Negotiating the Veil: Purdah in Twentieth Century Indian English Writing

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by

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

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Introduction

Kya sirf burqa pehenna Allah ki ibadat karna hai?

Masla rivaazon ko nibhaane ka nahi, intekhaab ka hai

Is wearing the veil the only way to show reverence?

The issue is not following traditions, its about the freedom to choose

This is what a a burqa clad woman, who is a professor of literature overhears in a chance encounter at a bus stop when she sees a struggling actress, rehearsing lines from a script about a Muslim girl, in the short film, *Marzi*. When the burqa clad woman says that she is a professor, the actor replies, "I couldn't have guessed it." While the actress talks of how her mother's ghunghat appeared stifling to her, the professor finds the burqa liberating. She tells her how she started wearing it after her mother's death, in the attempt to imitate her. Burqa liberated her from the "unrealistic beauty standards" which imprison women in the expectations of the society. The attempt to correct her pronunciation of Urdu words leads to a conversation about burqa, tradition, standards of beauty and choice. This research is an attempt to carry on a similar conversation by looking at the engagement with purdah in Indian English Writing.

Indian English Writing has often been seen as an oddity, an impossibility or as put by Gordon Bottomley, "Matthew Arnold in a *sari."* To others it is,- a "curiosity, as an uncouth, if exotic thing, often misty in the name of mysticism, funereal in trying to be solemn and serious, fantastically absurd in the attempt to accomplish Oriental exuberance" (Iyengar 7). The mushrooming of Indian English Literature made many question the merit of writing in English by Indian writers. Yeats[1] "begged the Indian writers present to remember that no man can think/write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue" (520). Similarly, Buddhadev Bose[2] expressed his concerns about being poetic in a language which is learnt from books and not heard in streets or homes. Bhalachandra Nemade argued that "Languages are not innocent; they are very aggressive" and hence English should be treated like footwear that is left outside before entering the home (137-138).

[1] Cited by Paranjape, p. xi
[2] Ibid

It was with the confident and unselfconscious usage of English by reformers and nationalists like Rammohan Roy, Tilak, Gokhale and Aurobindo that English became ours, one of our many languages (Iyengar 8). It is "but one of the voices in which India speaks", a new voice which is "as much Indian as the others" (3). It has been argued time and again that it might be the language of our erstwhile colonizers but it should be accepted as "a legitimate language of literary representation in India." Its kinship with Sanskrit and Indo-Aryan languages, because they derive from Indo- Germanic languages has been established (Sachidanandan 140). "Indian English Writing" (IWE) has been adopted by Sahitya Akademi as the most apt appellation for this writing. The term refers to "Literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality" (Naik 2) and encapsulates two meanings. The term gestures to the fact that IWE is one of the many voices coming out of India and secondly, it is a consequence of the "nativization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility" (5).

As against the writer who chose to write in vernacular languages, the Indian English writer was uncertain about the nature of his/her audience. It could be surmised that in the initial stages, the implicit target readership was the British reader residing in England, or the colonial administrators in India, hence, "The authorizing presence of this shadowy reader is intermittently perceived in details of ethnographic documentation or through lexical or semantic emphases" (Mukherjee 92). A familiarity with English and the dexterity to use it for expression was a sign of power and privilege. There were Indian writers who paraded their knowledge of the high brow writers like Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, Coleridge etc. in the form of epigraphs, quotations and references. K.K Sinha[3] sought the help of Scott and Shakespeare to defend the practice of purdah in *The Star of Sikri*:

> Women are proverbially liable to be deceived and seduced, they are known to
>
> have weak resolutions. Scott thinks them to be as
>
> 'variable as the shade
>
> by the quivering aspen glade,'

[3] Cited by Mukherjee, p.98

and the immortal Bard of Avon truly says,

'Frailty! Thy name is woman'

Is it not proper therefore to keep them as much away as possible from tempting influences?

Women are seen as sexually vulnerable, hence in need of the protection of purdah to shield them from the temptations offered by the world. The playful and irreverent attitude of Indian English writers towards English is also seen as "the deracinated insouciance of college boys" and a sign of their distance from their native cultural values (Mee 321).

Although, Indian English writers are not confined to one part of the country, it cannot be considered a pan-Indian language. The name gestures towards its connection with British English but it is not circumscribed by one geographical location, "If anything, Indian English is the language of middle and upper class metropolitan India, an almost natural result of the centuries of colonization by the British" (Prasad 154). One of the anxieties of IWE is the fear of flattening of regional, cultural and linguistic differences and standardization of all kinds of experience. It resonates with the concerns of urban middle classes but in a nation where most people are illiterate, it is this miniscule but expanding section of the population that has a say in the management and administration of the nation. A lot of vernacular writers also write about the same class of people. The differences, thus are not so much between Indian English writers and vernacular writers but between them on one side and diaspora writers on the other (Satchidanandan 142-143). It would thus be wrong to talk of an alienation or distancing from a "homogenous national community", as in a country like India, the very act of writing is a sign of privilege (Mee 322).

The novelists of the early twentieth century(1930s and 40s) were caught between "the sometimes complementary and sometimes opposing claims of home and the world." Their writing was largely governed by two influences-the Gandhian mode of struggle and late modernism in Europe (Gandhi 168). Modernism, came under attack by Marxist critics and writers for its elitism, non-committal approach and its obscurantism. It was these writers who espoused the use of a simple, lucid prose that would be accessible to all (174). In addition to

Gandhi, Nehru, whose Marxist ideas came into conflict with Gandhi's idea of nationalism also played a crucial role in shaping the sensibilities of writers of this time. The "personal cultural syncreticism" of Nehru resonated with many novelists of the time, since the opposition between home and the world is not always stark. Some writers attempted a difficult synthesis of "Nehruvian modernity and the distinctly non-modern imperatives of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj."* While there was a sense of progress and a spirit of jubilation in the attainment of Independence, there was also a deeply felt loss because of the vivisection of the nation and all it entailed (171).

The novel, which is a relatively recent emergence can be attributed to western impact on India which resulted in formal prose writings, first in regional languages, initially for functional use but soon for creative purposes. The translation of the Bible into English by Christian missionaries, familiarized Indians with the possibilities offered by prose, which were realized in the form of petitions, journalistic accounts, and translations of Sanskrit and western classics into Indian languages (Iyengar 314). The greatest innovation of this period was the psychological probing of women characters, although these characters belonged to a privileged section of the society. The novels engaged with the contrary pulls of tradition and change and how they impacted the lives of women like Geeta, Zohra, Laila and many others (Narayan and Mee, 224). Women's writings can be seen as palimpsestic, whose surface meanings conceal deeper and less accessible levels of meaning (Gilbert and Gubar). This "camouflaged articulation of the self" in Indian women's writing shows a proclivity for depicting a woman's quest for selfhood through spatial shifts (Rekha 168). The publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981, gave a new life and spirit to Indian English Writing. The influence of the novel, could be seen in a postmodern playfulness with regard to history and language, a reconfiguration of allegory, use of sexual innuendoes and repeated allusions to cinema in general and Bollywood in particular. The end of the Nehruvite consensus also led to a questioning of the supposed unity of the nation (Mee 318).

The sheer variety and complexity of Indian English Writing demands a novel approach for its evaluation. One does notice ethnographic documentation in writers like Cornelia Sorabji and Rama Mehta, but the use of English to write about the negotiation with purdah also enables possibilities which this research attempts to explore. It is crucial to acknowledge that 'modernity' that came with English was not accessible to Dalits and Bahujans, whose marginalization was justified by dominant varieties of Hinduism. Similarly, Sanskrit was not available to women,

English, on the other hand, does not have the sanctity that Sanskrit does and is thus available to all (Anand[4]). English, played a significant role in the democraticization of the upper and middle classes. It is seen as the language of advancement and progress that "helped the people to overcome historical barriers of knowledge and communication" (Ilaiah).[5] Instead of looking at English and the vernaculars in terms of conflict, the operative conjuction should be 'and' which gestures towards "co-existence and concurrence, however uneasy." Indian English texts should be read in conjunction with those in native Indian languages, thus vernacularizing English, "an enabling way of righting the asymmetrical balances of power between English and the other Indian languages" (Paranjape xi).

The research also proposes to vernacularize English by looking at how Indian English Writing engages with purdah which encapsulates, "elaborate codes of seclusion and feminine modesty used to protect and control the lives of women" (De Souza xi). Although the thesis primarily engages with purdah in Indian English Writing, it would have been incomplete without discussing, even if cursorily the treatement of purdah in literature written in native Indian languages. The texts that are part of this research, engage with purdah as a garment, separation of spheres, a symbolic form of the ideology of honour and shame and division of space on the basis of gender. Purdah, veil, ghunghat and burqa are some of the words which are used in South Asia to refer, not just to clothes worn by women but to a whole complex of behavior associated with honor and modesty. Fadwa El Guindi argues how the veil encapsulates material, spatial, communicative and spiritual domains. It is often used to refer to sartorial practices of Muslim women, but it is practiced by both Hindu and Muslim women in South Asia. The practice of purdah not only varies from culture to culture, it shows variations within the life span of the same woman as well, since pre-adolescent and post-menopausal women are seen as sexually neutral and hence not needing purdah. It is an "ambivalent and shifting signifier" whose meanings and motivations cannot be encapsulated by reductionist explanations (Grace 1). The veil is often used to symbolize the clash of civilizations, west vs. east, civilization vs. barbarism, liberation vs. misogyny. There are references to veiling in the New Testament, for instance, St Paul[6] urges women to veil while praying and those who don't are chastised, "if she refuses to

[4] Cited by Prasad, "A Minute Stretching into Centuries: Macaulay, English and India.", p.11-12
[5] Ibid.
[6] Cited by Grace, p. 14

wear a head covering, then she should shave off all her hair" (1 Corinthians 11: 3-17). It is used by multiple agents to signify the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men, although veiling has been and is practiced by various communities in their unique and distinctive ways. The Shah Bano case was a testimony to the fact that religion in India, is a "crucial signifier of community identity and hence a player in state politics" (Rajan 153). The furore caused by the case and the Supreme Court judgement which smacked of prejudice against Islam, allowed Hindu fundamentalists to use the "discourse of protection" to attack Islam for its supposed misogyny and subjugation of women. Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, by referring to Spivak's, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argue, how, like "white men saving brown women from brown men", Hindu men claimed to save Muslim women from Muslim men (263). Sabina Kidwai, by focusing on the case of Ameena (a thirteen-year-old girl forcibly married to a sixty-year-old Saudi Arabian national) shows how there was a "constant reference to her Muslim identity such as the 'she clutched the burka in her hand'" in media representations (374).

The Foucauldian understanding of power and its spatial dynamics is tremendously useful to understand the gendered division of space that purdah entails. Lefebvre's theory about the need to understand spatial practice, representation of space and representational spaces enables an understanding of the spatial ideology of a society and how it determines our embodiment and "ways of operating" (Certeau). Domestic space, which is often seen as the site of women's oppression needs to be revisited to unravel its myriad dimensions. Taking cue from Iris Marion Young, the thesis resists the reading of domestic space as almost always oppressive by looking at the "meaning making activities" (124) performed by women through their attempts to imbue objects and rituals with meaning. Certeau argues that theorization about the microphysics of power is silent on the acts of resistance offered by people who refuse to be reduced to a societal code. The focus on the act of enunciation, the difference between performance and competence will help us understand the "ways of operating" of people that are not always aligned with the script fashioned by dominant ideology. What Certeau calls strategies, try to control three types of spaces-the space of power, theoretical or discursive spaces and physical spaces but space is also an ensemble of "possibilities and interdictions" (98) which need to be analyzed to better understand the workings of power and the negotiation of agency. A modified Foucauldian paradigm will help us in understanding subjects who could be agents as well as collaborators. Jung talks of Shagufta from Anderkote, who had given up the veil but not her notions of privacy,

dignity and respectability. When she stepped out of the house, in the evening, she took her young son, as "A son's presence lends a woman respectability" (61). Subjects are not only constituted by discourse, they also inadvertently create alternate discourses. This approach also allows us to expand our notion of agency by looking at the whole gamut of activities which includes daily private acts of negotiations and a deployment of a deliberately ambiguous language (Kumar). Keeping in mind the cautionary remarks of Chandra Talpade Mohanty about the deployment of western feminist theory with regard to'Third World' women, the thesis draws upon a diverse range of postcolonial and feminist theoretical and analytical tools to understand the tangible and intangible aspects of purdah. While there is an assumption that the veil oppresses women, there are many who look at the veil as a symbol of their cultural identity, desire to be the subject of the gaze and a rejection of the commodification of women. Zahra Rahnavard[7] considers the western demonization of the veil as:

> part of a wider imperialist stratagem designed to attract the Muslim to the rotten surplus goods of Western capitalist economies, clothes, makeup, fashion-access--ories none of which are marketable unless there are unveiled female bodies to wear them…[*Hijab]* is not a prison…it is a weapon, a fortress, a sanctuary of decency and chastity, which enshrines not only your physical attributes…but also the divine essence of your womanhood. (9)

Islamic feminism, which, as argued by Sylvia Vatuk is still at a nascent stage in India is also immensely useful for its nuanced, complex understanding of questions related to choice, subjecthood, piety and agency, in relation to purdah.

In the first chapter, **"Purdah: Meanings and Origins"**, I explore the reluctance of philosophers to seriously engage with clothing, a tragic consequence of the Platonic split between body and soul and the precedence given to the rational over the corporeal (Soper). In the hierarchical scheme of things, matters related to the body are considered unworthy of serious philosophical disquisition. This anti-corporeal approach is also often androcentric, since rejection

[7] Ibid., p. 22

of the body is often, a denial of the female body and assumption of the male body as the universal norm. An understanding of clothing as a "situated bodily practice" (Entwistle) is enabling to understand the discursive construction of the body and the various ways in which it exercises its agency, if any. The Kantian approach towards clothing as an index of one's moral self and Goffman's insight into the "moral demand" placed on others by donning pious clothes, is a useful approach to understand the ideology and practice of purdah. The chapter explores the various meanings of purdah, a term that is used to refer to different practices of veiling and seclusion of women, although there is a wide variety in terms of choice of words and the practice itself. While there are many who refute the claim that the practice of purdah began with the emergence and spread of Islam (Leila Ahmed, for instance) it is often seen as an Islamic practice. Since the Qur'an is often cited as the word of God, which outlines the strictures about modest attire, the chapter looks at the text to understand the injunction about veiling.The chapter also engages with the various connotations of the word, 'hijab' and the various explanations about its origin. Purdah, also raises interesting questions about the intersection of gender and class, as clothing is not just made for bodily comfort or aesthetic indulgence, it is also a marker of prestige and an elite status (Veblen). Initially the hijab was a means to mark the elevated and privileged status of women of the Prophet's household. Through a reference to the Quran, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's *Bihishti Zewar* and the discussion of the women's question by twentieth century reformers, the chapter also explores the origin, meaning, rationale or the motivations behind veiling.

The second chapter, "**Socialization of Space and Spatialization of Social**" looks at purdah by engaging with the division of space on the basis of gender. The Marxist critique of the 1970s rejected the belief in the autonomy of space and put forth the idea that spatial processes are social relations taking a geographical form. The attempt to rescue the spatial from passivity is also an attempt to question and critique the gendering of space. The dualistic construction of space and time also shapes and reflects conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Time, being the privileged signifier is often seen as masculine, while space is relegated to the domain of stasis or passivity and thus feminine. The division of space into public and private is one of the most common examples of control of both space and identity. The notion that geography matters and gender and geography are deeply implicated in the constitution of each other is crucial, since it offers a critique of essentialist identity (Massey). An understanding of space and gender that

focuses on their "processuality and relationality" (Low) will not only help in understanding how subjects are constituted by discourse, it will also allow us to look at the playful possibilities explored by the subject. This chapter is informed by Lefebvre's critique of the division of space into "real space" and "ideal space" by philosophers; as space, according to him, is both abstract and concrete. He proposes a theory of social space which focuses on spatial practice, representation of space and representational spaces. It is only by looking at perceived, conceived and lived space that one can hope to understand space, and the relationships embedded in it. The understanding of purdah in Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli, The Western Educated Hindu Woman*, Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and Gayatri Devi's *A Princess Remembers: The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur,* is deeply illuminating about the spatial dimension of purdah in Rajput and taluqdari households and the mutual constitution of space and gender relations. The physical and psychological drama of Sangram Singh's haveli is informed by several factors such as class, gender, age etc. The life of a purdah clad woman is a "hermetically sealed respectability" (Minault, 108) to an outsider but the chapter looks at how an outsider turned insider such as Mehta, Hosain and Gayatri Devi look at the zenana. The threshold, as argued by Malashri Lal is a real and a symbolic space, crossing of which by a woman is an irreversible movement, since it closes the possibility of inhabiting the inner space or changes the terms on which that space can be inhabited. It is the interior space which provides the "positional tools of the narrative" in both Mehta and Hosain. The threshold can also be used an analytical tool to look at the Indian writer caught between the pulls of his/ her cultural concerns and the language he/she uses to talk about them. Burton talks of how "influential architectural idioms can be of the practice of remembering" (102) especially in case of partition narratives. The chapter by focusing on Mehta, Hosain and Gayatri Devi, looks at the "architectural idioms" deployed by these writers and the manner in which women imagine their relationship with space.

The third chapter, "**Veiled Woman as the Oriental Other**" looks at how the veiled woman became a metonym for the mysterious and resistant Orient in Orientalist discourse. *Orientalism,* argues how the difference between the Occident and the Orient in Orientalist discourse was hermeneutical and geographical and the cultural difference between the two was expressed through "metaphors of depth, secrecy and sexual promise" (Said 222). The two themes that predominated in the construction of the Orient in Orientalist discourse were its "innate"

violence and unbridled sexuality (Kabbani). The harem was seen as a site of "generalized perversion" and "limitlessness of pleasure" characterized by the absence of the phallus-the Lord who can satisfy all the women (Alloula 95). It is travellers like Richard Burton who contributed the most to the simultaneous racialization and feminization of the Orient. The chapter looks at the figure of the veiled woman in Cornelia Sorabji and Salman Rushdie's selected writings to explore how or whether their writings are a reproduction of the exoticization and eroticization of the Orient. Sorabji worked with secluded women in her capacity as a lawyer. Although she encountered dysfunctional families, her perspective on purdah offers an interesting approach to seclusion of women and its legal consequences. It also engages with the link between scopophilic and epistemological projects, the inextricable link between the desire to know/master and sexual desire/curiosity, as explored by Peter Brooks. Sexuality is not only about the body, it embroils a whole web of fantasies and significations which premises on curiosity, which is the basis of all intellectual inquiry. The body holds within itself the key to pleasure, knowledge and power. The colonizer's desire to control and dominate, is not independent of his scopic desire, the desire to see and surveil (Yegenoglu). The narrative techniques of Rushdie and the trope of voyeurism suggest this link between pleasure, knowledge and power. Irigaray argues that instead of merely inverting the phallocentric order, women should playfully mimic/imitate "recover the place of her exploitation by discourse". By submitting to ideas about herself she will make them visible by her "playful repetition" (76). It is this "playful repetition" that we see in Rushdie's writings which make visible the recurrent tropes and motifs of Orientalist discourse. This chapter explores the link between scopophilia and epistemological desires and whether Sorabji and Rushdie's women subvert the phallocentric order through "playful repetition."

The fourth chapter, "**Battle of the Veil**" makes an attempt to contextualize the debate about the veil to understand how a "formally inert element of the native cultural configuration" (Fanon 89) assumed monumental significance because of colonial discourse. It was the centrality of the veil in colonial discourse which made it such a significant element of post-colonial discourse. Despite the claims of Islamist groups that advocate a return to a "pure" past, the West and its paradigms are everywhere (Nandy). It was Qasim Amin, with his impassioned plea to make women shed the veil and lead them to the "community of the living" (13) who started the first debate on the veil in the Arab press. The use of the language of feminism by colonial interests has made it suspect in the eyes of many but there are many third world feminists who

draw upon Anglo American and French feminism while being at the same time vigilantly self critical to prevent being unwitting collaborators in the demonization of other cultures (Ahmed). The positions from which feminists speak need to be understood as understanding and antipathy to one kind of oppression does not lead to an antipathy to all kinds of oppression (Grewal). The term, 'Islamic Feminism' was used in Western literature for the first time in the 1990s to refer to Iranian activists lobbying for legal and social reform (Mojab). Islamic feminists assert their right to *ijtihad*-a revisionist reading of the Quran through independent reasoning. They differentiate between two aspects of Qur'anic instructions-the socio-economic and ethical-religious. While the first, dealing with socio-economic relations is subject to change, the other aspect which asserts the spiritual equality of men and women is seen as immutable (Hashim). The opposition to Islamic feminism is equally vociferous, it is opposed by Muslim traditionalists, Islamic fundamentalists and secular feminists (Hosseini). Politicized religion tends to "naturalize" notions of race, religion, identity etc and one cannot base feminist arguments on religious texts, since they are highly ambiguous and the male clerical establishment can easily dismiss these interpretations (Jeffery). The argument that historical and cultural specificities should inform questions of feminist theorization and politics is often discussed, but it usually revolves around questions of class, sexuality, ethnic difference etc. The dimension of religious difference has not received the kind of academic attention it should, and even if it is, it is often discussed in relation to Islam. Through her ethnographic study of the mosque movement in Cairo, as part of which women, for the first time in Egyptian history met and gave lessons to each other in Islamic doctrine and bodily comportment, Mehmood talks of how the rise of Islamist ideals and practices in certain nations, baffled some self proclaimed progressive leftists. It was a consequence of their discomfort with religion, when it is outside the "private space of individualized belief" (xi). She was interested in unpacking the ideas of self and moral agency and how they challenged liberal assumptions about the will and freedom of an individual. She argues how agency is often understood by feminists as "political and moral autonomy of the subject" (8) which sometimes ends up romanticizing all acts of resistance. While Lughod argues that we look at resistance as a "diagnostic of power"(Mehmood 9), Mehmood questions the use of the word, 'resistance' by Lughod. Is it possible to use this word to refer to those actions which do not challenge hegemonic understandings? Since it also imposes a "teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power" (11), does it enable us to understand any action that lies outside the narrative

of assimilation and subversion? She also talks of the difference between negative (absence of restriction) and positive freedom (realizing an independent will unaffected by custom, tradition etc using the faculty of reason or self-interest). If the desire for freedom is a product of historical and cultural mediation how to we understand bodies/subjectivities which do not follow the "entelechy of liberatory politics" (14)? Mehmood finds Foucault's distinction between ethics and morals useful, since morals signify principles and ideals, while ethics refers to a set of practices and techniques that the subject applies on himself/herself to reach a certain state of being. These practices include corporeal and spiritual exercises which constitute the subject in a certain way. The chapter looks at Vishwapriya Iyengar's "The Library Girl", Iqbalunissa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household,* Zeenuth Futehally's *Zohra* and Imtiaz Dharker's *Purdah,* in the light of the debate about the veil in Islamic feminist discourse and the nuanced notion of agency, resistance and personhood as outlined by Saba Mehmood.

The fifth chapter, "**Purdah in Indian Langauges Other than English**" is a cursory engagement with the representation of the veil in so called 'vernacular' literatures, an area of enquiry which could be explored further in future research projects. The Industrial Revolution; Russian Revolution and literature; and the struggle for independence had an enormous impact on Indian writers. There was a turn towards realism and fashioning of a voice that would raise the consciousness of people to remove the social and economic inequities of the society. *Angarey,* laid the foundation of the Progressive Writers' Association which strongly believed in "aesthetic expression as being integrally fused with political and social codes" (Alvi xvi). Premchand's inaugural address at the All India Progressive Writers' Conference encouraged writers to modify their understanding of beauty and literary expression. Both Hindu and Muslim social reformers looked at the zenana as steeped in ignorance and superstition. Some of them argued, how the manner in which purdah was observed was more severe than the shari'ah injunctions. Education for girls as opposed to those of boys was intended to perpetuate, "cultural continuity" (Minault 1998). As argued by Sarkar, Hindu revivalists believed that the only manner in which colonial rule could be challenged was by reviving Hindu social institutions which had survived the test of time. It was the search for an ani-colonial identity which led to the nation being imagined as a Goddess and as a self abnegating mother. The conceptualization of space, as material and spiritual, public and private, masculine and feminine, gave an impetus to purdah ideology by entrusting women with the responsibility to safeguard the traditions and values of the society

(Chatterjee). Sister Nivedita, made a comparison between Western and Eastern notions of motherhood and argued that it was in the East that one came across a complete ideal of motherhood, that encapsulated both love and Shakti. The 'condition of women' novel that emerged in Urdu in the 1870s, the autobiographies that appeared later and women's journals questioned the "post-enlightenment assumptions of visibility and voice in the public realm as the only definitive markers of subjecthood" (Asaduddin xiii). Through an analysis of selected works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Rasheed Jahan, Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmud-uz-Zafar Ismat Chughtai, Krishna Sobti, Yashpal, and Rabindranath Tagore, the chapter explores how vernacular literature challenges conventional mores and conventional ways of narration.

