a large scale, even in personal relationships, Rushdie’s women characters hold their own. Vina, who is her happiest when she marries Ormus retains her individual spirit and freedom. She says:

Ormie, my only boy, I love you my darling, but you can’t tie me down. You can marry me but you can’t catch me; if I’m the blithe spirit, you’re the genie in the bottle. You can run the show but I can run. (472)
Thus while some of the characters in Rushdie's work lead lives of relative independence, some live in quiet desperation. *Fury* (2002) is the only book where the main women, Neela Mahendra, Mila Milo and Eleanor Masters have jobs and independent existences. And as much as they confront desperation, they also have the comfort of being in control of their own lives. They are all connected to each other by one man, Malik Solanka. He is Neela's lover, Mila's father figure and Eleanor's estranged husband. Solanka is famous for his creation, a doll called Little Brain. Solanka, who initially thinks of Mila and her young friends as a bunch of sharp dressers and not much else, soon realises that they are serious players in the website business.

So he had misjudged them, and they were whiz kids. They were the stormtroopers of the technologized future about which he had profound misgivings... (119)

It is Mila, with her friends, all computer genuises, who gives the doll another dimension and commercial opportunities, by connecting it to a science fiction theme.

The cool science fiction figures you've been coming up with: the mad cyberneticist, the drowning planet idea, the cyborgs versus the lotus - eaters from the other side of the world, the fight to the death between the counterfeit & the real. We'd like to come & talk to you about building a site. There's a whole presentation we have, you can get an idea of what's possible. (177)

Mila is the daughter of a famous poet, who still tries to make her own life on her terms. The project she undertakes for Solanka is a shift from the big league players her
group caters to, but she is willing to for him. She also pushes him to do more with his creation. Rushdie remarks:

That evening, encouraged by whispering Mila, he returned with new fire to his old craft. There’s so much waiting, she has said. I can feel it, you’re bursting with it. Here, here. Put it into your work Papi The furia. Okay? Make sad dolls if you’re sad, mad dolls if you’re mad. Professor Solanka’s new badass dolls. We need a tribe of dolls like that. Dolls that say something. You can do it. I know you can, because you made Little Brain. Make me dolls that come from her neighbourhood- from that wild place in your heart. The place that isn’t a little middle-aged guy under a pile of old clothes. This place. The place for me. (138)

These exultations make her Solanka’s muse, his inspiration and he creates, almost obsessively. The second woman Neela is worldly wise committed to the cause of her birth place, the island Lilliput-Blefescu. She is an Indo-Lilly, a migrant group resented by the indigenous Elbees of the island. The Elbees fear that the Indo-Lillies will grab land since they have been denied the right to own real estate on the island. Neela is articulate about the complications of the struggle, it being not about ethnicity but economics. In her words she says:

It is the age of numbers, isn’t it? So we are the numbers and the Elbees are words. We are mathematics and they are poetry. We are winning and they are losing: and so of course they’re afraid of us, it’s like the struggle inside human nature itself, between what’s mechanical and utitarian in us and the part that loves and dreams. We all fear that the cold, machine-like thing in human nature will destroy our magic and song. (158)
Neela moves on to liken this battle with the battle of the human spirit and even though her heart might pull her towards the other side she is determined to fight with her own people and not the Elbees. It is this passion that takes Neela, in her capacity as a "producer with one of the better independents, and specialised in documentary programming for television" (62), back to Lilliput-Blefescu, to bring the story to the world.

On the island she is treated brutally but stays firm, explaining to Solanka who has followed her,

"Everything I’ve done, everything I’m doing, is for the story,” she said.

"I don’t want to talk about us, okay? I’m caught up in something big right now. My attention has to be there.” (241)

She gives herself up to a cause she believes in, earning a name for herself in the process. This ability to believe firmly in just cause is what brings the book to its dénouement.