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Chapter 1

Purdah: Meanings and Origins

The Dressed Body

Kate Soper laments the near absence of philosophical engagement with the dressed body. The rhetoric of philosophical conversations uses the metaphor of clothing but does not seriously engage with its dynamics, constraints and possibilities. This lacuna is a result of a Platonic split between the mind and the body and the privileging of the mental or rational over the corporeal. The suspicion of the flesh in the Western philosophical tradition is not only anti-corporeal but also androcentric as argued by many feminists, "For when philosophy said 'away with the body' it always also, in effect, said 'away with the female'" (15).

Clothing, is not only an instrument to fulfill 'natural' needs, it also fulfills an aesthetic and semiotic function. Taking cue from Descartes,[8] Soper points out that clothing leads to a "presumption of personhood" and is linked to our "conceptions of dignity, personhood and bodily integrity" (18). Although, she also cautions about the "complex and overdetermined" link between the clothed body and these conceptions because our sense of self as perceived by others can take diverse forms, ranging from "extreme diffidence and discretion on the one hand, to blatant self-assertion and ostentation on the other" (18). Clothing, according to Entwhistle is an inextricable aspect of human bodies. Clothes make a body "recognizable and meaningful to a culture" and also make it appear "'decent', appropriate and acceptable within specific contexts" (33). It is, both, a "brute concrete reality" and part of a "greater conceptual scheme" and it is imperative that we look into the link between the concrete and the conceptual since it allows us to understand how people make sense of the world they live in or the world they have imagined (Corrigan 1). Clothes, are seen as essential to the existence and sustenance of the micro social order; hence, a subversion of codes of dress is seen as posing a dangerous threat to that order.

The importance of clothing in the social order can be illustrated through the debate on the issue of the veil in France that began in 1989 and eventually led to the law of 2004 banning conspicuous religious symbols. Corrigan argues that one can better grapple with the debate around the veil in France by looking at it through the prism of laicite- a belief in keeping the

[8] Cited by Soper, p. 18

Church and State distinct. According to the law of 9th December, 1905, the State has to keep public places that are under its control, such as schools, religiously neutral. Public spaces can be seen as sites where "multiplicities are turned into a unity" (Corrigan 8) and where the "law of the street" should not prevail (Debre 56).[9] The veil for many, including the government mediator, Hanifa Cherifi, is a sign of the willing subservience of women and an allegiance to Islamic fundamentalism (Debre 80). In June, 2011, the Iranian women's soccer team was disqualified from the Summer Olympics 2012 because of their violation of the dress code of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA). As this furore reveals, the regulation of Iranian women's clothing exists even outside the national boundaries of Iran (Bucar 25).

Gilman identifies two standards to evaluate clothing-physical and psychical (aesthetic, moral). She equates the practice of veiling with the crippling shoes worn by women in China:

> It is however condemnable under exactly the same head; from the mechanical interference with the use of the eyes, to the social error or a magnified insistence on sex and exclusion from social relationships. As in the former case, it is defended in the opinion of those nations, as wholly suitable, even necessary to the nature and place of women. (29)

In her account, there is no considereation of the various meanings and significance of the veil for veiled women. Gilman, later argues that the "veiled beauties of the harem" suffer from "slowness, awkwardness, tottering inefficiency" (32).

Muslim men's clothing also plays a significant role in national politics. The *keffiyeh*- a black and white checkered cloth- is associated with Palestinian nationalism, a red and white cloth with Jordanian culture, and turbans with the Taliban. As against women's clothing which is linked to concerns with piety and morality, men's clothing is equated with national concerns. The Indonesian nationalist leader, Sukarno[10] states in his autobiography, "The minute an Indonesian dons trousers, he walks erect like any white man…Let us demonstrate we are as

[9] Cited by Corrigan, p. 8
[10] Cited by Bucar, p. 22

progressive as our former masters. We must make our place as upstanding equals. We must put on modern clothing", thus indicating how shedding traditional attire is often equated with modernity.

Our ways of seeing and comprehending nudity are also governed by our notions of dress. As suggested by Hollander[11], "At any time, the unadorned self has more in kinship with its own usual dressed aspect than it has with any undressed human selves in other times and other places (xiii). Douglas[12] talks of the social forces acting upon the body to make it conform to the prevalent dress norms:

> …the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society . There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. (93)

Similarly, Mauss[13] talks of the culturally embedded or context driven nature of the body when he talks of the 'techniques of the body.' It is culture and its unique notions of masculinity and femininity and normative and non-normative behavioural codes, which dictate one's being in the body.

Kant[14], while talking about an ideal of beauty with regard to human physiognomy, implies that while looking at clothing that is voluntarily donned by an individual we have to look above and beyond the protective and decorative role of clothing to evaluate it as an "aesthetic index or expression of the moral self" (20). Thus, dress as Entwhistle (2000) argues elsewhere, should be seen as a "situated bodily practice." The notion of a situated bodily practice not only addresses the discursive construction of the body but also acknowledges the active agency of individuals in engaging with the social. There is a dialectical interaction between social change

[11] Cited by Entwhistle p. 34
[12] Ibid. p 37
[13] Ibid. p.38.
[14] Cited by Soper, p. 20

and change in dress norms. Norms about clothing are both influenced by social change and make it a part of the "thinkable, the practicable and the embodiable" (Corrigan 6).

Semantic Meanings of the Veil

The terms, 'veil', 'hijab' and 'purdah' are often used interchangeably to talk about the seclusion of women and a segregation of the sexes. Fadwa El Guindi notes how the English word, 'veil', like its European equivalents, such as 'voile' is often used to talk of Middle Eastern and South Asian women's head, face or body covering. According to Bucar, veiling is not just about the headscarf, since it encapsulates the entire array of "sartorial practices of Muslim women" (3). The word, 'hijab' is used to refer to Muslim women's clothing in Tehran. Indonesians use the word, 'jilbab' which is mentioned in the Qur'an 33:59. In Turkey, the word 'tesettur' is used whose Arabic root, s-t-r means covering (7). As a noun, the term has four usages: a piece of cloth worn by a woman over her head, face or shoulders; a netting attached to a woman's hat or headdress for the purpose of decoration or protection; a part of a nun's headdress and a piece of cloth used to separate or conceal what is behind it (6). Thus, the meanings attached to the term encompass material, spatial, communicative and the religious realms. The word, 'purdah' is an Anglicization of the word, 'parda' (curtain) which is used to refer to the entire complex of practices of veiling and seclusion in South Asia. In addition to 'purdah' there are other words such as *gosha* (corner) used in Maharasthra and Gujarat, ghunghat (Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh), and *palla,* among others, which are used to refer to the practice of veiling. Thus, the semantic definition of purdah varies from region to region in South Asia and different words are used to refer to "different aspects of the complex of behavior which we tend to lump together under the term, 'purdah'" (Vatuk[15] 57-58). Thus, the prolix and variegated nature of the purdah cannot be reduced to the 'veil' or to a mere piece of cloth which covers a woman's body from strangers.

Jasbir Jain rightly points out how, in India, purdah is often associated with the advent of Islam but the workings of purdah ideology could be seen even among the newly urbanized Bengali women in the nineteenth century (243). Aristocratic women pracised purdah and their movements were restricted, as is indicated in the study of the Mauryan period (Basham[16] 179-

[15] Minault, 1982.
[16] Cited by Jacobson, p. 86

180). Sanskrit plays, *Kamasutra* and Buddhist texts also show evidence of seclusion of women belonging to the upper class. It was with the advent of Islam that it possibly spread to women of other social classes as well, "If Hindus did develop their purdah behavior in response to Islamic influences, they did borrow traits without shaping them to the configurations of the Hindu subcultures of which they have been vital components for centuries (Jacobson 87). Thus, indicating that the practice of veiling or the motivations behind the practice were already a part of Hindu subcultures. With the advent of Islam, certain traits were borrowed without the need to modify them, since the practice of veiling already existed within the community.

It is believed that due to the preference for cross-cousin marriages among Muslims, intra-family avoidance rules are followed through purdah. There are many Muslim families that reject the conventional Islamic preference for cousin marriages/ close kin endogamy, thus, the position of the wife is very similar to that of North Indian Hindu families (Vatuk 64). Purdah is practiced by various communities for a variety of reasons. It is not a specificially Islamic insititution. Malavika Karlekar, talks of the lived experiences of women in the "relatively autonomous integrated reality" (Vina Mazumdar) of the antahpur in Bengali households that provided them a sense of belonging and support system (x).

Islam, does not consider sexuality a taboo and accommodates both worldly and other worldly desires in the same space. Although, being sexual and being religious are not in opposition to one another, it also postulates that sex is to be enjoyed in matrimony. The interaction between men and women in the public sphere is subjected to a "temporary desexualization"(Guindi 136). In a religious sense, veiling may also mean the vow of chastity taken by a nun, a meaning which is not often recognized (6-7). Guindi likens veiling to *mashrabiyya* (lattice woodwork in windows and screens) since, both allow women privacy. The difference between the two is that *mashrabiyya* is static, "veiling is mobile, carrying women's privacy to public spaces" (95). A woman carries her privacy with her in the form of a veil, the way in which a Muslim carries a sacred space with himself/ herself, since they can pray anywhere. Mernissi argues that the concept of hijab is as significant to Muslim civilization as sin is to Christian civilization or credit is to American capitalist society. To use this term to designate a piece of cloth to be donned by women when they go out into the street is to strip it of

its myriad signification, since, initially it was used to refer to a partition or a screen between two men (95). Guindi further notes that the word, 'hijab' is used in the Qur'an only seven times:

> In general *hidjab* in the Kur'an means a separation: it is the veil or the curtain behind which Mary isolated herself from her people (XIX, 17); it is also the separate establishment (later the gynaceum) which was imposed at first only on the wives of the Prophet (XXXIII, 53; cf. XXXIII, 32), apparently on the advice of 'Umar. On the Day of Judgment, the saved will be separated from the damned by a *hidjab (*VII, 46), which is glossed as wall (*sur)* by the commentators, who deduce this interpretation from Kur'an LVI, 13, "It belongs not to any mortal that Allah should speak to him, except by revelation, or from behind a veil" (XLII, 5 I), a veil apparently meant to protect the elect from the brilliance of the divine countenance. (Pickthall 340)[17]

Hijab is used in a negative sense here to talk of humanity's inability to perceive or comprehend God. Al-Tabari argues that this is the sense in which it is used in verse 5 of sura 41, to talk of the inability of the traditionally polytheistic Quraysh to accept the singularity of God. (92) [18] In Sufism, the *mahjub* or veiled is someone whose sensibility is clouded by sensual passions, making them unable to see the divinity of their soul.[19] It is also used in an anatomical sense to talk about something which is a boundary as well as a protection. The diaphragm is called, *hijab al-jawf* and the hymen is called *hijab al-bukurriya* (Mernissi 96).

The Qur'an and Purdah

It is the marriage of Zaynab bint Jaksh and the Prophet after the fifth year of the hijra, which is identified as the moment of revelation of the verse regarding hijab. Ibn Kathir[20] and

[17] Cited by Mernissi, p. 96
[18] Ibid. p. 97
[19] Burckhardt, Cited by Mernissi, p. 95
[20] Ibn Kathir. Cited by Stowasser, p. 89

many other Qur'anic exegetes have written about the hostile civic atmosphere of Medina, created predominantly by the "hypocrites" (*munafiqun*) who harassed the Prophet and the women of the household. Al-Suyuti, a scholar of Islamic theology pointed out that it is impossible to understand a verse without understanding the *qissa* (the story) and the causes that led to its revelation."[21] The hijab verse is part of sura 33, *Al-Ahzab*, i.e "The Clans". This sura describes the siege of Medina (Battle of Khandaq) and the Battle of the Trench. This was the most cataclysmic year for the Prophet as a military leader of a monotheistic sect which was trying to spread its influence in a polytheistic Arabia. [22] He could not conquer the Meccans, a victory he needed to gain credibility in the eyes of his Companions, the Medinese and all the Arabs. It was in the same year, the fifth year of the hijra, that Arabs who were under the command of Meccans came to besiege Medina. One of the most paramount concerns in this verse was to teach tact and discretion to his Companions. There were certain etiquettes, such as not entering the Prophet's household without seeking permission, that they lacked.[23] In a city which was torn asunder by civil war, women were harassed in the street. When the Prophet sent out his emissaries to question those who were harassing women, they justified their conduct by saying, "We only practice *ta'arrud* with women we believe to be slaves."[24] It was in this context of blurring of identities and the attendant violence that the hijab verse needs to be interpreted. It also reveals that hijab was not only a response to sexual violence, it was also "its mirror image" since it saw the female body as *awra* (meant to be hidden/intimate parts of the body) (Mernissi 182).

Fatima Mernissi suggests that the marriage with Zaynab was one of the core weapons in the arsenal of the political opponents of the Prophet. She was married to his adopted son, Zayd. Ibn Sa'd[25] talks of how the Prophet saw her when he went to meet Zayd. Tabari[26] added further details by suggesting that when the Prophet went to Zayd's house, the wind lifted the curtain at the threshold, thus revealing Zaynab who was in a single slip. The Qur'an[27] talks of how the Prophet concealed his desire for Zaynab and the foreknowledge of their impending marriage:

[21] p. 13, Cited by Mernissi, p. 93
[22] Ibid, p. 89
[23] Ibid, 91-92
[24] Ibn Sa'd, p. 176. Cited by Mernissi, p. 180
[25] Sa'd, *N*isa, p. 71-72. Stowasser, p. 88
[26] Tabari, *Tafsir,* p. 10-11, Stowasser, p. 88
[27] A. J Droge

> (Remember) when you said to the one whom God had blessed, and whom you had blessed: "Keep your wife to yourself, and guard(yourself) against God,' and you hid within yourself what God was going to reveal, and feared the people, when God had a better right that you feared Him. So when Zayd had gotten what he needed from her, We married her to you, so that there should not be any blame on the believers concerning the wives of their adopted sons, when they have gotten what they needed from them. The command of God was (to be) fulfilled. 38 There is no blame on the prophet concerning what God has made obligatory for him. (That was) the customary way of God concerning those who passed away before- and the command of God is a determined decree. (278)

The Hadith and Tafsir report that it was during the wedding ceremony of the Prophet and Zaynab that the hijab verse was revealed because of the indiscreet behavior of some of the wedding guests. Ibn Sa'ad, Ibn Kathir, Zamakhshari and Mernissi argue how hijab came down in a dual sense at this moment. The Prophet brought down the hijab to screen Zaynab from the guests and to prevent Anas ibn Malik, his servant from entering the chamber and the hijab verse also came down in the manner of a revelation by God to the Prophet.[28]

> You who believe! Do not enter the houses of the prophet to (attend) a meal without (until it) is ready, unless permission is given to you. But when you are invited, enter, and when you have eaten, disperse, and do not linger for conversation. Surely that is hurtful to the prophet, and he is ashamed of you, but God is not ashamed of the truth. When you ask them for anything, ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. It is not for you to hurt

[28] Ibn Sa'd, *Nisa,* p. 74-75, 81-82, 124-125; Tabari, *Tafsir,* Vol. 22, p. 26; Zamakhshari, *Kashraf,* vol. 3, p. 437; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir,* vol. 3, p. 503-504, Mernissi, *Veil.* p. 85. Cited by Stowasser, p. 90

the messenger of God, nor to marry his wives after him-ever. Surely that is a great (offense) in the sight of God. 33:53 (279)

There are other traditions which suggest that the verse was revealed when the Prophet saw some men around Zaynab's house after the wedding night or when A'isha's hand accidentally touched a man's hand[29]. Tabari, Zamakhshari, Baydawi Anwar and Ibn Kathir argue that Umar ibn al-Khattab, who was the Prophet's counselor, encouraged him to ask his wives to veil since all kinds of people entered his house.[30] It is suggested by many interpreters that before the revelation of the verse about hijab, women of the Prophet's household played an active role in the community. The changes that occurred in the lives of women in Islamic Arabia can be summed up by looking at the differences between the lives of Khadija and A'isha. Khadija had employed Muhammad to oversee her caravan, which traded between Mecca and Syria. She was forty-five and he twenty five when she proposed marriage to him and was his only wife until her death at sixty-five. She was the first convert. Ibn Sa'd suggests that her conversion would have played a crucial role in the spread of Islam, especially among the members of the Quraysh because of her standing in the society. [31] She was fifty when she received the first revelation, which suggests that it was pre-Islamic culture or Jahiliya society which governed her ways of living. The autonomy and monogamy found in this union were absent in all the other attachments of Muhammad. A'isha stood at the threshold, a moment of transition as indicated by the active role she played in the affairs of the community.[32] According to the accounts of the battle of Uhud, women on both sides played an active role. A'isha and other wives of Muhammad carried water to the men on the battlefield with their garments tucked up. On the other side Hind bint 'Utbah, wife of Abu Sufyan, the Meccan leader sang war songs. This unshackled participation of women in the public sphere was curtailed by the revelation of the hijab verse. It was the lives of the women of the Prophet's household which were the first to be circumscribed.[33] The word, 'hijab' which literally means a 'screen' or a 'curtain' evolved in the Hadith to mean seclusion itself (90). Early texts of Islam do not distinguish between veiling and seclusion. The term 'hijab' was used to refer to the practice of veiling, *darabat al-hijab* (becoming Muhmmad's

[29] Stowasser, p. 90
[30] Tabari, p. 27-28, Zamakhshari, p. 438-439, Anwar, p. 134, Kathir, p. 503 and 505. Stowasser, 90
[31] Cited by Ahmed, p. 47
[32] Ahmed, p. 43
[33] Ibid, p. 53

wife) and curtain or partition. [34]The verse 33: 53, which is about seclusion within the house, is addressed to those entering the house of the Prophet while 33: 59 is about the garments to be worn outside the house by all believing women. There is a semantic association between hijab (domestic seclusion) *jilbab* and *khimar* (garments worn outside). [35] The injunction about modest clothing in the Qur'an is addressed to both men and women in sura 24:

> Say to the believing men (that) they (should) lower their sight and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely God is aware of what they do.
>
> 31 And say to the believing women (that) they (should) lower their sight and guard their private parts, and not show their charms, except for what (normally) appears of them. And let them draw their head coverings over their breasts, and not show their charms, except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or what their right (hands) own, or such men as attend (them who) have no (sexual) desire, or children (who are) not (yet) aware of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they hide of their charms. Turn to God (in repentance)-all (of you)-believers, so that you may prosper. (229)

The word, 'charm' in the above cited passage, according to A.J Droge is a euphemism for breasts. The Quranic injunction about the veil is thus an appeal to women to cover their chest, an appeal which was later interpreted by lawyer-theologians to mean a woman's hair, face, ankle etc. Sura 66 presents Mary as an example worth emulating since she "guarded her private part: We breathed into it some of our spirit, and she affirmed the words of her Lord and His Books, and became one of the obedient" (393).

[34] Stern, 111ff. Ahmed, 53-54
[35] Ibid, 92

Veiling and Respectability

One of the reasons put forth for the injunction about hijab was the urge to provide comfort and privacy in a city which was inordinately crowded, especially around the mosque where the quarters of the women were located. The political opponents of Prophet Muhammad sexualized their attacks by attacking his private life and his relationship with his wives. Mernissi argues that he was a man of sixty whose health was declining and he was struggling as a military leader. His beloved wife A'isha was accused of adultery, to plant suspicion and discord in their relationship. It was a "hurt and weakened man" who agreed to Umar's suggestion about the confinement of women (163). Hijab, then connotes the elite and privileged status of the Prophet's wives and an attempt to differentiate between them and other women.

> Prophet! Say to your wives, and your daughters, and the believing women, to draw some of their outer clothes over themselves. That is more appropriate for their being recognized and not hurt. (33:58) (279)

Hijab, was thus a protective device to save women from being attacked by the hypocrites. There are certain verses in the Qur'an which are meant only for the wives of the Prophet:

> Wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women. If you guard (yourselves), do not be beguiling in (your) speech, or he in whose heart is a sickness will become lustful, but speak in a rightful fashion. 33. Stay in your houses, and do not flaunt (yourselves) with the flaunting of the former ignorance, but observe the prayer and give the alms, and obey God and His messenger. God only wishes to take away the abomination from you, People of the House, and to purify you completely. (33: 32 and 33: 33) (277)

This sura, urges the wives of the Prophet/ women of his household to stay within the confines of the house. Sa'd reports that A'isha practiced purdah from Hasan and Husayn-the Prophet's

grandchildren as well. [36] She also hid behind a screen in the presence of a blind man since he couldn't see her, but she could see him.[37]The Hadith suggests that Sawda bint Zam'a and Zaynab bint Jahsh, embraced complete seclusion and immobility when the Prophet commanded his wives to "the backs of the mats." [38]It was believed that the women of the Prophet's household extended the principle of seclusion to death as well, as Umar, the then caliph of Islam was not permitted to see the grave of Zaynab bint Jahsh, since it was not lawful for him to look at her while she was alive. [39] Through the hijab verse, Prophet Muhammad tried to create some distance between the women of the household and the constantly evolving and expanding community:

> He was, in effect, summarily creating in nonarchitectural terms the forms of segregation-the gyneceum, the harem quarters-already firmly established in such neighboring patriarchal societies as Byzantium and Iran, and perhaps he was even borrowing from these architectural and social practices. As a successful leader, he presumably had the wealth to give his wives the servants necessary for their seclusion, releasing them from tasks that women of Muhammad's family and kin are described as doing. (Ahmed 55)

The specifics of veiling, as to who ought to veil and who couldn't were minutely outlined by Assyrian law:

> Neither [wives] of [seignors] nor [widows] nor [Assyrian women] who go out on the street may have their head uncovered. The daughter of a seignior…whether it is a shawl or a robe or [a mantle], must veil themselves…When they go out on the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street

[36] Sa'd, p. 50. Cited by Stowasser, 116
[37] Ibid, p. 47
[38] Ibid, p. 150
[39] Ibid, p. 79. Stowasser, 117

> with her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute whom a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street; she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself, her head must be uncovered…[40] ("Laws" 183)

The law does not distinguish between free and enslaved women or upper class and lower class women, instead, it divides women on the basis of their sexual activities. Laws, which reflect social assumptions and conditions are subjected to a historical analysis by Lerner. She points out how out of the two hundred and eighty two laws in the Code of Hammurabi, seventy three revolve around regulation of sexual behavior. Laws, by setting limits to what could and could not be done define permissible behavior and thus are revelatory of social structures (102-3). Through her analysis of Middle Assyrian Laws, she reveals how the regulation of women's sexuality which was earlier a matter of private practice, later became a matter of state control and regulation (121). The capture and enslavement of women due to the military conquest of third millennium B.C led to the rise of prostitution and emergence of commercial brothels. The over abundance of captive women and the need for rulers and nobles to establish their authority, led to a public display of wealth and luxury in the form of harems (133). She argues how the veil served as a signifier of one's elevated/ elite status and was used to distinguish between "respectable" women and those who were available. It was used to categorise women on the basis of their sexual activity and whether they were worthy of male protection. Lerner goes on to argue how the position of women on the class hierarchy was determined by the class position of the men who protected them. [41] Class formation requires visible characteristic markers to distinguish between different classes but the institutionalization of class distinctions is also marked by gender. This division of women served the interests of a patriarchal society, by weaving a complex web of power which Lerner calls "patrimonial bureaucracy". The power of the elites was dependent on and ensured by installing members of their own family into "subordinate positions of power." There was a parallel hierarchy where elite women wielded a

[40] Cited by Ahmed, p. 14
[41] Lerner, p. 139. Cited by Ahmed, p. 14-15

significant power over both men and women below them in the class hierarchy, but their power derived from the men they were related to. [42]

A dress which is not made for bodily comfort or to facilitate physical labor or movement is, according to Veblen, an emblem of one's prestige and honour. It is the product of an "abstracting intelligence attracted by form, line and texture-the intelligence that sees itself as managing the world rather than as producing 'stuff' at the behest of others" (Corrigan 160). The "elitism expressed in women's exclusive domesticity" is not specific to societies that practice purdah, since upper middle class Victorian women were also confined to household duties but "the separation of high status women from public labor is underscored by purdah restrictions which made this separation as obvious as possible" (Jacobson[43] 97). Mehta, while talking about the rigidity of purdah norms practiced by the Oswals of Mewar argues how it was the Maharana of Udaipur who made it a norm that women will not appear in public in the presence of strangers and "the general populace accepted the pattern of life, legitimized by the highest in the land…" (141-142). As against this argument, Papanek (1973) concluded that purdah in South Asia is usually a feature of lower middle class families while the elites who could afford to seclude their women often shed purdah because of the impact of education, urbanization and western life styles (292).

Tabarruj, "public display of her physical self" by wearing revealing garments, ornaments or makeup is seen as antithetical to the tenets of hijab. It is considered pre-Islamic or un-Islamic since it is associated with jahiliyya. This Qur'anic command, directed at the Prophet's wives was extended to all women by medieval exegetics, to enforce and justify women's segregation. According to Ibn Kathir, the Prophet drew a parallel between a man who fought for God's cause and women who confined themselves to domesticity and refrained from going outside. The Hadith talks of the mothers of the believers as models of piety, righteousness, dignity and devotion. Ibn Sa'd[44] points out that A'isha replaced the thin *khimar* that Hafsa was wearing with a thick cloth, citing the modesty verse to explain her action. Sa'd also argued that A'isha while praying was heavily clad and circumambulated the Ka'ba in a head veil[45]. The Hadith, thus

[42] Lerner, p. 74-75. Cited by Ahmed, p. 14-15
[43] Cited by Minault, 1982.
[44] Sa'd, p. 40. Stowasser, 115
[45] Ibid, p. 49. Stowasser, 116

serves as "(para-) legal texts in that their intended meaning is normative, not descriptive" (115). The wives and daughters of the Prophet were set as exemplars of morality and piety to be emulated by all Muslim women.

Is Purdah of Islamic Origin?

Leila Ahmed argues that it was with the rise of the Iraq based Abbasid state in the mid eighth century that the formulation and concretization of Islamic law and morality occurred. The Qur'anic verses regarding clothing and demeanor, especially for women were interpreted in line with the social, cultural and ideological climate of the time (79-101). She suggests that Islam replaced polytheistic beliefs such as the cult of three goddesses, and made Arabian socio-religious practices and organization of society adhere to the gender norms of the rest of West Asia and the Mediterranean. The Qur'an also incorporated a number of Biblical narratives. The expansion of Islamic influence to adjacent territories led to "the assimilation of the scriptural and social traditions of their Christian and Jewish populations into the corpus of Islamic life and thought…" (4). On the basis of archaeological evidence, she argues how there was a culture of worshipping the mother goddess in West Asia in the Neolithic period into the second millennium B.C. Studies of these cultures show the supremacy of not only goddesses but women in general in Mesopotamia, Elam, Egypt and Crete among Greeks, Phoenicians and others[46]. The emergence of urban societies and importance of military prowess led to the evolution of a society where the military and religious elites constituted the propertied classes. The preoccupation with the paternity of heirs led to further controls of female sexuality. The veil was one of the many practices adopted and assimilated by Muslim women. The veil and segregation of the sexes was in use in Sasanian society as well as the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions at the time of the rise of Islam. Prophet Muhammad's wives were the only women who donned the veil during his lifetime. After his death and the Islamic conquest of adjoining territories where upper class women wore the veil, the veil became a symbol of cultural identity for Muslim women in general. Ahmed argues how instead of looking at purdah as an Islamic institution one needs to engage with the processes and trajectories by which the veil was assimilated into Islamic society. Her contention is that ethnic and religious groups, other than Muslims also played a significant role in shaping the culture of the Middle East (5-7). The idea of seclusion of women which

[46] Lapidus, Cited by Ahmed, p. 12

encapsulates an architectural confinement, veiling and a general invisibility of women was established by the first Christian centuries as an element of upper-class life in the Mediterranean Middle East, Iraq and Persia. As against the popular contention that such attitudes and practices were an emanation of the Persian world; Mesopotamian, Persian, Hellenic, Christian and Islamic culture, each contributed to establishing a tradition of women's simultaneous elevation, control and denigration. The Sasanian society in the Iran- Iraq region contributed its mores which fused with Arab practices after the conquest. The Muslim society that emerged in this region played a key role in codifying Islamic law and institutions. The predominant religion of Sasanian society was Zoroastrianism. It became a state religion, thus establishing the regulations that governed male-female relationships. The patriarchal family, according to the religious and cultural practices of the time demanded a wife's total obedience to her husband. A man could, without his wife's consent loan her out to another man, especially a widower who did not have the means to marry. It was considered a "fraternal act", of "solidarity with a member of one's community which was sanctified as a religious duty." [47] The arch rival of the Sasanian empire was the Byzantine empire, which adopted Christianity as the state religion in 330 CE. The narratives of female martyrhood indicate how the Christian church enabled women to explore other avenues of self realization and personhood by moving beyond the notion of women's reproductive function as being their primary role.[48] The premium laid on chastity was an expression of a fear and a rejection of the body/ sexuality, with the belief that women were more prone to physicality than men. In Byzantine society women were always expected to be veiled. Grosdidier de Matons, citing Michael Psellos, an eleventh century Byzantine author and political figure, argues how rigidly demarcated the society was. Psellos, wrote with great pride about his mother who raised her veil only once in her lifetime, at her daughter's funeral. [49] The Greek society which was the most direct antecedent of Byzantine society was also harsh and oppressive. Free women in the Classical period "were usually secluded so that they could not be seen by men who were not close relatives." [50] Aristotle believed that women's sole purpose was to produce heirs. According to Athenian law, a female heir was expected to marry the next of kin on her father's

[47] Perikhanian, 3, pt. 2:650. Ahmed, p. 18-20
[48] Ibid, 22
[49] Ibid, 26
[50] Pomeroy, p. 81. Cited by Ahmed, p. 28.

side, even if she was married, to provide heirs for the father's oikos.[51] According to Aristotle, they were prone to shame, deception, jealousy[52] and were defective or "impotent male."[53] The arguments of Aristotle which articulated mental and moral differences premised on biology, were accepted as objective, scientific observations by both Arab and European societies. [54] Scriptural misogyny was seamlessly accepted by Islam in the form of biblical stories which attributed the fall of mankind to the weaknesses and wiles of Eve. Augustine suggested that Eve was created, not to be the helpmeet of Adam, since a man could have been a better companion, her sole purpose was to bear children.[55] Augustine, Tertallian and many other Church fathers saw woman as the arch-temptress, "You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree." [56]

Ahmed's cogent analysis reveals that despite the rampant belief in purdah as an Islamic institution, many cultures practiced different forms of veiling to seclude their women, especially upper-class women, as a sign of their prestige, because of the fear of their sexuality or the belief in their inferiority. Ahmed argues that the laws regarding conduct, especially of women, differ from society to society because of the tension between the ethical and pragmatic persepectives in the Qur'an, resulting in ambiguities.

According to Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, there are two theological schools of thought. The Hanafis and Maliki stipulate that the face and hands need not be covered, whereas the Shafiites and Hanbalites believe that a woman should be completely veiled (148). He based his arguments on *Hijab al- Mar'ah Muslimah fil Kitab was Sunnah* by Muhammad Nasiruddin al Abbani, who suggested that when a woman steps out of the house, the entire body except face and hands should be covered; the veil itself should not be an instrument of attraction; garments should not be transparent or tight fitting or masculine or ornamental. [57] Maulana Wahiduddin Khan juxtaposes segregation of the sexes where a man interacts only with his spouse with the

[51] Foley, p. 3:1311. Cited by Ahmed, p. 29
[52] Aristotle, *Historia animalium,* p. 9.1.608b. Cited by Ahmed, p. 29
[53] Aristotle, *De generatione animalium.* 1.20.728a, 2.4.738b. Ahmed, p. 29
[54] Ibid, 29
[55] Brundage, p. 85-86. Ahmed, 36
[56] Ruether, p. 157. Ibid, 36
[57] al-Albani, p. 13. Cited by Khan, p. 143.

West where a man comes across new faces and develops new loyalties. Segregation of the sexes, in his opinion prevents divorce and ensures the stability of the familial and social order.

It was in Umar's reign (634-644 CE) that some of the major institutions and ordinances of Islam were concretized. He also prevented Muhammad's wives from going to pilgrimage and the mosque to attend prayers.[58] The period in which the texts of Islam were compiled and codified was harsher towards women as compared to that of Arabia. The mores and customs of the dominant classes of the Abbasid era used the words, "woman, and slave and object for sexual use" interchangeably. The attitudes to women that were codified into law were thus conceptualized in regions which "formed part of a cultural continuum extending over the territories that had formed part of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires." The Abbasid dynasty with Iraq as the seat of the Sunni Empire played a dominant role in preparing the textual edifice of Islam.[59]

Qur'an, as against the texts of most monotheistic religions directly addresses women, thus asserting the spiritual equality of men and women. Sura 33: 35, "makes a clear statement about the absolute identity of the human moral condition and the common and identical spiritual and moral obligations placed on all individuals regardless of sex" (Ahmed 64-65).

The central texts of Islam in particular and religions in general "embody acts of interpretation" which orthodox religion tries to conceal. Ahmed discusses how the authority of Islamic orthodoxy which was closely linked to that of the Abbasid state and the ruling elite, was dependent on its claim to absolute truth regarding religion, in order to sustain its hold. The interpretation of the Qur'an differs from sect to sect, not only with reference to certain words but also in a supra-textual way of how to read the text in general-Did these ordinances aim to resolve the historical, cultural and political conflicts of the time or are they relevant for all times?[60] Guindi reframes the question by talking of the "differentiated and variable" nature of veiling practices. She wonders how the meaning of the veil changes with changing historical, ideological and cultural contexts and what the veil reveals about the culture in which it is embedded or practiced (12).

[58] Ibn Sa'd(8: 150), Cited by Ahmed, p. 61.
[59] Ahmed, p. 67-68
[60] Ahmed, p. 94-95

Piety and Purdah

Bucar notes that the terms 'pious' and 'fashion' are often seen as being opposed to one another since 'fashion' is seen as an expression of superficial and materialistic desires while piety is about disciplining the body and the mind. She proposes to challenge these assumptions by insisting on how these two terms inform each other since fashion is not always superficial and piety need not be anti-corporeal (4). Her confrontation with the enormous variety of the sartorial practices of Muslim women in Iran, Indonesia and Turkey made her question the neat boxes in which she had believed in, " modest dress as imposed on women, fashion as a symptom of patriarchy and aesthetics as separate from ethics" (xiii). Piety is not only about a belief system, it also entails an exterior manifestation of that belief system. Michael Lambek[61] argues that "the ordinary is intrinsically ethical and ethics intrinsically ordinary" (3). It is the daily, routine actions of our lives that are an expression of our morality and value systems.

Muslim women's clothing is diverse historically and geographically. The large, round shapes of Turkish headscarves, the loosely draped veils of Tehran and the nicely pinned scarves of Yogyakarta reveal how local social, historical, political and aesthetic underpinnings give varied meanings to the veil (5). It cannot always be seen as a return to tradition, since Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation in the world does not have a history of veiling of women. The traditional Javanese idea of beauty was uncovered hair and shoulders (Taylor 12). [62] Drawing upon Goffman's insight that pious fashion exerts a "moral demand on others" (13). Bucar argues that an individual by donning pious clothes exerts their claim to be treated in a certain way (15).

The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Reform Movements

The *Bihishti Zewar,* by Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, a leader of Deobandi reform movement, was written in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was directed at women in particular and society in general to urge them to provide women a basic education. It later became a gift for Muslim brides and an essential part of her trousseau as they "entered their husband's home with the Holy Qur'an in one hand and the *Bihisthi Zewar* in the other."[63] The nineteenth century was a time of enormous political, social and cultural upheaval. The immediate

[61] Cited by Bucar, 16
[62] Cited by Bucar, p. 6
[63] Cited by Thanawi, p. 3

context for reform movements in nineteenth and twentieth century was the end of Muslim dominance with the rise to power and authority of the British, the displacement caused because of government jobs, the presence of a new array of cultural values, and the growth of cities.[64] It was in response to the "false" customs followed by this rapidly changing and mobile population that reformers like Thanawi propagated ideas about ethical Islam which revolved around individual responsibility (5). He argues that "faulty belief leads to faulty character, faulty character to faulty action and faulty action to faulty dealings that are the root of the disquietude of the society" (48). One's outer behavior is understood as the cause and consequence of one's inner being since, "Knowing, doing and being are inescapably one" (167). It is one of the most influential texts of the nineteenth century reform movements based on scriptures. It sets Prophet Muhammad as an example to be emulated by both men and women, "[The Prophet Muhammad] was very gentle…At night…he would do everything very softly, so that no one's sleep would ever be disturbed…When he was happy, he lowered his gaze. What young girl would have been as modest as this" (Book VIII). Although the book asserted that men and women are essentially the same, it aimed to create a well ordered and stratified society where each and every individual knew his/ her place. They are forever caught in a conflict between *aql*, (intelligence) and *nafs* (unchecked impulses) and women are more likely to give in to the *nafs* because of their ignorance which, according to him, has nothing to with biology and everything to do with culture.

In response to the colonial critique of Indian society which was premised on the predicament of women, reformers, mostly Bengali Hindus, presented the domestic sphere as a repository of spiritual and cultural values which were untainted by the blemishes of the public sphere. The new middle class woman was modest and pious as against the traditional, illiterate Indian woman, and the heartless, mercenary European woman. Partha Chatterjee, wondered why the "women's question", which is of tremendous concern to the reformers in early and mid nineteenth century Bengal lost its importance during the high tide of nationalism. He argues that nationalists did provide answers to this question but these answers were predicated on asserting the difference and not identity with the perceived cultural and social norms of Western modernity. Their answer was an assertion of the sovereignty of the inner domain, the domain of

[64] Ibid. p. 4

women. The nationalists separated the cultural domain into two spheres, material and spiritual. They argued that it was both unnecessary and undesirable to ape the West in every domain since the East was spiritually superior to the West. Chatterjee's analysis revealed that:

> The discourse of nationalism shows that the material/ spiritual distinction was condensed into an analogous, but ideologically far more powerful dichotomy, that between the outer and inner…Applying the inner/ outer distinction to the matter of concrete day to day living separates the social sphere into *ghar* and *bahar*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. (120)

The public domain was believed to be tainted by mercernary concerns but the private sphere had to be pristine and pure. Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, in his essay called, "Modesty", argues how it is this trait which distinguishes mankind from animals and among mankind, it is women who have a greater potential to cultivate modest virtues. He says that in a society which allows the free mingling of the sexes, "manners of women are likely to be somewhat coarse, devoid of spiritual qualities and relatively prominent in animal traits."[65] Education of women, was to be a means to inculcate "bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social forms of 'disciplining'" (Chatterjee129), virtues such as thrift, orderliness, hygiene, a sense of responsibility about her conduct and the running of the household. It was believed that to inculcate these values, a movement from the home to the world was necessary but she was expected to hold on to her femininity. Thus, while she could move out of the architectural confines of the house, she carried purdah values into the world (130). One of the rationales which was employed to resolve the possible conflict between the principle that a woman should stay at home and the fact that she is working outside is the "rationale of expandable walls" wherein it is believed that as long as her focus is on the well being of her family and home, there is no conflict:

> …a woman may become a boudi (older brother's wife) to many of her office colleagues. If she is younger, she is careful to call them dada (older brother).

[65] Mukhopadhyay, p. 446-47. Cited by Chatterjee, p. 125.

> Thus, through the process of assimilating non-kin into kin relationships and through emphasizing the familial motivations a woman has for being employed, the proverbial four walls of the *ghar* or *bari* are expanded to allow a woman to work while still being essentially g*har mukhe.* (Beech 132)

Dagmar Engels raises the question about the public appearance of women in the 1930s, with the emergence of the Swadeshi movement. She wonders if this signaled women's coming out of purdah. Purdah, for her was not just a piece of cloth, veiling women from the sights of outsiders. It was an "all encompassing ideology and code of conduct based on female modesty which determined women's lives wherever they went" (2). She later talks of purdah as an "extreme form of sexual control". It implies "multitudes of complex social arrangements which maintained social distance between the sexes."[66] The ideological framework of the superiority of feminine qualities and their elevation to the status of goddesses further reinforces their relegation to the domestic sphere. As put forth by S.C. Bose, a wife is forbidden:

> to open her lips or lift her veil in order to speak to her husband in the presence of her mother-in-law, or of any other adult male or female member of the family. She may converse with the children without fear of being exposed to the charge of impropriety; this is the whole extent of her liberty, but she is imperatively commanded to hold her tongue and drop down her veil whenever she happens to see an elderly member in her way. (18)[67]

Thus, purdah was also an expectation of a generally demure and submissive behavior from the women of the household. This implies, according to Borthwick, a belief in the vulnerability of women which makes them defenseless and in need of protection, and paradoxically a fear of women's aggression thus requiring supervision and control of women's

[66] Jeffery, p 2-3. Cited by Engels, p. 15
[67] Cited by Engels, p. 19

behavior.[68] Women who moved to the city with their husbands were even more curtailed in their movement, since the city posed a greater threat to their honor and by extension to the family's honor. Those who could not enforce social segregation through the architectural pattern of their houses, enforced it through separate meals for men and women (20). Vatuk identifies two concerns with regard to women in South Asian societies-women's sexual vulnerability which is related to the fear of women's sexuality; and the fear of women causing social discord or disruption in the "structural integrity of the kin group" to which she belongs (59-60). Jacobson concurs by arguing how the veiling practices of Hindu women are less about their sexual relations and more about the relationship between and among kinsmen, that is why Hindu women veil in front of men as well as women such as their *samdhans*, "Familial prestige, household harmony, social distance, and affinal respect are all linked to veiling behavior and restrictions on women's movements outside the home" (96).

Missionaries often wrote about the claustrophobic, stifling atmosphere of the zenana which was so secluded that even the breeze could not reach its inhabitants. In response to these complaints, many like Tagore pointed out that both men and women in Indian households believed in living an austere life.[69] The active participation of women in the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movement also saw an ideological convergence about purdah and women's true place between Bengali families and colonial police officers and magistrates. Their responses to women activists ranged from being astounded by their presence, persuading them of their moral superiority, considering them pawns in the hands of duplicitous men and questioning their femininity and respectability (Engels 33-34). Minault argues that most women who were associated with the reform movements and the nationalist struggle in the twentieth century wielded influence by building upon their traditional roles instead of significantly deviating from them. She gives the example of Akbari Begum[70], a distinguished Shia woman addressing a gathering of women and exhorting them to participate in the Non-Cooperation movement, "Are we not masters[sic] in our homes? If we are, we can compel the men to observe the noncooperation resolutions religiously" (*Independent,* 1920). Forbes[71] saw these women as proponents of social feminism rather than radical feminism since their belief in women's rights

[68] Borthwick, p. 228. Cited on p. 19
[69] Tagore, p. 575. Cited by Engels, p. 22
[70] Cited by Minault, 1982, p. 253.
[71] Minault, 1982.

was accompanied by "an acceptance of the traditional definition of womanhood that justified women's public role in term of biological or psychological uniqueness" (239). She concludes by saying that it was the system of segregation of the sexes which resulted in social feminism, which was an upper caste and upper class answer to the subordination of women (240).

Thanawi argues that the seclusion of women is a shari'at requirement. In Book Six, he points out thirty two sins which accrue due to the outings of women. He says in Book One, that in order to "manage" women it is necessary to teach them the principles of religion (48). He deplored the practice of women going to their relatives' or neighbors' house for weddings, festivities or funerals, "At most, it is permissible for them to visit their parents or other close relatives, and then only once or twice a year" (108). Any display of their private self, even an arm to a bangle or cloth seller is also a violation of the code of modesty (109). He also chastises women for shouting at their maids or others since it leads to their voices being heard by outsiders, which is both "shamelessness (*behaya'i)* and immodesty (*bepardagi)*" (338). He says later:

> Many ladies are so careless that they let their hem hang out of the palanquin or leave the curtains open on one side, or reek so much of perfume that its sweet smell hangs about them on the road. That is to display beauty before strangers. The noble hadis says that any woman who goes out of her house wearing perfume in such a way that its odor reaches others is very bad. This is the thirteenth sin… Frequently on these occasions she will encounter a stranger and their eyes will meet. Women lack the common sense to first make inquiry. Not to inquire when there is a strong likelihood of possible sin is the fourteenth sin. (110)

Later, citing the messenger of God, he says that "The best mosque for women is the inside of their houses." He argues that prayer is the highest form of devotion and expression of piety but even for that, a woman is encouraged to pray at home, instead of going to a mosque, which should be deterrent enough for women who go out of their houses for customary gatherings

(206). The woman envisioned by Thanawi is a woman of "minimal transactions", a woman who limits her interactions to her immediate family.[72]

Purdah, Honour and Shame

Purdah can be seen as the symbolic or ritual form of the ideology of honour and shame, as argued by Leach[73], "…the structure which is symbolized in ritual is the system of socially approved proper relations between individuals and group" (15). The code of modesty which is seen as an inseparable part of Mediterranean culture is an aspect of the great tradition (Qur'an, Islamic law) as well as the little tradition (local customs and rituals). [74] Intra-community conflict is identified as one of the most important aspects of rural Mediterranean culture. These conflicts have occurred due to encroachments on boundaries, water rights, animal theft, crops etc. They are often seen as a violation of the honor of the victim. Honour, can thus be seen as the "ideology of a property holding group which struggles to define, enlarge and protect its patrimony in a competitive arena" (Schneider).[75] Honour, is prevalent in primary societies where one's relationship with those around oneself, because of its "intensity, intimacy and continuity" takes precedence over one's relationship with oneself. Such societies have "concentric circles of intimacy" where familial secrets are guarded from the clan, clan from the village and village from other villages. The idea of honour in such a society is "amour-propre", i.e love and regard of those around (Bourdieu 212). The preoccupation with honour intensifies further when families or clans are sovereign or the main units of power over the territories they control, and feel threatened by competing groups. As argued by Schneider:

> Honor as ideology helps shore up the identity of a group (a family or a lineage) and commit it to the loyalties of otherwise doubtful members. Honor defines the group's social boundaries, contributing to its defense, against claims of equivalent competing groups. Honor is also important as a substitute for physical violence in the defense of economic interests. The head of a family challenges the rest of the

[72] Marriott, Cited by Metcalf, p. 317
[73] Cited by Pastner, p. 257
[74] Antoun, p. 671
[75] P. Schneider, Cited by Schneider (1971), p. 2

> world with the idea of his family's honor…Paradoxically, the idea of honor can also serve to legitimate limited aggression, making acts of imposition, enroachment and usurpation morally valid in the eyes of nearly everyone except the victim. Especially in bilateral societies, where the exercise of collective force and violence is vastly curtailed, but family patrimonies are extremely vulnerable, honor regulates affairs among men.
>
> But if the family or lineage is inherently stable, or at least has no long term, indivisible economic interests in common, what besides family name provides a focus for honor. The repositories of family and lineage honor, the focus of common interest among the men of the family or lineage is its women. A woman's status defines the status of all the men who are related to her in determinate ways. These men share the consequences of what happens to her, and share therefore the commitment to protect her virtue. She is part of the patrimony. (17-18)

In a similar kind of study, based in Panjgur, Pakistan, Pastner argues how the social order is continually challenged by the new economy of irrigation, patron-client relationships and political and economic factors. Although the concept of male honor centered around ideals of generosity and bravery still exist but with the absence of martial activities and the liberation of slaves in the 1920s in Panjgur, cultural values revolve around the honor and shame of women for the reinforcement of kin solidarity and endogamy (250-51). The introduction of new and complex variables unsettled the stable foundations of the social order. Purdah, thus is a "symbolic statement about a more ambiguous social order" (258). It is related to larger questions about kinship and social stratification. It is often associated with a higher social status or a symbol of a recent rise to that status, as can be seen in the peasant women in Punjab who started veiling due

to the change in the fortunes of their families (Honigmann, 160).[76] A differential adherence to purdah is of paramount significance to social organization and mobility between different social strata. The emphasis laid on the modesty of women and their comportment reveals the "highly sexual connotation of these values." The two methods to prevent the breach of the modesty code are restraints on the physical mobility of women and the visual invisibility of women through clothing (251).