A woman finally comes into her own only when she rejects the man in her life and his presence and takes decisions of her own volition. This is the case with Qara Köz, the princess. Of her life, Rushdie says:

... Her life had been a series of acts of will, but sometimes she avered and sank. She had built her life on being loved by men, on being certain of her ability to engender such love whenever she chose to do so, but when the darkest questions of self were asked, when she felt her soul shudder and crack under the weight of her isolation and loss, then no man’s love would help her. As a result she had come to understand that her life would
inevitably ask her to make choices between her love and her self and when those crises came she must not choose love. To do so would be to endanger her life. Survival must come first. (256)

In contrast to the two working women in *Fury* (2002) and the artist Aurora, all the other characters of Rushdie's works do not work. It is possible for the woman to be strong and be a catalyst for change in those very same roles wherein they rebel within the boundaries circumscribed for them.

In *Midnight's Children* (1998) Naseem Aziz is just an 'ordinary' wife who sits uncomplaining till she takes a path less trodden. Naseem despite her husband's protests and attempts, refuses to change and instead creates an "invisible fortress of her own making, an ironclad citadel of tradition and certainties." She rules over the heart of any home-the hearth- and "Aziz and the children ate what she dished out." Rushdie says,

> It is a sign of the power of this custom that, even when her husband was afflicted by constipation, she never once permitted him to choose his food, and listened to no requests or words of advice. A fortress may not move. (41)

When Aziz throws out the religious instruction teacher, she withholds food from her kitchen to him, in order for the teacher to be reinstated. She worries for his health, "while Aziz's death would be a clear demonstration of the superiority of her idea of the world over his, she was unwilling to be widowed for a mere principle" (74) and then fakes an illness in order to restore the balance of things.
Naseem’s daughter, Brass Monkey uses tradition to create an identity for herself. Her divine voice is discovered at a late stage in her life and she transforms into Amila Singer. The erstwhile self-appointed hell raiser finds her identity in modesty and religion and takes to singing behind the veil willingly. Rushdie speaks of her transformation in this way:

Except observing the Monkey, who was a crucial year younger than me, fall under the insidious spell of that God-ridden country, the Monkey, once so rebellious and wild, adopting expressions of demureness and submission which must, at first, have seemed false even to her; the Monkey, learning how to cook, and keep house, how to buy spices in the market; the Monkey making the final break with the legacy of her grandfather, by learning prayers in Arabic and saying them at all prescribed times; the Monkey revealing the streak of puritan fanaticism which she has hinted at when she asked for a nun’s outfit. (292)

Adept at pushing away the people she loves the most; her final realisation of her feelings for Saleem comes too late. A streak of vindictiveness runs through her psyche, especially when it comes to people who confess to love her deeply. A streak which changes Saleem’s life forever. Rushdie says, "... she, who spurned all offers of worldly love, was seduced by the love of that God who had been named after a carved idol in a pagan shrine built around a giant meteorite; Al-Lah, in the Qa’aba, the shrine of the great Black Stone." (292)

When he confesses his love for her, she sees it as a marked betrayal. They are not siblings at all, but this is incest in her mind and Saleem refers to it in the same sense too. She then exacts a great revenge on him. Saleem describes this incident as, “vengeful
abandonment by Jamila Singer, who wormed me into the Army to get me out of her sight, I (or he) accepted the fate which was my repayment for love...” (350) in Shame (1983), while at first glance there seems to be little in common between mother and daughter, between Rani and Arjumand, one must endorse that both rebel against patriarchy, the latter choosing an extreme way to do so. This behaviour comes from what Neluka Silva claims in “The Politics of Repression and Resistance in Salman Rushdie’s Shame” (2003) as the women’s belief that in “order to acquire power, it is necessary to enlist its patriarchal structures.”(158)

Rani also rebels, in the role of wife. After decades of tolerating her husband’s philandering ways, her powerful act of defiance is in the embroidering of eighteen shawls that breathtakingly capture the inhumanity, brutality and depravity of her husband’s career. Thus, the unsaid spoken word is passed on by the distinctly feminine pursuit of embroidery. And in doing so, she reverts to her maiden name, signing the shawls as Rani Humayun, not Harappa. In one clear-cut lunge, she disassociates herself from both, her husband and her daughter. But this severing of ties with Arjumand is also a passing on of a legacy of truth.