The motivations behind the enforcement of the code of modesty have also been engaged with, by many scholars such as Yalman, Antoun and Papanek among others. Yalman studied the similarities between the South Indian and West Asain pattern since both emphasize on hypergamy or isogamy for the woman, and loss of honor if she goes astray. Although in South India it is restricted to certain groups, it is the way of life in West Asia. According to Yalman, there is a cultural similarity between the bilateral caste affiliation in South India and the belief in noble status being inherited from both parents in Arabia and it is to ensure blood paternity that the modesty code is enforced with such great zeal. Through an analysis of puberty rites, he concludes that the preoccupation with caste purity leads to an obsessive concern with female sexuality. Hindus believe that a man is only externally polluted by sexual intercourse while a woman's purity once lost can never be regained.[77] Nambudiri women are kept secluded since the custom is that only the eldest son will marry. She is called "*Antharjanam* (interior being) or *Akatamma* (i.e, one who is inside, strictly *gosha)*.[78]Zahra concurs by pointing out that the word, *sharaf* in literary Arabic means noble descent from both parents (1084). Papanek (1973) also points out that whenever there is concern about descent from both parents, there is concern about female purity (304). She also notes that a highly stratified society deeply imbued in religious ideology and caste is the wider context of purdah in South Asia. By referring to Dumont (201-16), she argues that Muslims living in South Asia are also impacted by the principles of caste segregation (292). She refers to a sample of Pakistani businessmen she studied in the 1960s that were like quasi-caste groups in terms of their modes of organization and exclusivity (298). Antoun rejects this argument by saying that not all immodest acts lead to illegitimate offspring. Instead the focus in Islamic law is on legal paternity. The child should have a legal father

[76] Cited by Pastner, p. 258.
[77] Stevenson, Cited by Yalman, p. 41.
[78] Iyer,p. 282. Cited by Yalman, p. 52

regardless of his role in the child's conception. The explanations need to be sought elsewhere. Islam is one of those very few religions which recognize the sexual drive and gives sanction to licit sexuality within the chaste sheets of marriage. Men were even allowed to enter into temporary marriages to avoid sin:

> Having placed such a positive stamp on licit sexuality in term marriage, concubinage and polygyny, the dangers of illicit sexuality could not but have been increased. It was the constant affirmation of the modesty code together with the threat of application of penal sanctions for its violations that was depended on to prevent the norms stipulated for licit sexuality from spilling over into a wider area of behavior. (690)

He attributes the persistence of the code to its internal logic, validation by scriptures and Islamic law, and the vast array of social relationships affected by it. Zahra suggests that the values of virility and modesty are closely connected to one another. If women were allowed to mingle with men and assess them on physical or sexual grounds it would create or heighten the insecurities of men (1086).

The norms of purdah can change not only from culture to culture but can also apply to the same woman variably since pre-adolescent and post-menopausal women are seen as sexually neutral and thus not needing many strictures (Pastner, "Accomodations" 410). Social, political, economic and geographical factors make it difficult and also unnecessary to make generalizations about the practice of veiling. Zahra talks of a comparative study undertaken by her of the practice of veiling in Egypt and Tunisia in 1968. She discovered that while the veil helped to distinguish between different social classes in Egypt, the purpose of the veil in Tunisia was to ensure the absolute invisibility of women (1086). Purdah observance may also be an attempt to emphasize one's Islamic heritage especially when one is a part of a minority group as pointed out by Stuers[79] in her study of several groups of Muslims in Delhi. The hegemonic influence of local clerics or religious leaders such as those of *Jamat-i-Islami* could also lead to an

[79] Cited by Papanek, p. 299.

internalization of certain values. One of the most important reasons cited for the change in the adherence to purdah norms was the displacement and the general upheaval at the time of Partition. Many women realized that the veil had proved useless, leading them to discard it while many Hindu women donned the veil for precisely the same reasons (Papanek 301).

Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter

Purdah is often seen as an Islamic institution but both Hindus and Muslims in South Asia practice purdah or a variant of purdah norms which curtail interaction between men and women outside some well-defined categories. Muslim purdah, begins at puberty and it is not practiced within the kin group while Hindu purdah begins after marriage and involves male affines (Papanek, "Separate Worlds" 289).

The emphasis laid on the purity of women and the strictures to ensure that purity is not specific to only purdah societies. There is an undue emphasis laid on the "exotic" or curiosity value of purdah ideology. The ideology of separate spheres can be found in other societies as well. The purdah clad women might appear to be visually very different from women in industrialized societies but the arguments about their "place" in society are similar, as well as complex (Papanek "Purdah" 530). What needs to be explored is the determining features, the rationale and the variations of purdah ideology.

The various aspects of purdah can be summed up in terms of two related ideas, 'separate worlds' and 'symbolic shelter'. The segregation of the two worlds is accompanied by an interpersonal dependency. The dependence of men on women is almost never acknowledged especially in the public domain. Where separate spaces cannot be provided, separate times of attendance are introduced. Burqa is a "logical supplement to the use of enclosed living spaces" and creates the possibility of "portable seclusion". It is a "liberating invention" since it allows a certain mobility to women and also announces their secluded status to the world. The end of the sari or a dupatta are often used for similar purposes by women (Papanek 295). Sex segregation is different from other kinds of segregation because of the promise of a protective shelter. It also entails that individuals are rarely seen as individuals and more as social units or status demonstrators. The idea of symbolic shelter indicates the asymmetrical relationship between the sexes. Women are seen as vulnerable not only to dangers posed by the outside world but also the

dangers lurking within. In societies where families are dispersed or mobile, it is internalized 'guilt' which acts as an instrument of impulse control but where there is close and frequent interaction with a collectivity, shame is often used as an instrument of control. Shame and honor are pivotal elements in the value cluster of purdah (316).

The unveiled body is also subject to a myriad set of disciplinary mechanisms and is as marked or as inscribed as the veiled body. Thus, not veiling needs to be seen as "one among many practices of corporeal inscriptions" which includes bras, stilettos, corsets, cosmetics etc (Yegenoglu 116).

Papanek raises several questions which researchers need to engage with and attempt to answer about the purdah ideology, such as: What are the similarities or differences between purdah and other kinds of segregation? Do the characteristic features of a society such as caste and class barriers function differently within the segregated domain? Does sex segregation and the moral division of labor raise the expectation of a higher standard of religious observance when it comes to women? On the one hand, women are believed to have a polluting influence, on the other hand one also witnesses a "vicarious ritualization" (Singer 439) where religious duties are often delegated to the women in the family since they 'have more time' (Papanek 323). The subsequent chapters will make an attempt to answer the questions raised by Papanek and raise more questions and answer some of them.

Conclusion

There is a need to reject binaries/false dichotomies such as body vs. soul, rational vs. corporeal, clothed vs. unclothed body and look at clothing as a "situated bodily practice" (Entwistle). This will enable us to look at the intersection of the social and the physical body and help us understand the embodied nature of various practices. Terms such as *hijab, jilbab and purdah* are often used to refer to clothing norms of Muslim women but one can recognize injunctions about behavioural codes for women across cultures. While purdah refers to curtain or a screen that hides what is behind it, it encapsulates material, spatial, behavioural and religious meanings and is used to refer to a varied set of norms about veiling and seclusion. A focus on the Qur'an reveals how the practice of veiling was initially used to mark the privileged status of women of the Prophet's household. It was with the concretization of Islamic law and morality in

the Iraq based Abbasid sate in the eighth century that the injunction about veiling was applied to all women by turning the women of the Prophet's household into models of piety and modesty, worthy of emulation. The belief in the sexual vulnerability of women, institutionlisation of class differences, kin endogamy, structural integrity of the kin group and ideology of honour and shame are some of the motivations behind the practice of purdah. The framing of the women's question in nineteenth century reform movements is also revealatory of the working of purdah ideology. As put forth by Papanek, purdah is predicated on the separation of spheres and promise of symbolic shelter to women. Although it is about relegation of women to the private domain, there could also be an extension of purdah ideology in the public sphere as argued by Dagmar Engels.

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Chapter 2

Socialization of Space and Spatialization of Social

Purdah is not just a piece of cloth that conceals a woman's face or chest or her entire body, it also entails a division of space on the basis of gender. It is the construction and demarcation of space on the basis of social relations and spatial nature of social and cultural norms that this chapter attempts to engage with.

Perceived, Conceived and Lived Space

Doreen Massey looks at the history of theorization on space and argues how spatial scientists considered the spatial an autonomous, self contained sphere where spatial relations and spatial processes led to spatial distributions, regardless of social processes. For instance, the geography of industry solely focused on geographical factors. The Marxist critique of the 1970s posited the idea that space is a social construct and "spatial processes were actually social relations taking a particularly geographical form" (254). It was in the eighties that the one sidedness of this argument was abandoned to make it plain that the social is also spatially constructed.

Reena Tiwari talks of how the science of perspective developed in the fifteenth century which changed the way in which space was conceptualized. Space was seen as abstract and neutral with no connection with the body except the visual. Two opposing ideas about space developed in the seventeenth century. The first understanding of space focused on its mathematical or geometrical contours. This space was an "empty container" in which objects arranged themselves, it was pre-existing, free flowing and boundless. The second understanding of space which owes its popularity to Rene Descartes looked at space as emerging from the world. Both Descartes and Leibniz rejected the idea of space as an absolute entity and suggested that space needs to be understood by looking at the relationships between objects (Lefebvre 1). Lefebvre argues how philosophers differentiated between "ideal space", a abstract and divine entity which can be intuitively grasped by them because of its homogenous nature, from "real space", that is the space of social practice. This is a case of tragic irony, since the beginnings of philosophy were closely tied up with the real, material and tangible space of the Greek city. He wonders how the insidious nature of hegemony could leave space, pure and untouched. He talks

of the paradox that is space by raising questions such as:-,Is space an abstract category? Is it concrete? Is it instrumental? Can it be reduced to a passive projection of knowledge? He answers these questions by pointing out that space is abstract, but it is as real as other concrete abstractions such as commodities and money. It is concrete but not concrete like other objects and products. It is instrumental but its procedures and mechanisms like knowledge go beyond instrumentality. It is an objectified form of knowledge but like any other objectified form of knowledge, it transforms the theoretical form of knowledge.

Lefebvre's project in his book is to reveal the particularities of social space, by laying bare its inextricable links with mental space (the 'ideal space' and its geometrical/mathematical connotations) and physical space. His attempts to define space begin with defining what it is not "What I shall be seeking to demonstrate is that such a social space is constituted neither by a collection of things nor an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents and that it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality (27). He proposes a theory of social space which focuses on spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Spatial practice of a society produces that society's space and "propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction" (38). 'Representations of space' refers to the conceptualization of space by architects, scientists and planners. 'Representational space' is the space "lived through its associated symbols and images" (38), the space which users inhabit and also which their "imagination seeks to change/appropriate" (39). It is only by making an attempt to understand the dialectical relationship between the perceived, conceived and lived space can one hope to understand the complexities of social space and the relationships embedded in that space.

Thus, Lefebvre's notion of space moves beyond the binary notion of space to envelop another spatiality, which reconciles the physical and cognitive.[80] This assertion of the significance of the spatial, rescues it from the domain of passivity and stasis to which it is often relegated and opens it up for a historical and political analysis. Space is often seen as not Time and in a dichotomous relationship with time. Time, being the privileged signifier is seen as masculine while space is seen as feminine. This gendering works on the entire constellation of dualisms linked to time and space. Time is often aligned with "History, Progress, Civilization,

[80] Discussed by Reena Tiwari, p. 32

Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand, are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, reproduction, nostalgia, emotions, aesthetics, the body" (Massey 257). Massey asserts that this attempt to retrieve the spatial from passivity and depoliticization is an attempt to critique and go beyond the gendering and either/or dualisms of larger philosophical debates (7). This dualistic conception of space and time and many other binaries they are aligned with, constitute and reflect the construction of masculinity and femininity of our societies (259). The understanding that geography matters and gender and geography are deeply implicated in the construction of each other will offer a devastating critique of essentialism and attribution of 'natural' characteristics to men and women (178).

Gender and Geography

The symbolic investment in the meaning of space and exclusion by violence reveals its gendered nature and its role in the construction and understanding of gender identities. Massey puts forth the argument that the division of space into public and private is one of the most crucial aspects of the "joint control of spatiality and identity" (179). The idea of home which is often intimately bound with the idea of woman reverberates with nostalgia, security, stability, comfort, cultural and spiritual values. The Angry Young Men of the previous century, who went south in search of jobs often looked at the North with nostalgia which had the idea of 'Mum' as its "stable symbolic centre-functioning as an anchor for others". Their idea of home and the figure of the mother did not encapsulate the trials, tribulations and drudgery of life, "not actively engaged in her own and others' history…" (180). Massey asserts that:

> The intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious. Each is, in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other: geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply influential in the production of the 'geographical'. (177)

Architecture moulds and structures our material world, thus, it has a direct and not just a symbolic relation to social life. It provides the "material preconditions for the patterns of movement, encounter and avoidance which are the material realization-as well as sometimes the generator of social relations" (Hillier, Hanson ix). Hillier and Hanson argue how buildings are similar to other artefacts insofar as they have a practical and social meaning. But they are also unlike other artefacts since buildings are not merely objects but metamorphoses of space through objects. The architectural ordering of space is the ordering of relations between people. They point out the epistemological problem in the conceptualization of space by discussing how social theorists often attempt to find a link between an abstract, spatial object and a 'social' subject which is an individual or a group, by doing which "space is desocialised at the same time as society is despatialised" (9). Man's attempt to order space and give it an architectural form/pattern is itself a social behavior which contributes to generating and perpetuating certain kinds of cultural identities.

Rama Mehta

Rama Mehta, born in Nainital in 1923 was a sociologist, novelist and one of the first women to join India's Foreign Service. She resigned from that position after her marriage. In *The Western Educated Hindu Woman*, Mehta looks at the difference in the perceptions of women who had come of age after independence, and their mothers. She argues that for the social and economic elite of the country in the late twentieth century if "Pativrata was the moral code, the Purdha system was part of the feminine code of modesty" (19). Women who belonged to the upper caste and class in some parts of India were segregated from men and their personal and social lives were limited to the domestic sphere where they were surrounded by other women. In some other parts of India where there was not a strict segregation of the sexes, a free mingling of the sexes was discouraged. There was a reserve that women were expected to maintain in the company of men, and women were made to look at their bodies as sacred and pure which had to be guarded from being tainted by the male gaze. Mehta's respondents told her that even when they were very young, there was a careful supervision of their behavior and all contact with men other than one's brothers, uncles and first cousins was strictly forbidden. After turning ten or eleven they could not step out of the house without a chaperone and they were not allowed to interact with the male servants of the house. The respondents were made to associate their

separation from men with their dignified status. It was believed that men did not respect women who were "free and frivolous" (112). Those women who unabashedly interacted with men were seen as having loose morals and it was this inherent bias which prevented women from the social and economic elite of the society from aping those who were "freer". She says:

> The consciousness that they were girls was brought to bear on the respondents by this kind of segregation and by the constant repetition that they were girls and hence had to be careful of men. The idea of female chastity and purity was also put before them and every story told to them during their childhood seemed to the respondents to underline this point. (29-30)

Hillier and Hanson also assert that the interior space is a more ideological space with its immutable system of categories, classifications and relations whereas the exterior is a "transactional or even a political space" (20), with a more flexible system of encounters and avoidances. The exterior according to them is the site where societal relations are produced and the interior space is the site of its reproduction. The exterior is an indeterminate space while the interior is more structured. Society does not merely exist in space. It takes a distinct spatial form in two senses:

> First, it arranges people in space in that it locates them in relation to each other, with a greater or lesser degree of aggregation and separation, engendering patterns of involvement and encounter that may be dense or sparse within or between different groupings. Second, it arranges space itself by means of buildings, boundaries, paths, markers, zones and so on, so that the physical milieu of society also takes on a definite pattern. In both senses a society acquires a definite and recognizable spatial order. (26)

Malashri Lal proposes what she calls 'The Law of Threshold' an indigenous methodological or analytic tool to look at Indian women's writing in English. She argues how the term 'Feminism', which does not have an equivalent in the Indian languages, is looked at with suspicion and is often differentiated from 'women's issues', 'women's development programmes' and 'women's studies'. Lal argues how these writings talk of women who "desire change which is critical for the protagonist yet non dramatic to the public gaze. Her rebellion is rather muted, by the self analytic, ameliorative view she takes of social change as gradual, almost imperceptible" (28). It is because of this suspicion and hostility that there is a need for a terminology which emerges from out of the cultural context of the subcontinent. She locates the origin of the Law of the Threshold in the spatial contours of Indian architecture. As E.B Havell argued "The entrances to a house, temple, or shrine are always in India consecrated places, only second in importance to the sacred image itself, it is therefore here that the highest art of the master craftsman is shown." [81]The Law looks at space in terms of the architectural arrangements of the domestic arena which extend to the metaphysical notions which govern human conduct. According to her, the threshold is both a real and a symbolic space, crossing of which signifies transition. While men have traditionally moved, unchallenged or unremarked from one space to the other, women's mobility is confined to the four walls of the house. It allows "multiple existences for men, a single one for women" (12). The transgressive act of crossing the threshold is an irreversible movement which either completely closes the possibility of inhabiting the inner space or changes the terms in which the space can be lived in. It is believed that a woman cannot guard her body, employ her intellect or contribute to the economic well being of her family, and "the women have been confronted with and internalized elements of a culture which simultaneously devalues them and elevates them" (Jeffrey 114).

Lal's analysis of literary texts looks at different permutations of three possible spaces-the interior space, threshold and the exterior space. The interior space is a "real and psychological" (14) location for which the conventions of the author and the reader serve as positional tools of the narrative. For instance, Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) takes the multiple and complex hierarchies of a joint family of a Rajput household in Udaipur as its narrative takeoff and sociological base to chart the journey of Geeta.

[81] Havell, *The Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India*, p. 152-Quoted by Lal

Rama Mehta, like her protagonist was an outsider turned insider, someone who was unfamiliar with the ways of the haveli, who became a part of and assimilated the mores and customs like Geeta. The novel, *Inside the Haveli* begins on the outside with a bird's eye view of the city. Udaipur, which was once the capital of Mewar had lost its erstwhile glory and grandeur but the beauty and mystery surrounding the old city was still intact. The structures, that divided the city were in a dilapidated state but they still performed the functions they were meant to perform-dividing, demarcating and classifying. The new township that had developed had houses which were neater and greener "but there is no soul in the new township" (5). These were people who had come to the city for work but they had no memories of the past/history of Udaipur:

> More than anything they are puzzled by the wall-enclosed havelis, some in marble, others in stone; they wonder how much gold lies buried in the vaults. There is no way they can look into the courtyards; the windows are so high that no one can look through them. The town people leave the old city, without having fathomed what goes on inside men's and women's apartments of the haveli. (5)

The "wall-enclosed havelis" were an enigma to outsiders who had no insight into the lived experiences of the inhabitants. The haveli residents were an exotic curiosity because of their refusal to offer a glimpse of their world. Sangram Singhji's haveli was one such haveli whose first courtyard was built three hundred years ago and since then, the haveli grew like a banyan tree.

> The haveli may have no shape from the outside, but inside there is a definite plan. The courtyards divide the haveli into various sections. The separation of self-contained units was necessary because the women of Udaipur kept purdah. Their activities were conducted within their apartments. The courtyards connected their section with that of the men. The etiquette established through the years permitted only close male relatives to enter the women's apartment. Even so no

man entered the courtyard without being properly announced.(6)

Space in these havelis was divided and assigned according to two principles, gender and age. Spacious rooms, rooms around the courtyard and lower floors were given to those higher up in the familial hierarchy (Prabha 41). Although the novel is about Geeta's journey from Bombay to Udaipur, Rama Mehta also offers a glimpse into the lives of women like Lakshmi and Pari, who worked in the haveli. Their movements may not be as circumscribed as those of the mistresses and they enjoyed liberties and mobility their mistresses could not but the boundaries defined for them were of a wholly different kind. Pari who had devoted forty-five years of her life to the haveli came to the haveli when she was eight. Her father followed a practice prevalent in feudal Rajasthan when poor parents gave away their children to aristocratic families to protect them from famine, hunger and poverty. She had seen four generations of the haveli and had become adept at the customs and rituals to be followed and gifts to be exchanged. When Geeta asked her if she was unhappy after losing her husband, she says that she was never allowed to discover the meaning of unhappiness. Her mistress used to make her wake up at four in the morning and she was kept busy the whole day. She was not allowed to play with the girls her age since, "It was not considered proper for a widow to be gay and carefree" (24). She might not have been allowed to wear gay clothes and jewellery but she was elated that she had seen such splendor. Pari is as much a custodian of the customs of the haveli as her mistress, Geeta's mother-in-law. Lakshmi, like Pari was ten when she came to the haveli. According to the other servants, she had been given away by her parents because she was "dark and ugly" and they could not afford her dowry. Women like Lakshmi and Pari were looked after by the families that had taken them under their wing but this "care" completely negated the agency/ choice of these women. Lakshmi was married off to Gangaram, another servant, when she was fourteen. She detested the work she was expected to do but her "ways of operating" (Certeau) entailed having a child every year so that she could be away from work for twenty-one days, "If only women were considered unclean for longer what fun it would be" (12). As against this, Geeta met Ajay in the company of her brother's friends and was asked by her parents if she liked him. They were apprehensive, not about Ajay since he was educated and a science professor but about Ajay's family since the women of the haveli kept purdah. Their concern was not about their daughter's ability to accept and adopt the ways of the haveli but whether Ajay's family would accept an educated girl as their daughter-in-law.

Purdah, as illustrated by Mehta is not just a garment, it is a way of being and acting. Geeta's mother told her to "Keep your head covered; never argue with your elders; respect your mother-in-law and do as she tells you. Don't talk too much" (16). Purdah is concomitant of various intra and inter-family behavioural and avoidance rules. She felt claustrophobic in the car but she did not have the liberty to lower the glass. She is constantly reminded that she has to keep her head covered. All the women who surrounded her, whose feet she had to touch, who were related in one way or the other to her husband's family were a "mass of covered faces" (19) for her. The act of veiling robs a woman of her individuality and her unique sense of self which Geeta found appalling. The parallel lives of Geeta and Lakshmi and Vijay and Sita reveal how Lakshmi was Geeta's other, voicing discontent and resentment that Geeta did not have the liberty to voice, because "she was a maidservant and hence her concern with *sharam* was less although she was not free of the demands of *izzat"* (Misra 71). In addition to the purdah covering one's face, there was the "purdah of the mind" (Dharker) which did not allow a daughter-in-law to freely interact with the men in the family. The men came to the inner courtyards for meals, the rest of the day was spent by them in their part of the house. Jasbir Jain points out how men did not have the liberty to go to their own apartments and were reduced to the status of "night visitors" (184). Geeta, out of curiosity had once trespassed into the men's section of the haveli and had been awed by the elaborately decorated room and the portraits of Ajay's forefathers. She was later reprimanded by Pari for the trespass. The first few months after her marriage, Geeta found "the separation of men and women romantic, full of mystery" (21). It was a world completely different from the world of her parents where there was free mingling of the sexes. The practice of purdah applied to both men and women. Ajay could and did come to meet Geeta during the day but these visits were frowned upon or ridiculed. The household chores and the responsibility of overseeing the servants did not leave her with a lot of time but, "She came to love the veil that hid her face, this allowed her to think while the others talked. To her delight she had discovered that through her thin muslin sari, she could see everyone and yet not be seen by them" (23). Spontaneity was not acceptable of purdah ladies. They could not be unabashed in their display of affection, even for their own children in the presence of outsiders, "They covered their emotions in an elaborate exchange of formal gestures and words" (32). She could not look at the daughters and daughters-in-law of the other havelis as companions, because to her,

> They seemed like little canaries in a cage who sang and twittered but seemed to

know no passion. Their large eyes full of yearning and longing looked dreamily on the world beyond from behind their veils. Though young, some unknown fear seemed to have eaten away their natural exuberance. They followed the traditions of their families at the bidding of their elders, but they lacked the same faith or commitment to it. It seemed to Geeta that they were waiting for the day when they would be freed from their confinement. But on the surface they showed no dissatisfaction. In fact, Geeta longed to feel their placid acceptance of life. (87)

The generational differences could be seen in the dissatisfaction and unfulfilled longing of the younger women but none of them could completely abandon the ways and mores of the haveli. Pratibha Jain and Sangeeta Sharma talk about the martial ethos of Rajput clans which entailed a cultivation of values associated with warrior culture in both men and women. It was wives and mothers of warriors who acted as repositories of chivalric values and passed them from one generation to the other. The preservation of the virtue and honor of women was one of the most characteristic ethics of Rajput culture, reflected in their idiomatic expressions:

Ghar jatan dharm palatan, tiriya padta tav

Yeh tinuhi din maranra, kaha rank kaha ra

(When home and hearth is in danger, when religion is at stake, when women folk are in distress, these are three days for all to die, whether pauper or a prince)[82]

Even among Rajput states, Mewar had a distinctive sense of honor and looked at practices like purdah, sati and jauhar as crucial markers of their identity. Mewar which was ruled by the Sisodiya clan took great pride in its history of ruthless resistance to the power and influence of the Mughals. As against other Rajput states which formed dynastic alliances through marriage with the Mughals, the Sisodiyas were adamant about their revulsion to such associations. Purdah in such cultures was seen as a means by which, "sat (purity, goodness, truth, character) is

[82] K.R Qanungo, *Studies in Rajput History,* p. 67. Quoted by Jain and Sharma, p. 4

generated and preserved" (6). The concept of *izzat* as argued by Fatima Mernissa is three pronged with a visual (to hide something from sight), spatial (to draw boundaries) and ethical (the realm of the abstract which lays down prescriptions and prohibitions) dimension.

Familiarity with the haveli culture lent a strength and dignity to Bhagwat Singhji's wife, Geeta's mother-in-law. Geeta always felt like an outsider or a spectator. The women she was surrounded by had a shared past and pride in that glorious past. Their confidence was a consequence of their belief in their traditions, "Tradition was like a fortress protecting them from the outside world, giving them security and a sense of superiority" (114). Geeta's mother-in-law tells her daughter in law to not interact with her cousins-in-law, since it was not "becoming". She wanted to prove to her family members that an "educated girl can be moulded" (30). The individual, as Mehta argues in *The Western Educated Hindu Woman* was to be subordinate to the family unit, "For women life under such a system called for self control, reserve and modesty, acceptance of male authority and respect for the female hierarchy" (13). Purdah culture is built on the ethos of self negation and rendering oneself invisible/ silent, "The purdah only externally enacts the process of self-negation that a woman enters with marriage and is taught from childhood" (Misra 68). Her mother-in-law was uncompromising about the ways of the haveli but she was mindful and understanding of Geeta's needs. Geeta unconsciously was "drawn into the life of the haveli without even wanting to resist it. There was something in this way of life that frightened and fascinated her at the same time" (31). The noise which intruded into Geeta's privacy and did not allow her to think was her mother-in-law's only solace, "Noise did not bother her, but silence she could not bear" (48). Neighbors and maids from other havelis came to seek her advice and share gossip. After her mother-in-law's death, when Bhagwat Singhji's wife was not expected to be at her beck and call, she felt that she had lost her guiding light, "She found her freedom irksome" (69). Minault points out how to most outsiders the life of a woman behind purdah was one of "hermetically sealed respectability" (108) but a closer look inside the zenana would reveal how their lives involves a lot of socialization, participation in rituals and celebrations, sharing gossip, arranging marriages and visits to a whole network of families. The courtyard was a space abuzz with activity and noise and women's lives centered around the space of the courtyard; being deferential to, laughing with, ordering and being ordered by other women, leading "lives which may have been claustrophobic, but they were rich in human contact" (111).

It is because of the privileges that a house/home allows to men and the drudgery that it expects from women that many feminists look at the idea of domestic space as oppressive and patriarchal. Simone de Beauvoir argues how human life involves "transcendence and immanence", in other words, the attempts to move forward are to be accompanied by a desire to lend certain coherence and meaning to the past and to integrate it with the present and the future. For a man, according to Beauvoir marriage performs a synthesis of these two aspects of human existence:

> In his occupation and in his political life he encounters change and progress, he senses his extension through time and the universe; and when he is tired of such roaming, he gets himself a home, where his wife takes care of his furnishings and children and guards the things of the past that she keeps in store. But she has no other job than to maintain and provide for life in pure unvarying generality; she perpetuates the species without change, she ensures the even rhythm of the days and the continuity of the home, seeing to it that the doors are locked. (430)[83]

Similarly, Irigaray talks of the home as a projection of a man's nostalgic yearning for the lost mother and a desire to fix his identity in a world which is constantly changing, "She is assigned to be place without occupying place. Through her, place would be set up for man's use but not hers" (52)[84]. While not completely disagreeing with the reservations that most feminists have about the idea of home, Iris Marion Young argues for the need to reconfigure and revisit the space in which most women put their heart and soul and the "meaning making activities" (124) performed by them. The arrangement of material objects in space is a testimony to the "sedimentation of lives" lived there (140). The objects one collects when one travels or goes about the daily business of living are a repository of memories, smells, sights and experiences in general which give an anchor and a material envelope to one's sense of being. Beauvoir, according to Young, associates historicity with futurity, giving more importance to the act of

[83] Cited by Young, p. 137
[84] Cited by Young, p. 129

creating/fashioning things. Being a part of the world involves living among objects, rituals, celebrations, festivals and it is often women who perform the role of preservers of these elements. Preservation involves, both, keeping objects intact and imbuing them with meaning by

> preparing and staging commemorations and celebrations where those who dwell together among the things tell and retell stories of their particular lives…The preservation of the things above which one dwells gives people a context for their lives, individuates their histories, gives them items to use in making new projects and makes them comfortable. (142)

Young urges us to be cautious in our approach towards home and the act of preservation performed by women since preservation could be both conservative and revisionist. It is this act of keeping traditions alive and "preparing and staging commemorations and celebrations" which lends a strength and dignity to the women of the zenana, a "meaning making" activity which gives meaning to the lives of the zenana women and the other members of the household. While looking at her family album, Anees Jung thinks about all the women who helped create and nurture the family, but were conspicuously absent from all the photographs. The only women in the album were Western women. The women of her family were usually in a back room or a *chilman* which was used to hide women from the outside but not the outside from them. She describes this section of the house as a "little city in itself" which was enclosed but not shut…defined and strengthened by its own norms and rituals, was charged with essences that gave the house its sense of being" (14).

The code of purdah was so deeply ingrained in the women of the haveli that till her last breath Sangram Singhji's wife was conscious of "feminine decorum" (56) and insisted that her maids keep her face covered before the doctor. There is a mute, unquestioning acceptance of the haveli culture by the women which Geeta finds bewildering. Manju Bua Sa, a cousin of Bhagwat Singhji became a widow at the age of fourteen. She was considered inauspicious at religious ceremonies and was not allowed to participate in the gaiety of familial celebrations.

> All of us have to pay for our past actions. Who knows what sins I must have

> committed to have lost my husband? Still, I have had compensations. My nephews love me like a mother. Binniji, I do not need to be pitied. A widow has her place too in our society; do not forget. These women, our relatives you see here, feel responsible for me. (117)

The law of the threshold is not only enabling in looking at the various gendered spaces within the narrative, it also serves as an operative tool in the narrative technique. Both Rama Mehta and Attia Hossain refrain from an uninhibited evocation of physicality. We witness an inversion of the assumption of home as a private place (Lal 16). The public aspects of the household are dwelt on, while the intimacies shared by the members of the household are hidden from the gaze of the readers:

> The social subterfuges that obfuscate the privacy of private spaces and make them public is probably true of the class depicted in Indian English fiction. From authors who peer into the hidden corners of the mind one would expect the interior landscape of homes, dense and populous as Indian homes are, to be explored for the silences. But it has not been so. This side of the threshold, the scene is vivid in external detail and indicative of complex mind condition in women protagonists but the authors will not look too deeply into the forbidden territories of intimate relations. (16)

Purdah is not only depicted but also manifests itself in the narrative technique which dwells vividly on architectural details but is silent about women's negotiation with their bodily desires. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar described women's writings as 'palimpsestic', works 'whose surface design, conceal and obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning." [85] Subjects such as sex, desire, menstruation, physical violence are suggested/hinted at in the otherwise placid, linear narratives of women writers. Most of these

[85] Gilbert and Gubar,p. 73. Cited by Grewal, p. 164

writers are also delicately poised between fiction and autobiography, with their fictional narratives being oblique retellings of their sad compromises, frustrations, repressed fears and anger. A 'timidity about the expressions of the self' marks women's texts which Lal sees as a strategic device to "'civilize' female anger for an acceptable public bookshelf" (6). She wonders in her essay, "A Discourse on Gender and Class", if Mehta's books were "cathartic constructs of the troublesome disjunctions in her multifaceted life" (89). Her act of writing a novel about the lives led by women inside the haveli is an act of "intellectual retrogression" where she steps back from the world of liberal, educated and informed people into the inner realm. The novel is about the dialectics of inside/outside, purdah/modernity and the "purdah state is not condemned, the modern, not entirely condoned" (91). Rekha calls this narrative obfuscation, a "suppressive literary practice or camouflaged articulation of the self" (168). The female body is imbued with shame and the articulation of bodily activity and desires was to be either self censored or put in an idiom which robs it of its concreteness. Mehta's writings are "thinly veiled works of fiction", in which she discusses the plight of western educated women like her who were confined to the constricting atmosphere of the haveli, as she, being the daughter-in-law of an illustrious Rajput family had conceded the right to inhabit the public realm (Misra 68).

The second space where the narrative operates is the threshold. This is not only a space of contestation between two kinds of influence but also a space where the protagonist and the text remain. Poised at the threshold, the protagonist receives messages of conformity and tradition and promises of security and shelter from the interior space and from the outer space the possibilities of freedom, mobility, adventure and agency. The threshold is not a neutral space. It is instead a politically charged space where a woman reflects upon the multiple influences on her and "gender roles are subject to redefinition, the notion of gender becomes most acute" (17). This is also the space where a woman is subject to loneliness and isolation. She has rejected the securities and divisions of the interior space but is at a loss about the possibilities of her future trajectories. In *Inside the Haveli*, Lakshmi is called a "cheap street woman" because Heeralal had showered her with gifts. She defiantly tells Pari that she will not return to the haveli because she will be constantly humiliated for having succumbed to the temptations offered by him. But her life outside the haveli does not offer the shelter, security and comfort offered in the interior space. She is turned into an outcast by her own family members and is forced to seek refuge in strangers' houses to survive. It was these "socio economic and psychological rewards and

punishments" which allowed purdah culture to survive and make women willing practitioners of its norms and conventions (Sarojini 53). A novel which is replete with spatial analogies confines itself to mapping the contours of women confined to the havelis and does not explore Lakshmi's life once she leaves its confines (Rai 126), although it does address how the complex of behavioural codes that purdah encapsulates affects both Geeta and Lakshmi.

The third operative space in the law of the threshold is the exterior space which opens up for the woman who begins her irreversible journey from home to the world, a journey which alienates her not only from those outside but also the sisterhood that inhabits the inner sanctum. The alienation ensues because of her violation of the spatial code of feminine modesty. A world structured for the convenience and pleasure of men is a world where her decisions are questioned and ridiculed, but this is also a world where she devises strategies of survival. Rekha also argues how Indian women's writing shows a proclivity for women's quest for selfhood depicted through spatial shifts. Any movement through spatial cartography involves a change in a woman's "emotional and experiential landscape" (61). Space is not fixed or stagnant. Patriarchy, through its mechanism of surveillance and policing marks spaces and human bodies in such a manner that women carry these marked spaces within them wherever they go.

The threshold also serves as a metaphor to speak of the predicament of the Indian English writer who is tenuously poised between the contrary pulls of inherent cultural values and the language he/she adopts for creative expression. The fictional accounts have a "double edge, nostalgia and rebellion" (Lal 165). *Inside the Haveli* while portraying the stifled, muffled existence of purdah clad women like Geeta, also harbors a nostalgic yearning for the glorious feudal past which offered a security and faith shaken by the winds of change.

Processuality and Relationality of Space and Gender

Rekha argues how analysis of women's writing in India is preoccupied with the temporal dimension and the trajectory of a woman's journey from conformity/tradition to selfhood. Within this tradition of criticism, space is treated as 'the dead, the fixed, the un-dialectical, [and] the immobile' and time is seen as 'rich, fecund, lively and dialectical'[86]. Space is not free of values or a mere background against which the drama of human life is set. It is not a vacuum or void

[86] Michel Foucault quoted by Wegner, p.180-Quoted by Rekha

that is inhabited and moulded in a unilateral fashion. Space is artificial, constructed by human agents and constructing human agency. Wegner considers it "both a production, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a force that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human beings in the world" (181).[87] Smith defines space as 'a physical extent infused with social intent'.[88] Similarly Henri Lefebvre talks of space as a complex and contradictory process which is produced by and through human actions and is deeply intermeshed with temporal contingencies. It is worthwhile to look at how space contains and inflects the personality of its inhabitants and how space is inflected by its inhabitants. The importance of space in societal evolution was put forth by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* wherein he argued how insidiously power works, in and through spatial configurations to produce disciplined and docile subjects. Rekha urges to study the interrelatedness of spatial and temporal relationships in women's writing. A detailed study of space and women's negotiation of their place in that space would enable us to move beyond the dichotomous notion of gender and reveal the contextual and fluid nature of gender identities.

Space is usually imagined as women's bodies. In her essay,'Maps and Mother Goddess in Modern India', Sumathi Ramaswamy talks of the "traditions of spatially imagining 'India' as a geographical entity and as a somatic being embodied in the figure of Bharat Mata, Mother India" (97).[89]The feudalist, patriarchal idea of *zar, zoru and zameen* (wealth, woman and land/property) conflates women's existence in terms of material possessions. Karl Schmidt wrote, "The man appears as time incarnate, the incarnate process of becoming; woman as space, as being. Activity and passivity, mind and body, brain and heart, head and belly, individual and species, positive and negative pole; man and woman"[90]Gender relations need to be seen as "relational power grids that are complex, contradictory, contextual, arbitrary and unstable" (11). Rekha argues that it is important to understand the dynamics of space, gender and power since space is an "idea, ideal and ideology" (14). The dominant class at any given time in a society configures this idea, ideal and ideology of human relationships and their spatial dimensions to maintain the status quo. Martina Low while talking of the genderization of space and spatialization of gender talks of

[87] Quoted by Rekha, p. 8
[88] Quoted in D.Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*, p.3-Quoted by Rekha
[89] Quoted by Rekha, p. 129
[90] Quoted by Rekha, p 26

how both space and gender are seen as material, natural and immutable substances. It is imperative to see both as constructions and to look at both in their "processuality and relationality." They should be seen as "an effective, reciprocally constructing and constructed structure" (129).[91] An understanding of both space and gender as processes which are deeply related and implicated in each other's construction will be richly illuminating in the critique of an essentialist identity. Reena Tiwari looks at space as a palimpsest which has layers of meanings hidden beneath the surface. To understand the denotative nature of space one needs to look at it from a distance and to unravel the connotative meanings of space one has to look from within, through the eyes of those inhabiting that space. According to Tiwari, connotative codes of spaces can be understood by looking at the meanings of rituals, how those meanings have changed with the passage of time and the interaction between the user and the space he/she inhabits (16).[92]

Feminists such as Iris Marion Young and M.Frye speak of the relationship between women's embodiment and their sense of space. Young talks of a study conducted by Erwin Strauss in which he observed how when he asked five-year-old girls and boys to throw a ball, girls did not bring their whole body into the motion, which shows how women see themselves as situated in space. They imagine an "existential closure" (Young 40) between themselves and the space surrounding them, thus delimiting the space available for their movement and manipulation. It is because of the constant and continuous objectification of women that they tend to perceive themselves as located in space. Men are made to believe that they can move beyond the particularities of their body and look at themselves as the "originating co-ordinate for organizing everyday space" (Rose 118). M.Frye bemoans how this feeling of constantly being in space leads to an urge to escape, to acquiesce in one's erasure or invisibility. While talking of oppression, Frye uses the idea of confinement[93]-

> The root of the word 'oppression' is in the element 'press'. The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; press the button…

[91] Quoted by Rekha, p. 17

[92] Discussed by Rekha, p. 24

[93] Quoted by Rose, 117

> Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion/mobility. Mold. Immobile. Reduce. (2)

The Zenana

Malavika Karlekar points out how the space of the antahpur or the inner house which consisted of a set of rooms, courtyard and kitchen, because of the principle of seclusion was ill ventilated and exposed as compared to the rest of the house. Instead of looking at these women as oppressed, passive victims of partriarchy she talks of the parallel hierarchy of the antahpur, in which the in-marrying woman's identity was conditioned by the structured norms dictated by the senior female inhabitants of this space (7). The authority wielded by the mother-in-law or the senior most woman in the interior space is incontestable and all the other women are subject to the rigid and inflexible code outlined by her, as Geeta is subject to the strictures laid down by her mother-in-law.

Sarah Tillotson talks of the havelis of north India as distinctive types of "inward-looking courtyard houses" (1) and miniature versions of the palaces of princes. It was these internal courtyards which made Rory Fonseca call Old Delhi, an "introverted Garden City" (111)[94]. The order in which the havelis are arranged is not based on an architectural design but on the basis of affiliations of caste, class, culture and background. The havelis of those who were related to each other by ties of blood were built close to each other and often linked to each other. Jyoti Hosagrahar argues along the same lines by saying that "havelis were miniature cities within the city and their patriarchs were rulers in their own right" (31). She also says that like the women of these families who were secluded and veiled, the men also knew very little of the outside world. Tillotson argues how to many Western travelers the zenana, which was the most traditional as well as the least public part of the house gave the impression of "meanness and neglect" (96) because of being simply furnished. As against the ostentatious display of the rest of the haveli the most ornamental part of the zenana were the women themselves in their elaborate clothes and jewellery. According to Fanny Parks 'never was any place so full of intrigue, scandal, and chit

[94] Cited by Tillotson, p. 5

chat as a zenana" (450).[95] Mrs. Ali, on the contrary was astounded by the intuitive perception and conversational abilities of the ladies of the zenana despite the life of seclusion they led:

> The men with whom genteel women converse, are generally well educated, and from the naturally inquisitive disposition of the females, not a word escapes the lips of a father, husband or brother, without an enquiry as to its meaning, which having once [been] ascertained, is never forgotten, because their attention is not diverted by a variety of pursuits, or vain amusements. (64)[96]

Employing Gillian Rose's argument about how gender relations map time space patterns, Lisa Lau explores the relationship between domestic space and identity in contemporary South Asian women's writings. Among other things she shows how spaces are either restricted or restricting in terms of times of access on the basis of gender and how "the status of women within the social structure of their families and/or communities is paralleled as well as informed by their position in the physical structure of their house and families" (1098).

"Ways of Operating" (Certeau) in the Zenana

Michel de Certeau talks of "instruments" such as clothes, glasses, shoes, automobiles etc., through which bodies are set within the limits set by social laws. He wonders if there is a limit to these disciplinary mechanisms by which society represents and is represented by living beings. Bodies become what they become by subscribing to these codes, "Where and when is there ever anything bodily that is not written, remade, cultured, identified by the different tools which are part of a social symbolic code?." These "instruments" faciliate the realization of the social language in the body by making it narrate the order of society. To make people believe in a code so much so that they become practitioners depends on the credibility of the discourse. But it is only other acting, disciplined, performing bodies which make others believe in the power of the code. He argues, "It makes itself believable by saying: 'This text has been dictated for you by Reality itself'…The law requires an accumulation of corporeal capital in advance in order to

[95] Quoted by Tillotson, p. 111
[96] Tillotson, p. 112

make itself believed and practiced." Thus, normative discourse attains its power and durability by becoming a story, a narrative that is grafted on something real, something that speaks in its name. This ability of the discourse to turn into a story creates the possibility of creation of other stories. This incarnation of societal laws transforms a living being into a sign and gives it an identity (147-148), "The intextuation of the body corresponds to the incarnation of the law; it supports it, it even seems to establish it, and in any case it serves it. For the law plays on it:'Give me your body and I will give you meaning, I will make you a name, a word in my discourse'. The two problematics maintain each other…"(149) Certeau talks of how theories about the microphysics of power focus only on disciplinary/ repressive apparatus and are woefully silent about the resistance offered by people to being reduced to it. There is very little attention paid to "ways of operating", popular practices which conform to codes selectively or evade them, or form the counterpart to the processes that structure the socio-economic order. He looks at dominees as "unrecognized producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths…" (xviii) He uses the difference between performance and competence as his theoretical model for his project on everyday practices. The act of speaking or enunciation is different from one's knowledge of language. He privileges the act of speaking over competence, since it entails a knowledge of the linguistic system; an appropriation, a negotiation with time and space and also an other/interlocutor, since "users make(bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adopt it to their own interests and their own rules" (xviii). Gilbert Ryle[97] argued that Saussure's distinction between langue and parole is the distinction between a system and its operations/uses (109-116). Certeau uses the same distinction to see how in the case of use/consumption, the capital produced by others is used and operated on by users without owning it:

> These elements(realizing, appropriating, being inscribed in relations, being situated in time) make of enunciation, and secondarily of use, a nexus of circumstances, a nexus adherent to the "context" from which it can be distinguished only by abstraction. Indissociable from the present instant, from

[97] Cited by Certeau, p. 32

> particular circumstances and from a faire (a peculiar way of doing things, of producing language and of modifying the dynamics of a relation) the speech act is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it. (33)

He illustrates his argument by taking the example of the success of Spanish colonizers in imposing their culture, language, rituals and laws on the natives. Although these laws and rituals were outwardly accepted and assimilated by them, they put them to uses or ends which were outside the system propounded by their masters. There was an ambiguity in the way they performed these rituals, thus, "their use of the dominant social order deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge; they escaped it without leaving it" (xiii).

Certeau's schema involves the distinction between strategies and tactics. Strategy according to him is a "calculus of force relationships" (xix) which are made possible by "a subject with will and power" (36). A subject such as this designates or marks a place as its own and treats that as a base from where its relations with others are managed. Every "strategic rationalization" tries to demarcate its own place and distinguish it from an "environment." Tactic on the contrary is an attribute of the other. It is a maneuver which operates in and on the "enemy's field of vision" (Bullow)[98]. It waits and takes advantage of small windows of opportunity but unlike a strategy it does not have a base where it can keep its victories and solidify its position. It is a "guileful ruse…determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power" (37, 38). Strategies combine and try to control three types of places, the place of power (the place of the subject of will and power), discursive/ theoretical places and physical spaces. They attribute an appropriate place to each element and also govern the movements of the various elements in various places, thus privileging spatial relationships over temporal ones. Tactics on the other rely on a "clever utilization of time", on the stray opportunities presented at certain intervals which turn a circumstance into a favorable situation.

He argues how a spatial order is an "ensemble of possibilities and interdictions" (98) which outlines for its inhabitants the places they can move in and around and those they cannot.

[98] Quoted by Certeau, pp. 37

Users/walkers, according to Certeau actualize some of these possibilities and create many others which had not been envisaged by the dominant social order. The walkers lead to the metamorphosis of spatial signifiers in the way they make use of those spaces. He talks of place as the "order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence" (117). Each and every element is located in its proper location, a location it gives meaning to. Space in contrast is a "practiced place",

> …actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. (117)

In *Inside the Haveli*, Geeta tactfully transforms the conservative space of the haveli into a haven of knowledge and learning. Rama Mehta's novel is about a society which is on the threshold, in a state of transition and transition in such a circumstance can only be brought about by an insider (Sarojini 54). She wanted Sita, Lakshmi's daughter to go to school, like her daughter Vijay but according to Pari, Vijay had the strength of wealth and family name to support her. People of Udaipur will not raise their fingers at her. Sita, Lakshmi's daughter, who was to be married one day should be sturdy enough to do household chores which would be her lot after marriage. It was believed that education would give her wrong ideas and make her think and act like a lady. Even Geeta who was initially enthused by the prospect of Sita's education has her moments of doubt later when she thinks that she has probably disturbed their lives. The servants were united by their poverty and suffering. It was believed that educating Sita would end up alienating her. The classes she started for the maids and their children made her understand their motivations and how they abided by the customs of their family because that was their sole support and the refusal to toe the line might lead to a withdrawal of that support. These classes were shunned by the community because it was felt that the servants used these classes as an excuse to shirk work. When questions were being raised about the authority and dignity of Jeevan Niwas, Geeta was as indignant as her mother-in-law, "I don't want to leave Udaipur now. The haveli has made me a willing prisoner within its walls. How stupid I was not to see all that it holds. Where else in the world would I get this kind of love and concern? The children must grow up here. They must

learn to love and respect this ancient house" (170). The haveli made her a "willing prisoner" by making her understand the value of kinship. The last part of the novel shows how the purdah that prevented a daughter-in-law to freely interact with her in-laws had relaxed. It is when they receive a proposal of marriage for Vijay who was still very young, from one of the most prestigious families of Udaipur, that Geeta felt again that old sense of being trapped and the desperate urge to escape from the constricted atmosphere of the havelis. The rage she feels at the proposal is conspicuous by its absence at the conditions laid down by Sita's prospective in-laws of her not attending school as soon as the marriage proposal had been accepted. In the last few pages of the novel, we are told how Geeta was not completely sure of herself. Vir Singh, whose marriage proposal came for Vijay, was a clever man, who was going abroad for further studies, a man of character from a good family. The novel ends with the death of her father-in-law, who was like a "towering tree" which had provided shelter to the entire family and Geeta knew that after his death the haveli would not be the same as before. The dilemma of Geeta about Vijay's marriage shows how she is located on the threshold; she becomes the mistress of the haveli who is entrusted with keeping alive the traditions of the haveli.