The shawls speak even as the veil silences. Neluka Silva in “The Politics of Repression and Resistance in Salman Rushdie’s Shame” (2003) explains this act:

Significantly, Rani chooses to ‘tell her story’ by adopting an article of female clothing. Since she is constrained by the ‘unspeakable’, a wife’s unquestioning loyalty to her husband, she must confine herself to what is perceived as an ‘innocuous,’ familiar device, overtly identified with the ‘feminine’ and the domestic, but tacitly enabling her to transgress patriarchal codes of conduct. (158)
Power structures play an important role in relationships and govern the rules therein. This power may be inherent or acquired or it may be an accident of birth or of a group. The man orders, the woman obeys, the husband demands, the wife gives. And gives in to the man's wishes. But in this case, the women rule the domestic sphere with a firm hand.

The ultimate reversal of gender roles is when the woman helps the man in his times of need. A throw back to the hunter-gatherer phase in human evolution, the concept of the woman taking the upper hand outside the domestic realm might seem a little impossible.

When her husband's business assets are frozen by the government and he takes to his bed, Amina Sinai decides to rescue him from the fate he has been dealt. She goes to the horse races where she wins large sums of money. Rushdie says:

The streak of luck of my mother at the race-track was so long, a seam so rich, that if it hadn't happened it wouldn't have been credible... for month after month, she out her money on a jockey's nice hair-style or a horse's pretty piebald colouring; and she never left the track without a large envelope stuffed with notes. (140)

Her winnings went towards the legal funds required by her husband to wage a war for his business, and thus Amina saves her husband from a life of self-defeatist sorrow. This action finds echo in The Palace of Illusions (2008) where sage Vyasa says to Draupadi, "I've always known you to be stronger than your husbands." (329).
If Amina and Brass Monkey are from another life, then the woman in the life Saleem makes for himself after his stint with the Army Unit CUT...a is undoubtedly Parvati-the-witch who uses her sorcery to smuggle him out of Pakistan and back into India, thereby giving him a new lease on life:

Then Parvati whispered some other words, and, inside the basket of invisibility, I, Saleem Sinai, complete with my loose anonymous garment, vanished instantly into thin air. (380)

When he regains consciousness, he finds he is back in India. Parvati thus gives him his life back.

Another character that saves a man’s life is seen in The Satanic Verses (1988) in Alleluia Cone. The Mount Everest-conquering ice queen, (literally and figuratively), lives life on her terms, is looked up to by many. Rushdie says of her, “She was a competent woman, formidable in many ways...” (318).

She brings Gibreel Farishta out of depths of despair when he is struck by an illness which disappears as mysteriously as it appears. The illness brings him the realisation that he has lost his faith, a fall out of his realisation that he felt nothing-despite implorations to God- and had nothing and nobody. “And to prove to himself the non-existence of God” (31), he stuffs himself with the forbidden pig’s meat. Upon seeing this woman laugh at him he says,” ‘Don’t you get it? No thunderbolt. That’s the point.’(31). She responds,” ‘You got your life back. That’s the point.’(31).

This challenge gives new life to him and he resolves to get ‘his life back to normal.’ Alleluia’s challenge is a rebuke, made harsh by the mildness with which it is issued.
After her first intervention with Gibreel, she saves his life again when she finds him in a roadside park, takes him home and nurses him back to life. And a third time when he finds his way to her, collapsing at her doorstep. She is the focal point of his existence and her life too is consumed by her devotion to Gibreel ḍarishta. Till she reclaims it back.