Nita Kumar discusses different approaches of feminist theorists in their attempts to grapple with the problematic issue of conceptualizing, talking and writing about women as subjects. The first approach aims at extending the boundaries and scope of different disciplines so that women could be included within the ambit of the analysis, thus subjecting them to an objectifying gaze. Another is to focus on women as possessing the consciousness, will and wherewithal to understand and reconstruct the world. The third revolves around the institutional and societal structures which circumscribe and control women. The fourth approach that Kumar puts forth and endorses is the methodology that looks at "hidden, subversive ways in which women exercise their agency even while outwardly part of a repressive normative order" (4). She suggests a modified Foucauldian approach which looks at the subjects as constituted in and through discourse but also as subjects that attempt to resist/resists and creates other/alternative discourses. It is an approach which replaces the idea of an unassailable, formidable subject with tracing the genealogy, "a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of subjects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is neither transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout

the course of history (117)[99]. She posits a discursive textual analysis of women's texts as one of the very many approaches to understand the "doubts, confusions and aspirations that characterize the fashioning of a non-normative discourse." This kind of an approach would establish that there are actors and there are also people who could have been actors and whose narratives were related to the dominant discourse in a myriad set of ways, "sometimes loyalist, sometimes subversive, sometimes scornful and silent, at other times directly challenging" (14). Kumar urges us to broaden our understanding of the idea of agency so that it can include the whole spectrum of subversion, from "daily 'private' acts and intentionally ambiguous language to elaborate myths and execution of violent oppositional deeds…" Even a minor shift in the symbols and meaning of discourse attempted by the subject changes not the terms of the discourse but the uses that it is made to fulfill. Using the Foucauldian paradigm of the insidious and capillary nature of power which is diffused everywhere and not unilaterally imposed, one can think of a subject who is both an agent and a collaborator (21). As put forth by Gerda Lerner, "the true history of women is the history of their on-going functioning in that male defined world on their own terms. The question of oppression does not elicit that story and is therefore a tool of limited usefulness to the historian" (148)[100].

In *The Western Educated Hindu Woman,* Mehta distinguishes between Indian modern and Indian Western. The Indian modern was the educated woman who owed allegiance to traditional modes of belief such as Dharma and Karma, is afraid of the "invisible penalties" (207) and laid emphasis on fulfilling her familial and caste- community obligations instead of laying a premium on personal fulfillment and individualism. She is not self reliant and hence is acutely conscious of the society's opinion of her. In contrast to her, the Western oriented woman does not value Hindu religious obligations. Her independence gives her the space and the gumption to brave public disapproval and condemnation. She is interested in the world outside her home, "wants to relate to a wider canvas" (21) and is desirous of cultivating her interests and passions instead of devoting all her time to traditional and domestic obligations:

> Leisure has a very definite place in the Western educated woman's routine. She gets little satisfaction from domestic preoccupation and needs to combine

[99] Quoted by Kumar, p. 8
[100] Quoted by Karlekar, p. 21

> domestic life with an external interest. She has a new need for privacy, and rejects the old assumption that women's psychological needs are satisfied through service to others. (21)

Geeta, like Rama Mehta, is a western educated Hindu woman who becomes a "willing prisoner" of the haveli culture. The novel ends with Geeta being entrusted with the responsibility of taking the legacy of the haveli forward but the narrative aims to encourage readers to look at the lives of purdah clad women to understand what Toril Moi called the "lived body". Lived body is a "unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociohistorical context; it is a body in situation". Situation, here is a reference to facticity and freedom. The material/physical aspects of the sociocultural environment and the bodies of those inhabiting that environment encapsulates the idea of facticity. Freedom refers to the "ontological freedom to construct herself in relation to this facticity[101]. Toril Moi argued for the dispensing of the concept of gender and replacing it with lived experiences but Young posits the necessity of both lived experiences and gender, since gender allows one to theorize about the social/cultural constructs which condition one's being. *Inside the Haveli* shows us bodies in situation, dealing with and negotiating various aspects of their embodiment in their own individual, unique ways but it also gives us an insight into social structures of the haveli culture which privilege the collective over the individual, the community over the family.

Attia Hosain

Attia Hosain was born in Lucknow in 1913 in a taluqdari (landholders in the Mughal and later British Empire, responsible for collecting taxes from various districts) family. She received an English liberal education at La Martiniere and Isabella Thoburn College. She was the first woman from a taluqdari family to graduate. The Indian National struggle and Progressive Writers' Group were some of the seminal influences on her which inspired her to become a journalist, broadcaster and writer. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), looks at the changes in the fortunes of a group of taluqdari families because of the social, cultural and political changes that swept the subcontinent in the twentieth century.

[101] Cited by Young, p. 12-16.

The contours, corridors and courtyards of Ashiana in Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, are as much a character in the novel as Laila and her family. Antoinette Burton, while talking of partition narratives, talks of the detailed descriptions of the materiality of home which shows how spatial categories are intertwined with social categories and how "influential architectural idioms can be of the practice of remembering" (102). Romola Chatterjee's memoir is titled *Courtyards of My Childhood,* thus indicating the seminal role played by corporeal entities in one's memory, "Eight bungalows to my childhood, and in a sense the story is of them. . . . I felt an intimate partnership with them, and memories more or less fell into place" (193). Hosain's novel tries to recount the past by producing the "history of one family dwelling-literally materializing one community's experience of terror and political violence" (Burton 106). Laila's "peripatetic vision" lingers over the various spaces in Ashiana. As an orphan, she is both an inhabitant and an observant, a migrant to this space and living in it (Guha 155-60).[102] The novel begins with a foreboding of Baba Jan's death by charting the movement of aunt Abida from the zenana to the guest room, "The day my aunt Abida moved from the zenana into the guest room off the corridor that led to the men's wing of the house, within call of her father's room, we knew Baba Jan had not much longer to live (14).

The living room is described as a permeable space where all kinds of shadows, voices, footsteps and music could be seen and heard as against the world of the zenana which closed upon itself:

> Into this vast room the colored panes of the arched doors let in not light but shadows that moved in the mirrors on the walls and mantelpiece, that slithered under chairs, tables and divans, hid behind marble statues, lurked in giant porcelain vases, and nestled in the carpets. Footsteps sounded sharp on the gilded roof. In this, the oldest portion of the house, I heard notes of strange music not distinctly separate but diffused in the silence of some quiet night as perfume in the air. I heard too the jingling of anklet bells.

[102] Cited by Burton, p. 107)

> But no one knew any of this.
>
> In the corridor beyond there was light. It broke into the patterns of the fretted stone that screened this last link between the walled zenana, self-contained with its lawns, courtyards and veranda'd rooms, and the outer portion of the house. (18)

Laila's angle of vision is constantly leading us away from the zenana into the concentric circles of Muslim and European culture in the public spaces of the house, such as the living room (Burton 120-121). The home was a highly charged ideological space in the twentieth century. The zenana, which was often orientalized was seen as dark, stuffy, unhygienic and a sign of the inability of Indians to govern themselves. Western women often pathologized the "spatialized domestic practices" of Indian women to justify the imperial mission or to expand the horizons of their social goals. The centrality of the architectural trope can be seen in the way the nation was imagined as a home which had been defiled by the entry of strangers. Sarojini Naidu, as President of the INC declared in 1925:

> Mine, as becomes a woman, is a modest domestic programme: merely to restore India to her true position of supreme mistress in her own home; sole guardian of her vast resources, and sole dispenser of her own rich hospitalities as a loyal daughter of *Bharat Mata.*
>
> Therefore it will be my lovely, though difficult, task through the coming year to try to set my mother's house in order; to reconcile the tragic quarrels that threaten the integrity of her old history, joint family, the life of diverse communities and creeds; and to find an adequate place, purpose and recognition; alike for the lowliest and mightiest of her children and foster-children, the guests and the

strangers within her gates.[103]

There was an emphasis on marriage based on mutual love and respect by the colonizers and many Indian nationalists, who anticipated a passing away of zenana life, while there were some who glorified it by equating it with distinctive traditional and cultural values. It was a time when home in the traditional sense and its practices of seclusion, "enjoyed a kind of cult status as emblems of a culture of disappearance" (Burton 10-13).

The attempt to clothe the girls of the family by a tangible purdah and a purdah of the mind is evident in the instructions and admonishments in the novel. Zahra, who prayed five times a day, read the Qur'an daily, did sewing and knitting is a visible embodiment of the principles of purdah while Laila is often reprimanded for her refusal to toe the line and her fascination with books, which she calls "garlands of gold round my neck" (17). Hakiman Bua tells her, "Your books will eat you. They will dim the light of your lovely eyes, my moon princess, and then who will marry you, owl eyed, peering through glasses?" (14). It was believed that Zahra would do as the elders decided for her because she was not tainted with a "mem-sahib's education" (23). It was believed that Western education is desirable as long as an educated woman does not sidestep the customs related to dress, body language and speech. C.S Lakshmi points out how an educated woman's "physical appearance was viewed as the first outward sign of breaking away from tradition…The poet Bharati had heralded her [as one who] would walk erect with an unfaltering gaze and would be a slave to no man. Many like the poetry but probably did not think it would be a reality" (274). A discussion of clothes, according to her is "in actuality the age old discussion of the kind of education women must be given…Who is an educated woman? What is her education for?" (276).[104] Mrs. Martin, her teacher is elated at the memory of Laila's first recitation "in a white frock and a blue sash, with a blue ribbon in her hair" (47) which to her was emblematic of the superiority of western values and her success at imparting those values since, "The Light must reach into the darkest corners of the land" (50).

It is a world where women like Abida who was well versed in Persian poetry and Arabic theology are treated with disdain and sarcasm by others. Zainab, Laila's cousin tells her about a bride who was bitten by a centipede during the ceremony of seeing the face of the bride but she

[103] Cited by Burton, p. 9
[104] Cited by Katrak, p. 97

didn't move an inch. They were conditioned to emulate such girls and adhere to societal prescriptions through this erasure of oneself, a relegation to the realm of invisibility. When aunt Saira is asked by Begum Waheed about Laila's observance of purdah, she says, "We observe the spirit of Quranic injunction by limiting freedom within the bounds of modesty" thus indicating one of the various, diverse ways in which the hijab verse is interpreted. By referring to the elopement of a Muslim girl from a strict purdah family with a Hindu boy, Mrs. Wadia, a Parsi woman argued that "a purdah upbringing is no insurance against immorality" (132). Laila says later in the novel, "Those women who were at ease with men were regarded by the others with suspicion and hostility-much as domesticated animals in fenced-off fields might react to one of their species who dared to wander into unguarded spaces and yet keep within reach of safety" (202).

Hosain's story, "The First Party", is about a woman deeply imbued in the conventions of purdah. She attends a party with her husband and finds herself, "lonely in her strangeness, yet dreading approach" (18). It is a strange world for her where her husband's glass was never empty, where people objected to her not drinking and where the "bi-lingual patchwork" (18) of conversations was baffling. It was her resentment and "lonely unhappiness" which made her look at them with contempt and disgust,

> She felt a sick horror at the way the men held the women, at the closeness of their bodies, their vulgar suggestive movements. That surely was the extreme limit of what was possible in the presence of others. Her mother had nearly died in child--birth and not moaned lest the men outside hear her voice, and she, her child, had to see this exhibitionism of…her outraged modesty put a leash on her thoughts. This was an assault on the basic precept by which her convictions were shaped, her life was controlled. Not against touch alone, but sound and sight, had barriers been raised against man's desire. (21)

This polyphony of voices about purdah is indicative of the tangibility and intangibility of purdah and the various ways in which it has been read, interpreted, assimilated and accommodated according to the change in circumstances. Laila's vehement defense of the courage and perseverance of the girl who educated herself and earned a scholarship is seen as a defense of "wickedness", of a woman who "caused suffering" and a presentiment of Laila turning into a socialist (133). As described in *Inside the Haveli,* the code of honor is upheld by the taluqdars and those who worked for them. The mobility of women of the lower class was not shackled by purdah but any deviance from the honor code is met with severities. When Jumman's daughter, Nandi, was found with the cleaner in the garage, her father felt that his "honour was besmirched" (26).

The orchards had high walls so that purdah women could walk unseen in them. The women from the taluqdar families convinced the Municipal Board that there should be a park for them. The sale of the Raja of Bhimnagar's house which was in the vicinity was seen as a tragedy because his house had ensured "the privacy of our home" (167). There were men who were permitted in the zenana and from whom purdah was not observed. The women of the household observed purdah from Noor Khan, their driver since he had been in the household for only three years whereas from Jumman and his father before him, who had worked for the family since boyhood, purdah was not observed. Chuttan, a young man who was hired to keep a watchful eye on flies in Baba Jan's room left the room when Laila's aunts came in but Karam Ali "was allowed to stay because he was as old as Baba Jan, and had seen their babyhood" (30). They also did not observe purdah from Baba Jan's friend, Mr. Freemantle "but they were careful that their voices, even the rustling of their clothes were not heard by the others" (34). Even Englishwomen, except Mrs. Martin who had taught the girls were not permitted into the zenana. The presence of Asad and Zahid, Laila's cousins, in their room was met with disapproval and Hakiman Bua, "locked the door leading out of the zenana" after they had left (56). When Ram Das, the family jeweler and Naib Sahib, the manager of the estate came to the house, they sat on one side of the screen and Abida on the other and it was Laila who passed jewels and documents from one side to the other. Mushtari Bai, a courtesan who had educated generations of taluqdars in the intricacies of courtesy and etiquettes was also one of the visitors to the zenana.

The sons and daughters of the taluqdars were constantly made to realize their responsibility to respect, uphold and glorify their traditions regardless of the "outside influences" they were exposed to (38). As argued by Partha Chatterjee, the rigidity of the walls of the women's quarters was an attempt to jealously guard the patterns and rhythms of this space from being affected by the upheavals of the world outside, "Life within the household ordained, enclosed, cushioning the mind and heart against the outside world, indirectly sensed and known, moved back to its patterned smoothness" (59).

The fear of being caught without purdah is so persistent that it has a hold over Laila from beyond the grave, "And then inside me was a cold, paralysed horror because his eyes were open and he was looking at me. He was dead, he should have been dead. Yet he was looking at me. I had not covered my head, I had not raised my hand in salutation, and I could not" (82-83). After Baba Jan's death, "The zenana was busy with a life that grew from death" (84). The overt meaning is the mourning rituals after the death of the patriarch of the family but Hosain implies that the stifling and smothering atmosphere of the zenana and its values was a living death for its inhabitants. She had criticized purdah as "the greatest hindrance to the political development of Indian women" (206).[105] The fetishization of the veil that Hosain critiqued all her life was also employed to define and describe her, by Mulk Raj Anand when he wrote a profile for the first Indian edition of the book:

> Out of the purdah part of the household, screened by a big Kashmiri walnut carved screen, emerged the profile of a young woman-apparently to see who was in the living room.
>
> Sajjad Zaheer and myself were seated on a green velvet settee in the living room of Ishaat Habibullah, the son of a big *taluqdari* family, who was Bunne's [Zaheer's] classfellow in Oxford.
>
> "Attia, come and meet Mulk, just come from London…and Bunnebhai is here!"
>
> Tentative at first, then brightening, the young woman came in with her right palm

[105] Cited by Burton, p. 120

> uplifted in the polite salaam of the Oudh aristocracy. I exclaimed: "Surely an 18th century Mughal picture of the time of the Bahu Begum!" (i)[106]

Attia Hosain is reduced to the status of a purdahnashin woman, a quintessential sequestered woman emerging from the purdah part of the household and resembling a Mughal picture.

The Orientalist view of the women's quarters is both invoked and rejected in the novel. While talking of Baba Jan's friends, Laila mentions Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur:

> …a poet and a builder of palaces who had his zenana guarded by negro eunuchs. When he had succeeded his parsimonious father, he had lived riotously, emulating the legendary excesses of the late kings. It was said he made naked women roll the length of the throne-room in a race for a bag of gold sovereigns; that he, copying kings, had played chess in the courtyard with nude girls and youth as pieces. (33)

This, was the archetype of the harem in Orientalist paintings and literature which is portrayed as an exception to the norm, with the norm being the representation of the zenana inhabited by the women of Baba Jan's household.

Baba Jan sent his sons to English Universities, after being influenced by ideas of reform and to use the "weapons of the foreigners to preserve inherited values and culture" (86). He was disappointed in his son when he joined the Indian Civil Service, adopted a Western way of living and brought his wife out of purdah. Baba Jan and his friends, Thakur Balbir Singh, Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur and Mr. Freemantle had a:

> . . . strange arrogance and a will to exercise power-always to be in a position which forced men to reach up to them and if they ever stepped down themselves, it was an act of grace. In varying degrees they had been helped by birth, privilege

[106] Cited by Burton, p. 119

and wealth to assume such a position; but without some intrinsic quality they could not have maintained it. (34)

In Laila, one sees a nostalgic yearning for the ancestral house in Hasanpur, called Ashiana because it was ". . . the fulfillment of a deep need to belong, it was a feeling of completeness, of a continuity between now and before and after. In the city, the past attacked the present, and the future was lost in conflict" (88).

She does not worry about the curtained car which took them to Hasanpur because of this insatiable need to belong and a desire for continuity. Hosain's discomfort at the "unchallenged tyranny" (34) of Baba Jan reveals her belief in the inevitability and desire for change. These men and the values they represent are a grudging tribute to the dignity and integrity of a dying and decaying order, "The four men loved the city to which they belonged, and they lived and behaved as if the city belonged to them" (35).

Even when purdah is shed, the change is a mere superficial or visual change rather than a change in sensibility or outlook. Uncle Hamid had his wife Saira, "…groomed by a succession of English 'lady companions'. Before she was married, she had lived strictly in purdah, in an orthodox, middle class household. Sometimes her smart saris, discreet make-up, waved hair, cigarette holder and high-heeled shoes seemed to me like fancy dress" (87). She never addressed her husband by his name and the mention of Lenin and Soviet Union reminded her of linen serviettes, which shows how "assuming a modern exterior is no guarantee that one has got rid of purdah in all its metaphysical and psychological ramifications" (Palkar 114). The act of shedding the veil does not by itself "liberate" a woman from the strictures of purdah ideology. Similarly, donning a veil does not make her a victim of false consciousness.

The zenana is also a space, which when unguarded by its proponents allows its inhabitants small windows of opportunity to talk about matters of the heart and body. It was Zainab, raised in a more secluded family than Laila who told her about sex, "a girl's inevitable martyrdom whose horror could only be lessened through bawdy jokes" (95). When Laila says that the summer will prepare them for hell, Zahra replies that she would be in heaven, "amusing the old, bearded *moulvis"*(74). In an interesting inversion it was Laila who proposes to watch

the reception given in the honor of the Viceroy by the Taluqdars of Oudh, from the purdah gallery:

> Zahra can't I go with Abida Phuphi and watch from the Purdah gallery? You and I were content to do that once.
>
> Content? I was not content. There was no alternative in those days. You are lucky you do not have to wait until you are married to do all the interesting things I could never do. (147)

The discomfort of Laila outside the purdah gallery indicates how deeply ingrained are the feminine codes of shame and modesty. Zainab's subversion of these codes was made possible by marriage, thus indicating how the code of modesty is stricter is the case of unmarried girls.

In her story, "Time is Unredeemable", Hosain shows how the very presence of a man causes a confusion in the zenana where women on seeing Bano's father-in-law, "twittered like disturbed birds" (57). A woman's movement out of the confines of the house did not necessarily lead to a shedding of the veil. Instead, the purdah was engineered to be a "portable seclusion" (Papanek 295), screening a woman from the eyes of strangers even when she was outside:

> A sheet was tied round the back of the tonga and another to screen Bano from the driver, beside whom sat her father-in-law. Bano carried with her the shrouding 'burqa' she would wear to cross the platform. (63)

When Mrs. Ram urges her to remove the burqa, Bano listens to her but was glad "the closed car hid her from passers-by" (65). Burqa becomes a habit and she feels naked without it.

Laila, looks at her fascination with Ameer as " a nakedness to be hidden by each element of my will and feeling" (165). The purdah code entails a denial of the self and the desires of the self at the altar of cultural values and heritage. In a world such as this, love is seen as a "nakedness", a shame, an immodesty which is to be annihilated. Laila, Ameer, Asad, Zahra, Kemal and Sita are all victims of this value system. It is only Laila who refuses to be a victim,

and challenges this constant denial of self and rejection of love. It is with Ameer that she attains the sense of belonging and continuity that she had yearned for. It is this love which makes her go beyond the codes of modesty, morality and the limitations of her own self:

> The moment when Ameer kissed me had no beginning; it was as pure and eternal as the snows we had been watching in deep communicative silence. It was a part of every moment before it, the moment for which I had been born to become a part of existence before and after it, to know its meaning and fulfill its purpose. I knew a sense of such completeness and harmony that it seemed I was the earth, the sky, the light and the snow. (222)

In part III, Laila who is now nineteen talks of how her attitude towards Hasanpur and everything else changed because of the books she read and the people she met:

> My life changed. It had been restricted by invisible barriers almost as effectively as the physically restricted lives of my aunts in the zenana. A window had opened here, a door there, a curtain had been drawn aside; but outside lay a world narrowed by one's field of vision. After my grandfather's death more windows had opened, a little wider perhaps, but the world still lay outside while I created my own round myself.
>
> Now I was drawn out, made to join in, and not stand aside as a spectator. Yet the private refuge remained in readiness for withdrawal. (173)

The labor of those who had built Hasanpur was earlier invisible to her because of her "screen of emotions" (73) but now she was no longer oblivious to the squalor and drudgery of the lives around her. In part IV she returns to Ashiana, a "living symbol" (273) of her life. It is here that she recollects the momentous changes that drastically altered the lives of the taluqdars and

Muslims after the Partition. Laila also recognized that she had always desired "change without chaos, of birth without pain" (278). She moves from one room to the other reconstructing scenes we had not been privy to. Each and every chapter begins with a description of the room she is in at that particular moment. Burton argues that:

> The way Hosain deploys Aashiana in part 4 is arguably an amplification of the way it has functioned throughout the rest of the novel-namely as an archive, a storage space from which the past can be gleaned, can be made to come alive through the reconstruction of smells, sounds, images, voices. Like all archives, it can be used to retrieve a specific temporality, to commemorate a discrete past, and to hear whispers that are scarcely audible in other contemporary sources. (132)

Hosain, like Mehta represented the contradictions in the lives of Indian women in the context of colonial modernity by using the home as an archival source to record their own histories. This exercise was not one of preservation but of critiquing the "facile notion of home itself." The focus on the home as a historical record also enables us to bridge the gap between discourse and "reality" and understand their mutually constitutive relationship (Burton 5).

Looking at the reflection in the mirror, she realized that she was looking at a girl, "whose yesterdays and todays looked always towards her tomorrow, while my tomorrows were always yesterdays. I began to cry without volition and seeing myself crying in this room to which I would never return, knew I was my own prisoner and could release myself" (319). On seeing Asad, she tells him that she had been waiting for him, "I am ready to leave now" (319). Guha argues that belonging is about sharing and inhabiting a spatial and temporal imaginary. But according to Burton, he overestimates this desire for belonging and underestimates the troubled relationship that women have with it (132). In a conversation with Zahra, Laila asks her where she was when Laila needed her. She was in a "comfortable house, guarded by policemen and sentries" (304). Laila chooses a modest home for herself in the hills. Ashiana for her is a treasure-trove of memories, an archive which is rich in narratives about the past but, as pointed out by Burton her "capacity to be appreciative of the resources home offers as history and her

unfailing skepticism about its redemptive powers make her an interesting if not unique modern heroine" (133).

Gayatri Devi's *The Princess Remembers (1995)*

Gayatri Devi was the daughter of Maharaja of Cooch Behar and widow of Maharaja of Jaipur. She won a seat in the Parliament of India and was hailed as the woman with the most "staggering majority" by John F Kennedy. She had an unconventional upbringing in Cooch Behar, followed by a six years long courtship with the Maharaja of Jaipur. In her memoir, she describes her childhood, courtship and life inside the haveli in Jaipur with her husband's two other wives.

Gayatri Devi's memoirs map the whole gamut of experiences of women both inside and outside the haveli. The memoirs begin with the description of the lives of her Baroda grandparents who were "too liberal" to allow the practice of purdah. Her maternal grandparents' idea of purdah was, to not restrict the mobility of women as long as they were accompanied by chaperones and did not interact with the men outside their family circle. Purdah, though not enforced was observed in an unsaid manner since men and women chose to stay in different parts of the same space. Her grandmother, who observed the strictest form of purdah was an important leader in the women's movement in India and was the president of the All Indian Women's Conference. Gayatri Devi found it difficult to fathom how her grandparents who were products of a tradition ridden society could be harbingers of novelty and progressive ideas. Their daughter, Princess Indira Gaekwar of Baroda was one of the first Indian princesses to go to school and college. She exercises a choice and an agency which was unheard of and unprecedented in Rajput women of the age. When her marriage was arranged with the Maharaja of Gwalior, she wrote a letter to him indicating that she did not want to marry him. She expressed her desire to marry the Prince of Cooch Behar, which was a smaller and less important state than Baroda, he was of a different caste and clan and was seen as belonging to a 'Westernised' family. She corresponded with the Prince in secret for two years and eventually when they married, her parents did not participate in the wedding celebrations and sent her to the home of Sir Mirza Ali Baig in London to be married. As against their loose interpretation of purdah in Baroda, in Cooch Behar, her paternal grandmother who worked tirelessly for the emancipation of women maintained the strictest purdah and never attempted to challenge the

practice. It was with the marriage of her son and the arrival of the bride, "that purdah suddenly ended-except, of course, for the billiards room" (33).