Rushdie devotes time and energy in fleshing out their relationship and how important the woman was in it. He does so in the case of Vina Apsara and how vital she is to Ormus Cama’s music and his life. Rushdie says of Ormus, “He is fragile too. Without her love, terminally alienated, he might go horribly wrong.” (161)

One such instance where Vina’s essential presence is seen is when she hears Ormus’ voice on a record. At this point of time, Ormus is in a coma brought on by an accident. She “flies back into his life: and saves it.” “Ormus”, she whispers. “Ormus, it’s me. At which he opens his eyes; it’s as simple as that.” (352). Rushdie says, “... Ormus Cama, exiled from love by the parents whom he had failed to transfix with love’s arrow, shrivelled by their lack of attention, is restored to the world of love by Vina.”(161)

Vina’s busy, calling-attention-to-herself way of saving Ormus is in complete contrast to that of Persis Kalamanja’s actions that speak volumes in the quiet unobtrusive way it is done. When Ormus falls in love with Vina, all talk of an alliance between Persis and Ormus becomes redundant. She asks Ormus to come clean about Vina and he confesses his feelings for her. In Rushdie’s words, “Persis took it on the chin, set aside all her own hopes, nodded seriously and promised to help. From that moment until Vina’s sixteenth birthday, Persis joined Ormus and Vina in a conspiracy of small and large
deceits.” (157). She cries herself to sleep at night but stays strong despite her mother’s protests. Rushdie says, “(Yet) it is Persis who, in many ways was the heroine of their love.” (158)

The critic David Wood in his work, *Philosophy at the Limit* (1990) explains that silence is not a limit but rather it exceeds the limit that surpasses it and therefore speaks of something else that is meaningful and profound. ‘It is that the sense and significance of there being something that cannot be said is itself an effect of language’ (24). ‘In the case of Persis her silence is eloquent testimony to her feelings for Ormus and her willingness to sacrifice her own emotions for his happiness.

In *Fury* (2002) too a man is saved by a woman’s sacrifice when Professor Solanka is guided out of the prison on the island of Lilliput-Blefescu and into an aircraft. It is here that he learns of Neela’s ultimate act.

All the seats on the British plane faced towards the tail. Solanka taking his allotted chair, recognised the men across the aisle as Neela’s cameraman and sound recordist. When they stood up and embraced him, he knew the news was bad. “Unbelievable, mate,” the soundman said. “She got you out, too. Amazing woman.” (253)

It turns out that Neela was playing this dangerous game of siding up with the enemy in order to raise enough people to fight for her island, it costs her her life but she is able to save her colleagues and the man she seems to love. Mutiny with self sacrifice is at the heart of this woman.

Self sacrifice is not the aim of Skeleton, a prostitute in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) but she helps Mogor gain entry in the country of Abar, an otherwise
difficult enterprise, with the use of her "magic box of perfumes" (64). She tells him that for the right price, she would make him, "smell as desirable as any king" (64). It is this all important gesture that makes for the entire book. In describing Mogor's journey to the court, Rushdie says, "Miraculously the perfumes of the Skeleton went ahead of him and smoothed his way." (65).

The question of the infinite woman, the diasporic woman who walks the path of free will having given up, willingly, the four walls of her life, finds utterance in the novels of Salman Rushdie. Walls are not so much physical confines as much as they are cultural, emotional, societal and psychological. They may be the walls of the 'right' sexual orientation, or the walls of hierarchies, they may be the walls of stereotypes.

In an interview with Mukund Padmanabhan, Rushdie explains why The Enchantress of Florence (2008) is filled with strong women. This quote can hold good for his other women characters as well.