The memoirs also offer us a glimpse of the complex processes of socialization and gender construction, as the girls'"training included learning how to entertain. Ma would call on Ila and Menaka and me in turn to do such things as decorate the dining-table for a party, choosing theflowers, the silver and gold bowls, and the trophies to add splendor to the table. Ila and Menaka were rather good at this, while I was absolutely hopeless" (71). It was her "sports loving eyes" which made her fall for the Maharaja of Jaipur who was India's leading polo player. Her dreams about him were the "reverse of the usual fairy tale" (100) in which she wished that she would magically change from a princess into a groom so that she could hold Jai's horse. She was astounded after her first visit to the zenana quarters where she met her husband's other wife:

> But somehow I hadn't expected that she would wear make-up and have her hair fashionably bobbed and speak excellent English. Nor had I expected that the furnishings of her apartments would be so modern and have such an air of sophistication; they could have been anywhere, in England or Europe or Calcutta, and only the view from the latticed windows into the enclosed courtyards and the screens of trees in the zenana gardens reminded us of where we were. (113)

It was after her marriage that she personally experienced purdah. When she reached the Calcutta station, her coach was surrounded by canvas screens and she was ushered into a car which drove up to the platform, to be taken to Woodlands, where the male servants she knew since childhood were dismissed from her presence. In the year of her marriage about four hundred women were still living in the zenana.

Many a times the activities in the zenana were a replica of the activities of the men outside:

> Jai's activities were closely followed with extreme and affectionate attention in the zenana, and any achievement was promptly celebrated. When Jai's team won

> the All India Polo Championship, for instance, skirts and shawls were embroidered with polo sticks; when he gained his flying license, the ladies, who never had-and were never likely to-set foot in a plane themselves, loyally decorated their clothes with aeroplane motifs. (170)

The zenana was not a self contained space whose walls closed upon itself. Outside influences, especially concerning the men of the family permeated the walls of the zenana and left an impact. The custom of purdah did not allow Gayatri Devi to uncover her face in the presence of the Dowager Maharani and she was never allowed to meet her husband's father. Even male doctors were not allowed to enter the zenana and were expected to diagnose illnesses on the basis of details given by the ladies in waiting. Like Geeta, Gayatri Devi began to love the veil that hid her face, "It also showed me that it was possible to be lonely surrounded by people, yet happy even in the enveloping shroud of purdah life" (193).

The war opened many doors for women like Gayatri Devi who attended Red Cross work parties at the ladies' club. It gave her the liberties that she craved for in the stultifying atmosphere of her purdah life in Jaipur. It also enabled her to interact with women from different spheres such as teachers and doctors whose company was "far more stimulating than that of the purdah ridden palace ladies…" (202). She also talks of the stricter and more severe form of purdah that was practiced in Udaipur as compared to Jaipur. At the Udaipur station their "railway carriage was shunted into a special purdah siding" where they were greeted by the Maharani. While in Jaipur the purdah cars had darkened windows, in Udaipur they had wooden shutters which turned the car into a "blind, airless box" (218) to protect the women from being gazed at. When she lifted the curtains of the boat to take a picture of Lake Pichola, the Maharana gifted her an album of photographs to satiate her curiosity and to prevent her from lifting the curtain again.

Both Gayatri Devi and Geeta are similar in their attempts to use education as a tool to liberate women from the constraints of purdah life and make them shed the "purdah of the mind." Gayatri Devi started a school for girls of the nobility since most of them were confined to the zenana and received no or very little education. She, like Geeta marveled at the curious

mixture she had become because of her outsider turned insider life in the haveli which allowed her to understand and sympathize with the zenana ladies despite her cosmopolitan upbringing:

> It is difficult for Westerners to understand why most of these conservative women were perfectly content with what seems, from the outside, a hopelessly dull and claustrophobic existence. In fact, their lives in purdah were much fuller and more active than one would imagine. Apart from running a large household, a woman with a wide circle of children, grandchildren, and relatives was the focal point of the whole family. As a girl in her own home, she would have been taught the basic accomplishments considered necessary for any Hindu girl: cooking, sewing, and taking care of children. Later as a young bride, she would learn the ways of her husband's family, and eventually, as a mother and grandmother her authority and her responsibilities would increase. Perhaps most important of all, she would never be without companionship and she would always be needed. Zenana life, with all its limitations, had profound and solid compensations, too. Many of the women would have been lost and threatened if they had been suddenly exposed to the outside world without the protection they had come to rely on. (209)

The changes that occurred in Gayatri Devi's life can be seen in terms of the space/spaces occupied by her, as charted out by her memoirs. The chapter titled "Further Change", shows her at Moti Doongri, high on a hill, a vantage point from which she gets a bird's eye view of the entire city and contemplates about the havoc wrecked by the town planning authorities, "the city that Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh had planned with such meticulous care almost 250 years ago and which every ruler who succeeded him had enhanced-the last of them being Jai" (365). Her relationship with the city of Jaipur is mediated by her intense attachment to her husband. She does not mourn his loss in England, in the polo field where he died, "Only when we reached

Jaipur, the city that contained so much of our life together, did I truly realize that Jai had gone forever" (351).

Conclusion

Thus, both Mehta's Geeta and Gayatri Devi are positioned at the threshold, as outsiders not completely sharing the values of the zenana and insiders who vehemently defend those values when they are condemned by others. In both, there is a profound understanding of the values of purdah culture, values that they cannot completely accept or reject. The journeys of all these protagonists are charted through spatial shifts and the architectural trope serves as an archive to understand the complex dynamics of interaction and negotiation with space. Purdah is the code of modesty followed by these characters and their creators. The narrative lingers lovingly on spatial details but draws a blank with regard to the articulation of women's sexual desires. In Hosain, there is a yearning for continuity with the past but there is also a consciousness of the need to move away for self knowledge and self-fulfillment. Laila is vocal about her desires and the need to move away from the ancestral home. The lived experiences of these characters reveal how the narrative of oppression is inadequate to analyze the embodied nature of the social script and the various and varied meanings attached to it. It is analytically useful to look at the zenana and purdah in terms of the "meaning making activities" (Young) of women. Gender, is one of the variables which mediate a woman's relationship to and within space. Caste, class, age, marital status, affect etc. play as crucial a role in determining the spatial construction of gender and gendered construction of space.

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Chapter 3

The Veiled Woman as the Oriental Other

Unveiling the Orient

In his influential work *Orientalism*, Edward Said talks of the exteriority of Orientalist discourse and how the strategic location of the Orientalist is almost always outside and above the Orient that he/she describes for the benefit of the Occident. The exteriority of the Orientalist text is often based on the assumption that the Orient does not have the epistemological apparatus to interpret and articulate itself. In his analysis of Edgar Quinet's *Le Genie des Religions*, he shows how the ontological and epistemological difference between the East and West was always maintained. The learned West was pictured as surveying from a vantage point the "passive, seminal, feminine, even silent and supine East" (138). Said says:

> The Orient is *watched*, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the *Description de l'Egypte* called "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness. (103)

The nineteenth century not only saw an upsurge in travel writing, it also saw the emergence of the discipline of anthropology. Anthropology, in its nascent stage, was conceptually similar to the principle of the great chain of being, which arranged human beings hierarchically using arbitrary standards of judgment. The Orient was a "malleable theatrical space" that was exploited for the possibilities it offered of staging the self in a favorable manner in relation to its dark double. Two themes that predominate in the Occident's construction of the Orient were, that "East was a place of lascivious sexuality" and that it was innately violent and barbaric (Kabbani 32, 24). Edward Lane saw himself as a bridegroom while approaching the East "As I approached the shore, I felt like an Eastern bridegroom, about to lift the veil of his bride, and to see, for the first time, the features that were to charm, or disappoint, or disgust

him."[107] Most of these narratives were written in a historical/sociological framework leading to a suspension of disbelief. The construction of otherness in discourse is done through sexual as well as cultural parameters and the "representations of cultural and sexual difference are constitutive of each other" (Yegenoglu 1). "In the East my pleasure lies" (Act I, Scene iii, 42), says the duty bound, honorable Roman in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The barge scene, in which the readers encounter Cleopatra for the first time represents everything that makes up the spectacle of the East (Kabbani 45).

Cornelia Sorabji's *Purdahnashin*

Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954) was the first woman barrister and zenana official to be appointed to the Court of Wards in Bengal, who hoped to improve the conditions of the *purdahnashin*. She was skeptical of abrupt changes such as women's franchise, was an ardent supporter of British rule and vehemently critical of Indian nationalism. In *India Recalled,* she points out how her British friends and acquaintances were inquisitive about the way secluded women in India lived and their position and status in the family (*Love and Life* vii-viii). The introductory note by Hariot Dufferin and Ava, attached to *Love and Life Behind the Purdah,* indicates the availability of a market of readers craving to know about veiled women:

> Perhaps in these days of stress and strain, of activity and competition, a peculiar interest may be found in contemplating lives spent in the strict privacy of the purdah, under the iron discipline of custom, and in observing, with reverence and administration, the way in which virtues of patience, charity, self-forgetfulness, and devotion to duty, flourish in this silent and secluded world. (7-8)

When she was going from Mentone to San Remo, she was stopped by the Customs Office at the frontier as they thought that her saris were silks taken to Italy for sale. She had to demonstrate by undraping her sari, "One pull and my draperies were at my feet." She was amused at the sense of wonderment in the officers, " 'Do it again!' they kept saying, as if they were Alice in Wonderland or Peter Pan." Although a lot of Indian men had travelled to these countries, their

[107] Quoted in Leila Ahmed, *Edward W. Lane*, p. 1. Cited by Kabbani, p. 112

clothes did not have the "same allure or suggestion of foreignness" (*India Calling* 44). The intended readership of her books is hinted at when she says that Parsee women have never been secluded and "have no social customs to which the West would take exception-unless, indeed, the disposal of the dead-exposure to a swoop of birds in a Tower of Silence-be counted as such" (13). In Sorabji's accounts, there are sweeping generalizations such as, "For the Hindu there was 'the Outside' where the men lived, and 'the Inside' (or zenana) for the women…" (17). The cases that came to her were those of inheritance, succession, *stridhan* etc., "in an itinerary and setting which were like an adaptation of the Arabian Nights" (53). She recounts how it was on the day she and her mother were visited by a secluded "Guzerathi" Hindu woman that she decided to study law and help women like her. She came in a covered carriage, completely robbed of her *stridhan* by the man who managed her property. Although the *purdahnashins* were given the liberty to give their statements from the seclusion of their quarters, judges and lawyers were always anxious about the identity of these women and the freedom or lack thereof to voice the truth. It was these fears and anxieties that created the need for women like Sorabji who could take their statements face to face (80). In her short story, "Love and Life", while talking about women sitting in the rose garden, located in the zenana end of the palace, she wonders why they had to be bound by high walls, "Not that walls of any kind were necessary; for those within would have died rather than creep outside their shelter: and those without?-Why, there were none, save serfs, who knew better their duty to their lord and the soil than to attempt to steal his roses, either through or over the wicket!" (*Love and Life* 40) This, "spatial imagery of enclosure" (xvii) indicates how Sorabji looked at zenana women as sequesterd and severely restricted in their movements. The outer walls of the zenana were high and had spikes like "the walls of any gaol." When Sorabji asked a Thakur, if she could take his wives out in a purdah carriage to make them see through the slits, the improvements he had made to the estate, he said, "Certainly, if they will go." Their refusal to go "Did our Grandmothers drive out to see the world?" (*India Calling* 54) shows how deeply ingrained and insidious the purdah values were. Sorabji, through the example of a princess from Bengal argues how most of them were spoilt, prone to lying and liked men who were "Bahadur" enough to cut off a disobedient man's head:

> All Hindu women of those days liked men to be autocrats, to command not to beg, to be off-with-his-head-ish, in their relationship to their women and servants alike.

> And she was Raj-bred; with intrigue had she been familiar since infancy, not the intrigue of French novels, but the intrigue of power and possession, the intrigue of politicians and diplomats.
>
> And the only armour of which she knew in this game of intrigue was-a lie. (61)

The young princess, Piari was elated at being able to learn English, keep accounts and read newspapers but the thought of sitting beside her husband for a meal or playing tennis with him was appalling to her, "Oh, Presence, is that a thing to ask such as me? How could we ever run and beat balls with uplifted hand in the sight of the crown of our lives?" (*Love and Life* 43) Despite this glimpse into an unorthodox world, there is no release from orthodoxy for Piari. She is replaced by her husband with another woman. Borrowing from Khayam, Piari sings,

> There was the Door, to which I found no key;
>
> There was the Veil, through which I cannot see:
>
> Some little talk awhile of *Me* and *Thee*
>
> There was and then no more of *Thee* and *Me*! (44)

Piari, dies during childbirth, "Unable to bear any longer the strain of inaction, of listening for footsteps which came not.." (48). In "Love and Death" Sorabji shows how the fear of purdah overrides the fear of death, as poor women afflicted by plague, submit to the ministrations of the doctor, "But the better classes, as you see, choose death rather than be looked upon by a man…" (52). Purdah values do not allow a woman to be seen by strangers even if those strangers are doctors who can improve their health.

"Behind the Purdah" (*Love and Life)* takes us to the royalty of Balsingh Rai and the focal point of the narrative is Miss Rebecca Yeastman, a lady doctor and a woman, "so self possessed, brisk a person, her walk was a surprise . . . and she was a thoroughly good creature. . . " (72) It is through her eyes that we see the zenana. It was "new and engrossing" with a large room, high and barred windows, "gaudy Western carpet", a silver bedstead with a mosquito net which was completely ineffectual and, "On the floor sat women of varying ages, some shaven and without

ornament, others caparisoned gaily enough, all in the rich dark reds and blues of the Kathiawad saree. They were moving their bodies to and fro to a monotonous Gregorian wail, which did not cease for the entrance of the intruder" (73). The illnesses of the zenana ladies could be cured by "diet, air and exercise" (74). The zenana was not just a place of imaginary illnesses, lethargy and ignorance, it is also a site of domestic intrigue and strategems to outmaneuver each other. The young Rani was afraid of being poisoned by the Mother Thakrani, "…the food contained poison sufficient to have extinguished instantly the nine lives of the most vital cat." The second part of the story, which is set in London takes Rebecca back to the "haunts of civilization." The promptness of the porter, the modern buildings, the quiet city and the "unmistakable cleanliness of English soap and water" are set against the enigma and claustrophobia of the zenana (75). The"brainless unjust atrocities" of Indian principalities are revealed in the exile of the senior Rani and the denial of her allowance on the basis of a report, Rebecca was duped into producing. The evening lamp lighting at the palace fascinates her because it is "so strange and Oriental." The ability of Rebecca to enter the women's quarters, as against accounts by male Orientalists gives an authority to her and Sorabji's voice, further silencing and effacing the narratives of those in the zenana. The zenana thus "becomes the essential space of Indian femininity and it is only after such a sanctum has been penetrated that the Anglo-Indian can claim to 'know' the Indian" (Suleri[108] 93). Sorabji, anticipates the questions her readers would ask about the zenana and answers them in her writings:

> What do the ladies do all day, you ask? Quarrel? No, they are too lethargic for any such activity. Most of them turn over and fondle their lovely jewels and silk garments. One Ranee has taken a violent passion for the harmonium! She has dozens of them in all sizes and by all makers, but refuses to be taught how to handle the instrument in the conventional way. As she is energetic about playing (with one finger and both pedals going furiously!) you can imagine the consequence. I no longer wonder that about half a mile divides the king's

[108] Cited by Lokuge, p.xxii

apartments from the zenana. (78)

Sorabji's narrator is always outside the zenana even when she is inside. There is no attempt to understand or empathize with the women of the zenana. It is a place of intrigue, scandal, lethargy and boredom, a place the narrator wishes to escape from.

The "well-dressed rooms" (Kabbani 117) of Orientalist paintings can also be see in Sorabji's accounts but unlike the focus on erotic female bodies, in Sorabji, one notices ignorant and "sluggish femininity" (Lokuge, *India Calling* xxvi). Freedom, for her is defined in terms associated with the ability to travel to England or enjoy the patterns of English life, "We want another Kipling now to write about modern India-especially since progressive Indian women have begun to share the social life of the English" (127). She was fascinated by "all that was picturesque among their ancient customs" (134) but deplored the ignorance of the zenana.

There is both, an exoticisation and feminization of India in *India Calling.* She talks of Lord Curzon's repentance of his autocracy, "Again he did not realize that Indians are like women in one respect" since they do not forgive those who point at their faults in public (175). It is the "white [wo]man's burden to civilize the world" that one notices in her approach to the *purdahnashin:*

> After years of experience, in untrodden ways, I conclude that the only way to help the illiterate and superstitious is to proceed from the known and accepted to the unknown; to base the enlightenment which you would bring upon the superstition; not to flout the superstition…You have first to create recognition of a need for help, next a desire for help, and for help from you. (170)

Sorabji's self assurance is strongly reminiscent of British missionary women's accounts of their work with zenana women (xxi). She talks of the courage of Rukhmabhai who got married in her childhood, refused to consummate the marriage when her husband claimed her, went to prison and later became a doctor. Rukhmabhai appeals to Sorabji because, throughout her life, she "remained unemotional, and untouched by the hysteria of politics of 'women's rights'…" (62)

Rukhmabhai[109], lamented how fresh air and sunlight was not denied to plants and animals but women were not even considered worthy of such basic essentials. She also pointed out how the very poor and very rich were less burdened by the demands of purdah as compared to others since the rich had sprawling gardens while the poor were compelled to shed the veil because of necessity. While there is sympathy for women in the zenana, Sorabji's exteriority as a narrator and her vitriol against feminism makes her account lean strongly on the side of Eurocentric depictions of veiled women, "Nothing could mar the joy one had in the work itself; the opportunity of studying the real people of India in their settings; the opportunities of travelling of the beaten track; of learning legend, folk-lore and custom; best of all, the delight of contact with Indian *Purdahnashin" (India Calling* 132-133).

The strongly held belief in the ability to know "the real people of India" and the existence of a homogenous category of "Indian *Purdahnashin"* shows the uncanny similarity between her writings and Orientalist discourse. The complex representation of the veil and the veiled in Mehta, Hosain and Dharker make us rethink our notions of choice, subjecthood and agency but Sorabji reduces the Indian woman to either a naïve/helpless victim or scheming/conniving agent of intrigue. The only thing lacking in her experience of the zenana is a camaraderie with an English friend, "Oh, how did I grudge not having an English friend with me to enjoy what followed! That has been my one big miss through every thrilling zenana experience; no one with whom to share a wink! (148)

In the letter written by Lord Hobhouse to the author, he speculates about the various reasons behind the practice of purdah. He says, that like caste divisions and the belief in worship of ancestors, the practice of purdah is a strongly held custom predicated on "what is due to the dignity of women." He thinks they act as a cementing force between individuals of a group and fulfill social needs, "If it were possible to take away these social sanctions suddenly, or even rapidly, the result would be chaos, some frightful disruptions and convulsions" (10). He does argue for a need for women lawyers to interact with women directly, as Hindu and Islamic laws relating to property are not unfavorable to women unlike English common law (11). Although because of her profession, Sorabji came into contact with malfunctioning families/zenanas, her shift from the particular to the general leads to creation of homogenous categories and

[109] Cited by De Souza, p. 257

overarching statements. She, herself faced opposition by all and sundry for her attempt to enter, what were then exclusively male spaces but she never hints at a similarity between her and her *purdahnashins.*

Orientalist Trope in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children, Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*

Salman Rushdie, born in 1947 in Bombay, continuously harps on the dialectic between inside and outside in his relationship with his erstwhile homeland. In *Shame* he confesses how writers like him are often called trespassers and pirates and he wonders if history should be the sole property of the participants. He promises his readers that the novel he is writing will be a novel of leave taking, after which he will bid farewell to the East, but he also reveals how he is still joined to this world, "if only by elastic bands" (28). Said offers a scathing critique of the claims of objectivity and verisimilitude of Orientalist texts by analyzing the figures of speech, style, narrative devices and motifs common to Orientalist discourse which reveal how Orientalist discourse offers a representation and not a " 'natural' depiction of the Orient" (21).

Rushdie's writings incorporate both, the narrative strategies of Orientalist discourse and Said's critique of its claims of objectivity. He consciously encourages his readers to compare his fiction and its contrived parody of Orientalist writings, with Orientalist texts such as Richard Burton's translation of *Arabian Nights.* Burton's work was based on his personal experience and could be thematically and stylistically, seen as lying between the scholarly Orientalist texts and the French imaginative writers Said discusses. His works are structured like pilgrimages to places of economic, political and religious significance. He is both an adventurer to the remote islands he describes and a Western commentator who observes and analyses the peculiarity of natives and their individualism. Thomas Assad[110] (5) shows the struggle between individualism (his desire to rebel against authority) and his sense of identification with England (establishing himself as authority in and over the East) (Said 194-195). It was Antoine Galland who first translated *Arabian Nights* into English, thus institutionalizing these narratives. Edward Lane also translated *The Thousand and One Nights* in 1841 but it was Richard Burton who contributed the most to the image of the Orient as an illicit, sensual space where the women offered pleasures which were forbidden in the Victorian bourgeois households "They offered a prototype of the

[110] Cited by Said, p. 195

sexual in a repressive age, and were coveted as the permissible expression of a taboo topic" (Kabbani 26). For Burton, who also wanted to translate the writings of Vatsyayana, Eastern wisdom was sexual wisdom. Kabbani argues how texts were pretexts for both Burton and Lane, which represented not their subject matter as much as the preoccupations and personality of their creators (81).

In *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie's controversial novel about the history of Islam and Prophet Muhammad, Changez Chamchawala's library had a ten-volume set of Burton's translation which was left unread because of his loathing for books, and right next to Burton was a copper and brass lamp which reminded him of Aladdin. Similarly, in *Shame* we come across a reference to Burton's translation of *Alf laylah wa laylah* and innumerable times Rushdie uses the number thousand and one, reminding his readers of the tales of Schezadre. In *Midnight's Children (*1981), Saleem Sinai, the narrator, compares himself to Scheherazade, but unlike her, he does not have a thousand and one nights. The number, 1001, is the "number of night, of magic, of alternative realities" (300). These references to Burton, whose translation paved the way for the Orientalisation and feminization of the Orient, are worked into these texts for a contestation of the authority of Orientalist texts which professed to describe other cultures, constructing them in the process. This also reveals the "citationary nature of Orientalism" (Yegenoglu 80) which works through references to former Orientalist works, a repetition which contributes to the formidable nature of this discourse. When Saladin gets transformed into a beast in *The Satanic Verses*, he asks the manticore about his "macabre demoniasis" (159). He is told how they were turned into beasts by those who had "the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (168). It is the power the Occident has to describe the Oreint and in the process demonize the Orient that Rushdie hints at through this conversation.

Veil as a Multilayered Signifier

Salman Rushdie in the introduction to *Midnight's Children,* acknowledges his debt to "those great Indian novelists" (xi), Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. It is in Jane Austen's works that he came across representations of stifled, sequestered women and their astonishing similarity to the miserable plight of Indian women. Rushdie attributes the existence and continuity of the custom of purdah to patriarchy's fear of women but he does not consider purdah clad women submissive or fragile. In the novel, Aadam Aziz's mother who had spent her entire

life in purdah, did have the resourcefulness and the strength to manage her husband's gemstone business after he had a stroke. While the father was "behind the veil which the stroke had dropped over his brain", the mother dropped the veil for the sake of her family. When her son sees her afflicted by boils and rashes, he urges her to wear purdah when she sat in the store, she retaliates by telling him how it was her way of establishing trust since her customers won't buy gemstones from a face hidden behind a veil (18).