It was a man's world—very dominated by male power. And yet, there is evidence, for example, that the women of the Mughal court were really quite independent and powerful entities. The real Queen of Akbar, Mariam-uz-Zamani, the mother of Jehangir, was actually a powerful businesswoman. She has ships sailing to the Middle East and was by no means a sequestered meek lady. The aunt of Akbar actually went on a two-year pilgrimage to Mecca and took a great deal of the court with her. These were very intrepid women and so it seemed natural to me that even though it was a world dominated by military, political and male power, that the women should be shown as considerable and independent figures in their own right.
In each situation the woman has to grapple with variegated circumstances before she finds her feet. And finds her voice. Trinh T. Min-ha in “Women, Native, Other: Writing Post-Coloniality & Feminism” describes the history of feminism as, “a rampage from silence. This is characterized by an outbreak of critical unperturbedness which, in spite of a repressive regime, has began to make an outcry-a loud voice of assertions though without a number of listeners. It is a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right. (46)

There is a marked absence of the joint family structure in the novels. Grandparents are loving, but they stay for a while and leave. It is in this rejection of the stifling family structure that the woman ascertains her power and the ability to control her life and to have a say in it. Through Rushdie’s novels, there is a juxtaposition of one kind of woman with the other. For every Sufiya Zenobia there is a Naveed Ul Haq, for every Padma the screecheress, there is a Padma, the submissive lover, for every Aurora there is a quiet Carmen, for every Hind there is also a Rekha Merchant, for every Jodha, a Qara Köz. One also finds an overlap in the rebellion a woman displays. This is but natural given the nature of the woman and the impossibility of the isolation of this strong an emotion to any one particular aspect of the woman’s life.

Women and women’s movements have made some of the most dramatic changes in the country. Elisabeth Bumiller’s May You Be The Mother of A Hundred Sons (1991) profiles Vina Mazumdar, a matriarch in the women’s movement in India, who says of the women she helped train in villages,

They taught me that the achievement of equality does not necessarily mean giving up being a woman. These women taught me that I should not be ashamed of being different. (127)
In *Midnight's Children* (1988) Rushdie also speaks of all the women he has met and how they feature with prominence in his life:

Women have always been the ones to change my life: Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch must answer for who I am; and the Widow, who I'm keeping for the end; and after the end... Women have fixed me all right, but perhaps they have never been central—perhaps the place which they should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Aadam Aziz, was occupied too long by my voices. Or perhaps— one must consider all possibilities—they always made me a little afraid. (192)

Rushdie seems to suggest here that the fate of the woman is to be in the periphery of a man's life. A woman as someone who aids and abets, but who does not contribute actively. But the fear that urges him to keep them in the fringes of his life could emanate from the faith that there are unexplored depths to their strength and that they are more accomplished than he is.

He also creates in his rebels a sense of self doubt or what he refers to, in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), as "existential dread" (256). Despite these doubts, the women finally rely on their own strength to see them through. Of Qara Köz he says:

She had built her life on being loved by men, on being certain of her ability to engender such love whenever she chose to do so, but when the darkest questions of the self were asked, when she felt her soul shudder and crack under the weight of her isolation and loss, then no man’s love could help her. (256)
The most telling lines in *The Enchantress of Florence* are where one sees a woman coming into her own with every line she utters.

My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques Coeur. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter of Jacques. My name is Angélique and I am the daughter. My name is Angélique and I am. My name is Angélique. (188)

One by one she drops names and familial bonds as though she were dropping layers of her skin. Hindered by a vocabulary or the concepts to express the reality of female force and independence, the woman lay silent for long. Till she decided that that was not the path to take. What we have in front of us is her true essence, her true self. That self is all her own. And that self makes her her own person. The women characters one encounters in the novels are tortured by feelings of their self worth and those thrust upon them by society’s demands. Rushdie does not pretend that rebellion is easy for any of these characters, but what he ensures they retain is a sense of pride and accomplishment.

The next chapter titled Beauty and Sex Object discusses these the concept of physical beauty and body against the backdrop of *The Beauty Myth* (1991) by Naomi Wolf.