One of the central metaphors in the novel is a perforated sheet through which Aadam Aziz catches glimpses of his future wife Naseem, the daughter of Ghani, the landowner. This episode in which Naseem offers fragments of her body to her doctor, Aadam Aziz through the hole in the perforated sheet, is framed by a reference to the painting of the huntress Diana and the stag that was transfixed by her gaze. When two women who looked like wrestlers hold up a piece of white cloth between the doctor and his patient, Ghani explains to the baffled Aadam that his daughter was a decent girl who has to be hidden from the world. The doctor was asked to tell Ghani which part of her body he wanted to inspect and as per his instructions that part would be placed next to the hole in the perforated sheet. A practice/ custom considered absurd by the writer is taken to its absurdist extreme to expose its absurdity. Every visit of the doctor slyly contrived by the patient, allowed him to see a different seven-inch part of Naseem's body. Aadam Aziz was under the spell of the perforated sheet, "This phantasm of a partitioned woman began to haunt him, and not only in his dreams" (26). His imagined portrait of his beloved was a "badly fitting collage" of her various parts. The perforated sheet was not only the beginning of his romance, it also became the site of its consummation. Through the veil and its expanding circle of significations, Rushdie not only castigates the chasm/unbridgeable gulf that it creates between the sexes but also criticizes the cult of virginity that predominates in a patriarchal society. This perforated sheet becomes the legacy of Amina Sinai and the narrator. It casts long and recurring shadows in Amina Sinai's life when she attempts to fall in love with her husband in fragments. It is also the self-proclaimed legacy of the narrator who is forced to look at life in fragments because of the curse of the perforated sheet.

When Aadam urges his wife to come out of purdah, he asks her if she considered her feet and face obscene, she argued, "They will see more than that! They will see my deep deep shame!" This shows the internalization of purdah ideology which makes every segment of a

woman's body a synecdoche of her shame-the shame of her sex. Aadam sets fire to his wife's veils because he wanted his wife to be a modern Indian woman. When forced to discard the veil, the formidable Naseem Aziz, who is called Reverend Mother in the novel, retires behind the "invisible fortress of her own making, an ironclad citadel of traditions and certainties" (47). Rushdie reveals how the body which the veil aims to conceal is also eroticized by the same veil. When Jamila Singer sang sitting demurely behind a white silk chador, entire Pakistan fell in love with her, including her own brother and Mutasim, the Nawab's son. The desires which are created by the veil are satiated in the brothels, "no city which locks women away is ever short of whores" (442). Tai Bibi, the oldest prostitute, who could alter her bodily odors according to the desires of her customer, could mimic the odors of Jamila Singer, in a manner similar to the whores of 'The Veil' in *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie reestablishes the association between the veil and the desiring gaze which the veil attempts to guard from, by showing the sexual curiosity aroused by the veil.

The three mothers of Omar Khayyam, the "peripheral hero" of *Shame* (1983) had been raised by "Parsee wet-nurses, Christian ayahs and an iron mentality…" (13). They were kept inside the zenana wing of Nishapur till their father's dying day, subject to a "lifelong sequestration" (14). There were subjects, such as money, which they were forbidden to discuss amongst themselves. After their father's death, their decision to seal themselves off from the world to hide their "shame" turned their house into a "sweltering, entropical zone in which, despite all the rotting down of the past, nothing new seemed capable of growth…" (30). The hero, Omar was perturbed by the closeness of his three mothers, of their putting their heads together, hugging each other and finishing each other's sentences. When they declined, they declined in the same fashion, the "bonds of their identity remained unbroken" (36). By talking of the indistinguishable nature of the Shakil sisters, Rushdie represents the depersonalized, deindividualized nature of women who veil. The veil they don strips them of the individuality which does not allow an onlooker to distinguish between them. When Omar expressed his desire to leave the house to which he was confined, like his mothers had been by their father, Omar's birthday wishes turned them into "psychological centaurs" (40), so much so that the separation of personalities happened in the wrong way. Bunny, the youngest started greying and acting authoritatively instead of the eldest Chunni. In a manner similar to the confinement of the Shakil sister, Rani Harappa was pushed to the "backyard to the universe" (94) in Mohenjo by her

husband, Iskander. Rani's confinement is far worse than the seclusion of the zenana since it does not afford her the privacy and security that it assures to its residents. While Rani was abandoned by her husband, first for Pinkie Aurangzeb and later for his political ambitions, the villagers of Mohenjo who went to the west in search of jobs, returned with white women, "The number-one wives treated these white girls as dolls or pets and those husbands who failed to bring home a guddi, a white doll were soundly berated by their women" (152). After the downfall of her husband, when Rani and her daughter Arjumand are kept under house arrest, the always already confined Rani doesn't see a difference, "It just means there are new faces around to say a few words to now and then" (188).

It is a society which is governed by the law of *takallouf,* a "tongue-tying formality", a "compulsory irony" (104), a restraint which prevents people from giving vent to their genuinely felt feelings. When Raza Hyder tells his wife, Bilquis, that he has to attend Marshal Aurangzeb's reception and she need not accompany him on that arduous trip, it is the law of *takallouf* which prevents Bilquis from telling her husband that it is the charms of Pinkie that made Bilquis a burden for Raza. Talvar marries Good News for the "hunger of her womb" (163). After their marriage he came to her once a year, to plant his seed making her feel like a "vegetable patch" at the mercy of an over-zealous gardener", stuffing her with "alien unwanted life" (207). The arithmetical progression of children made her kill herself but she had nothing to say about her husband, who as the narrator cryptically argues would never be brought to trial on any charge. Repression, Rushdie points out 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" (173).

Rana Kabbani argues how the Orientalists are "atavistic and viscerally reactionary" (15), seeing unevolved, stagnant, inert and primitive societies which were as changing and complex as Occidental societies. Invariably, they sided with the tyrant and the patriarch because they served the need for the picturesque. Rushdie on the other hand exposes the tyrant and the patriarch by allowing those at the periphery to speak. In *Shame,* Rani Harappa embroiders her deplorable condition in her autobiographical shawls by making herself of the same materials as the house. In *The Satanic Verses,* Saladin Chamcha's father, Changez Chamchawala keeps the house as it is, as a memorial of his dead wife. His desire to mummify was so great that he made his servant,

Kasturbha wear the clothes of his dead wife. Rushdie comments on how women are considered dispensable and interchangeable. Kasturba could conveniently step into the shoes of Nasreen Chamchawala for her husband.

Fatima Mernissi argues that the belief in the seclusion of women is a consequence of a Muslim binarism which divides space into the public and private. The public space of the umma has to be kept pure, sacred, untainted and untouched by fitna, the anarchy and disorder caused by the threat of female sexuality. Prophet Muhammad's wife was a brilliant, resourceful and successful woman in a city where, "the gods are female but the females merely goods." She watched the world from her "stone latticed window" (118). The narrator in *The Satanic Verses* recounts the history of Jahilia, how both Ibrahim and Hagar, with their son Ismail came into this valley and how Ibrahim abandoned Hagar, using the name of God to justify his betrayal. Hagar climbed two hills, fed her son, was led by Gibreel to the waters of the Zanzam but the citizens of Jahilia did not celebrate the survival of Hagar, they celebrated the visit of Ibrahim. She, a seventy-year-old woman who had employed him to manage her caravans, is relegated to the inner courtyard of the house after marriage, much like the women of Titlipur and Ayesha who is veiled by butterflies. Similarly Gibreel Farishta considered his Alleluia Cone a treasure which had to be guarded from the "piratical hordes" (315) who were trying to purloin her. Mrs. Sufyan was apprehensive about harboring Saladin under her roof to protect the honour of her young girls. In the city, Mirza Saeed had a large, fashionable, modern house but in Titlipur he urged his wife to adopt the old ways and retreat into purdah. He made her understand that it was an erotic game since his inordinate passion for her could demand satiation anytime and anywhere and at that time if she was out in the open it would cause shame and embarrassment. To satisfy his conscience, Mirza Saeed read Tagore's *Ghare Baire*, the story of how a woman goes astray when she comes out of purdah. Elena Cone slapped her sister and called her names when she told her that she was not a virgin and the same Elena, who was unattainable, who did not allow a man to lay even a fingernail on her was reduced to a body, "clad in diaphanous veils" (307) in calendars and magazines after her death. The narrator self consciously adopts the prudishness of purdah culture by drawing a veil over Rekha Merchant's jump to death since it was not proper to look into a woman's clothes.

Rushdie refuses to limit the discussion on purdah by confining himself to the binary of oppression and liberation. He orientalises the veil and the veiled in a labored and contrived fashion to expose the myopic nature of orientalist discourse and by revealing near similar predicament of the unveiled, he comments on the deep-seated misogyny and regressive nature of both oriental and occidental society. Rushdie offers a caustic critique of the practice of veiling by showing how the curiosity aroused by the veil breeds unhealthy desires, the very same desires and passions that it had intended to control. Purdah ideology is not only about the hiding of women's faces and bodies or curbing their sexuality. It also entails a division of space into outer and inner. This division of space is gendered, but in *The Satanic Verses,* Rushdie explores another dimension of purdah. An exiled Imam dreams of returning to the homeland, a paradoxical predicament of "looking forward by always looking back" (205). The curtains of his house are always shut to keep the alienness, foreignness from entering his world. He desired to be "unsullied, unaltered, pure" (207), uncorrupted by the influences of the city that provided him sanctuary, so that he could return an unchanged man to his native country. The central heating in his house simulates the tropical weather of his homeland. Alleluia's father Otto Cone was a Polish migrant who survived wartime prison camp. He was pained by memories of his past. He anglicized his and his daughters' names, rejected Polish literature and called himself an Englishman. He, like the Imam kept the curtains permanently drawn, but unlike the Imam, not to preserve the purity of his identity but to keep up the façade of being an Englishman. He wanted to wipe the slate clean but he was also aware of the "fragility of the performance" (298). These are attempts at "self contextualization" made by migrants who feel both located and dislocated. They feel alienated from their adopted country and their past and feel the need to orient themselves to their new surroundings by providing themselves a cultural context (Cundy 68). The veil in Rushdie's corpus is also used to symbolize the separation between the earthly and heavenly worlds-the partition between the here and now and the afterlife-"So tell us truthfully before you go, what sort of paradise do you expect to discover when you have passed through the veil?" (*Enchantress,* 35).

Saladin Chamcha (*The Satanic Verses)* spent his entire life attempting to metamorphose into a refined, sophisticated Englishman. He married Pamela Lovelace, the "custodian of his destiny" (49), to complete the process of transformation but he failed, like many men in Rushdie's novels, to understand the woman he claimed to love "He needed her so badly, to

reassure himself of his own existence, that he never comprehended the desperation in her dazzling, permanent smile, the terror in the brightness with which she faced the world, or the reasons why she hid when she couldn't manage to beam"(50). Much later she told him how the suicide of her parents, because of their gambling debts left her desolate, abandoned, unloved and without confidence. England, for Saladin was always the postcard England. He refused to accept that both England and his wife were "really real." As Jumpy Joshi says, Saladin was like his namesake, who wanted to conquer his England and Pamela was a part of it "I was bloody Britannia" (175).

The necessity of repetition/reiteration and materialization of a regulatory norm/convention creates a space for agency by the possibility of its appropriation and rearticulation[111]. Foucault's idea of subjectivation suggests that subjects are constituted by discourse, but the discourses that constitute the subject are also the conditions of its empowerment (Yegenoglu 21). In *Shame,* according to an authorial aside, women have taken over, they who are pushed to the margins/peripheries by history have claimed the centre and demanded the inclusion of their counter-narratives, so much so that the male narratives will be refracted by the prisms of the women. In Rushdie's oeuvre, it is often the men who are pawns in the hands of enterprising, conniving, agential women in the narrative. Both Omar (*Shame)* and Saleem (*Midnight's Children)* complain of being sinned against by women. Saleem enumerates a long list of women who changed his life, Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Amina Sinai, Pia-his aunt, Reverend Mother, Jamila Singer, Parvati, Padma and the Widow,"From ayah to Widow, I've been the sort of person to whom things have been done; but Saleem Sinai, perennial victim persists in seeing himself as protagonist" (330). What Rushdie offers here is a scathing, vehement critique of the adoption of the status of victimhood by patriarchal society by attributing to women a negative agency, the agency to wreck havoc in the normative framework of society. In the list of women who have made and unmade him, Sinai also includes the country to which he is "mysteriously handcuffed" (3)-"It is perhaps a matter of connection: is not Mother India, Bharat Mata, commonly thought of as female? And, as you know, there's no escape from her" (565).

[111] Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* p. 10. Cited by Yegenoglu, p. 21

The Shakil sisters in *Shame,* amused themselves in the zenana wing by inventing private languages and fantasizing about men's bodies, bizarre genitalia such as holes in their chests in which their own nipples will fit. The narrator also hints at rumors of intimacy between them by saying that they explored each other's bodies to while away their time. After the pregnancy, they turned their mansion into a refuge, using the "dumb waiter", an external elevator as a mediating link between Nishapur and the outside world. Their act of retreat was one of pride, not contrition. Hashmat Bibi stressed the importance of constructing the external elevator in such a manner that it could be operated by the three sisters without the need to show them at the window, "not so much as a little finger must be capable of being glimpsed" (17). The solidarity of the three sisters which made the other two feign the symptoms of pregnancy that only one was obliged to display was a determined attempt to hide the "shame" of an illegitimate child, or to turn the individual shame into a collective one. Good News, was destined to marry Haroun Harappa but when she discovered that her future husband had no ambitions, her eyes fell on the polo star, Talvar Ulhaq. That night she tied her bed sheets together and climbed down into the arms of the polo star. The women in Rushdie's fiction, as the narrator complains, refuse to be tied down by the chains of misogynist forces. Rani Harappa, much like Philomela, continues to perpetuate memories even when she is under house arrest. Her eighteen shawls were an epitaph of wool to represent the degradation of her husband and the unspeakable crimes he committed. She called them "The Shamelessness of Iskander the Great" made by Rani Humayun. One of those shawls was an autobiographical record of Rani's cloistered existence, in which she depicted herself as made of the materials of the house and having merged with the earth, cracks, the cobwebs and the general mist of oblivion that surrounded Mohenjo. Arjumand, under house arrest began to do what she had never done in her life, she dressed to kill, swung her hips, and used her sexuality to cause strife between soldiers. When Captain Ijazz told her that the other soldiers wanted to rape her and he wouldn't stop them, since, "you are bringing this shame on your own head." she retaliates, "Let them come, by all means, but you must be the first" (190).

The Satanic Verses is about the struggle unto death between Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, native and immigrant, angel and divine but even in this narrative, women have pushed their way from the peripheries to the centre. Tavleen lifts her djellabah and stands before the hijacked passengers stark naked, so that they could all see "the arsenal of her body, the grenades like extra breasts nestling in her cleavage, the gelignite taped around her thighs, just the way it

had been in Chamcha's dream" (81). The veil, which is expected to conceal the modesty of a woman can also conceal objects of destruction. Rushdie refers to not just the arsenal hidden behind the veil but the "arsenal of her body." In a patriarchal culture it is the fear of a woman's body which engenders elaborate forms of control and seclusion to regulate that body. Gibreel Farishta is burdened by the "chains of desires and songs" (336) of Rekha Merchant and Alleluia Cone. Rekha Merchant on her flying carpet alternated between cursing him and serenading him with love songs, the gazals of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the song sung by Anarkali in *Mughal-e-Azam.* Rosa Diamond, like Circe weaves a spell of stories and it is this sorcery that keeps Gibreel chained to Argentina. Zeena Vakil, for Saladin, was a "beautiful vampire" whose vegetarianism had turned her into a cannibal in love making.

Before the monotheism imposed by Mahound, Jahilia had a cult of goddesses-Uzza-the goddess of beauty and love, Manat-the goddess of destiny and the mother goddess Al-Lat-the equal and the opposite of Allah. The battle between monotheism and polytheism is also the battle between Hind and Mahound, Al-Lat and Allah. Hind seduces Mahound into accepting the goddesses as equals of Allah and not his daughters. After Hamza, the Prophet's uncle, kills Hind's brother, she turns into an embodiment of vengeance like the furies of Greek tragedies. She kills her brother's killer and eats his liver and heart. Her agelessness, when the rest of Jahilia was subject to decay and degradation earned her the reputation of a witch who could turn human beings into desert snakes. This sexually voracious, ageless Hind became the embodiment of the city. When she lost the city because of the cowardice of her husband, she retired with her occultist texts in her tower room for two years and two months and used witchcraft to send a fatal illness to Mahound. Aijaz Ahmad accuses Rushdie of having an imagination, replete with "imageries of wholesale degradation and unrelieved social wreckage" (1468), that offers, "only chilling portraits of women, in terms so very close to the dominant stereotypes" (1469). Instead of recreating dominant stereotypes, Rushdie draws upon the ambivalence in Orientalist writings towards women, who were seen as "erotic victims and scheming witches" (Kabbani 53).

Honour and Shame in Rushdie's Fiction

Shame grapples with the polymorphous, multi layered nature of the word shame. The narrator is at a loss to find the English equivalent of the word, *sharam*, which has a whole web of meanings such as discomfiture, modesty, embarrassment, shyness etc. for which English has no

counterparts. The revelation of the pregnancy of one of the Shakil sisters, makes the narrator exclaim, "O shame, shame, poppy-shame!"(16), Omar is the "public shame of unwedlocked conception" (20), although his mothers command him to not feel the forbidden emotion of shame when he is called names in the street. He, who does not feel shame hypnotizes and rapes Farah Zoroaster when she does not succumb to his wooing, thus bringing "shame upon the school" (52). Bilquis' father is shamed by being called "Mahmoud the Woman" by street urchins since he, being a widower had to act as a mother to his daughter. 'Shame' is also used to refer to the dishonor of married women who slept regularly with their husbands. Sexual intercourse even between husband and wife was never discussed or even mentioned, so much so that when pregnancies occurred, they did so as if my magic, "The idea of parthenogenesis had been accepted in this house in order to keep out certain other, unpleasantly physical emotions" (74). For Arjumand Harappa, 'virgin Ironpants', a woman's body brings nothing but "babies, pinches and shame" (107). 'Shame' of an infertile woman is labelled a collective shame, the shame of her husband and husband's family. The word is also used to refer to immigrants, *mohajirs* who engender resentment because of their defiance of the force of gravity, because "we have flown" (85). Most importantly, the novel is about Sufiya's shame, the shame that makes her blush, the shame she embodies. Sufiya Zinobia, the daughter of Bilquis, who contracted brain fever at the age of two, is in her mother's words, her shame. She reminds her mother of her secret visits to Mengal Mahal, "something to do with visits to the cinema and fat-mouthed youths" (100). Sufiya embodies the shame of not just her mother but many other fictional, real and quasi real characters. The authorial aside tells us how not so long ago in the East End of London, a Pakistani father murdered his only child, a daughter because she fell in love with a white boy, although she had not "gone all the way" (115) and brought dishonor on the family name. We are told how this was a tragedy because of the immense love of the father for his daughter and because of the refusal of his friends and family members to condemn his actions:

> We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp what must seem unthinkable to peoples living in the aftermath of the death of God and of tragedy: that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride…Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn;

meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme, ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence." (116)

Rushdie gives this girl a name, Anahita Muhammad or Anna and wonders if Sufiya is Anna and maybe her fever was a figment of her mother's imagination or deception, maybe it was the repeated blows to her head to defend the ideal of honour which did the damage. It is the same preoccupation with honour which prevents Shahbanou from leaving Sufiya alone with a male doctor. *Shame* is haunted by the ghost of Anna Muhammad. Anna reminds the narrator of the last sentence of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*-"'Like a dog!'" he said: it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him" (118). The narrator is pained by the death of this girl but not astounded by the circumstances of her death and the apathy of the community. He understands this paradoxical concept of honour and shame, how men possess honour and women are honour, how shame/modesty/honour are believed to be innate and at the same time require a public display of its supposed existence or adherence. In *Midnight's Children,* Rushdie talks of the twin problems of the youth of Bombay in the 1970s, the possibility of procuring alcohol in a dry state and romancing girls in a clandestine manner, to prevent "the very Oriental shame of a scandal" (633). Through these images Rushdie lays bare the link between shame and violence, a link that he explores and exposes in the rest of the novel. He remembers another incident in which an Asian girl was assaulted by a group of white boys on an underground train. Later remembering the beating, the girl felt not anger but shame. She refuses to talk about this traumatic episode and does not lodge a complaint.

It is within this framework of shame and its inextricable link with violence within which Sufiya Zinobia is placed. This tale of the Beauty and the Beast is a "modern fairy-tale" (70) a story of an arranged marriage wherein a merchant because of his misfortunes pledges his daughter to a local zamindar, Beast Sahib, and receives a lavish dowry in exchange. Beauty like a devoted dutiful daughter marries the Beast Sahib for the sake of her father but she finds her husband monstrous and horrible in the beginning, but like all fairy tales this one ends happily as Beauty discovers the benign side of her husband and falls in love with him. The narrator asks the Great Living Poet what if Beauty never loved the Beast and what if a Beast lurked inside Beauty. Rushdie's reworking of Beauty and the Beast is a story of Omar Khayyam's love for Sufiya Zinobia, who was a "saint and monster conjunction" (159).

Orientalist discourse is predicated on a binary epistemological structure of Orient/ Occident, sensual/rational, inside/outside, veiled/unveiled in which the Western subject occupied a sovereign, autonomous status and refuses to acknowledge its relational dependency on its "other." In his analysis of Georg Buchner in *Shame,* Rushdie suggests how the true dialectic of history is not left-right, capitalists-proletariat, haves-have nots, good- evil, it is epicure against the puritan and it is an internal dialectic. Like Danton and Robespierre, human beings are both epicurean and puritans and can harbor various irreconcilable views within themselves. Rushdie by concocting a synthesis of the Beauty and the Beast, not only exposes the dichotomous structure of Orientalist discourse but also rejects it to achieve a synthesis of the two binary opposites. Sufiya realizes that Pinkie Aurangzeb's turkeys are a bone of contention between her parents. In the labyrinths of her unconscious she discovers the link between shame and violence which makes her tear down their heads and reach down into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks. It was the same "demon of shame" (170) which made her pounce on Captain Talvar Ulhaq, her sister's husband. She was both the incarnation of her family's shame and its chief cause. Sufiya, was concomitant of the possibility that "barbarism could grow in cultured soil, that savagery could lie concealed beneath decency's well-pressed shirt" (200). A burqa clad woman is seen as an epitome of modesty, but it was in a head to toe black burqa that Sufiya Zinobia stepped out of her house to be deflowered by four men whom she turned into headless bodies after her multiple deflowering. Rushdie puts forth the idea that society should condone purdah not only because it subjugates and stifles women but also because it unleashes a violence that will destroy all of society (Parameswaran 152).

Veil, Women and Truth

Veil is a "multilayered signifier" which refers to numerous things, such as the layer of cloth that covers a woman's face and which hides the Orient and the Oriental woman from apprehension. It is also a "metaphor of membrane" which serves as a screen around which western fantasies of penetration revolve. The Orient, seen as an embodiment of sensuality is always understood in feminine terms. The racialization and feminization of the Orient happens simultaneously in Orientalist imagery. The Orient is associated with "dissimulation, dissemblance and concealment" (Yegenoglu 47-48). Unveiling in Orientalist discourse stood for the penetration and conquest of the Orient. As pointed out by Yegenoglu:

> The Western subject's desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women. What explains such an obsession with the Oriental woman is the metonymic association established between the Orient and its women. The Orient, seen as the embodiment of sensuality, is always understood in feminine terms and accordingly its place in Western imagery has been constructed through the simultaneous gesture of racialization and feminization. (73)

For Nerval and Flaubert, Orient was a place of aesthetic, imaginative and sexual possibility. Nerval[112] feels the urge "to unite with a guileless young girl who is of this sacred soil, which is our first homeland; I must bathe myself in the vivifying springs of humanity from which poetry and the faith of our fathers flowed forth…." Flaubert in his Oriental travels dwells on his encounter with Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan and prostitute. What he liked about her was her lack of expectations and her refusal to demand anything from him, which made him conclude that "the oriental woman is no more than a machine" (220). She was the prototype of "impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity" (Said 187). Her unconstrained, boundless sexuality was symbolic of the fecundity of the Orient. Even a cursory reading of not just Orientalist texts but their titles (such as, D.G Hogarth's *The Penetration of Arabia)* reveals the sexual innuendoes in the description of the relationship of the Orient with the Occident. The relationship between the two was hermeneutical, and the geographical, temporal and cultural distance between them was expressed through "metaphors of depth, secrecy and sexual promise" (Said 222).

Even a cursory look at representation in painting, sculpture and literature reveals that Truth is often imagined and conceptualized as a woman. She may be naked or veiled, in which case the veils have to be slowly and steadily stripped away which is symbolized in countless symbolization of discovery. In a patriarchal culture, the gesture of uncovering a woman's body is

[112]Nerval and Flaubert cited by Said, 182-187

synonymous with unraveling a mystery. Viktor Frankestein finds that philosophy has only partially "unveiled the face of nature." His chemistry professor, Waldman, told him that modern scientists "penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding places."[113] Frankestein and his professor, both here reiterate "the conventional imagery of nature as a woman and the attempt to arrive at the truth is a difficult penetration into her body" (Brooks, 215). Alleluia Cone in *The Satanic Verses,* while climbing the Everest, felt that in that moment, at that height she could hear the music of the universe, "you can lift a veil and see the face of God" (198). The representation of the deceptive, masquerading character of women finds one of its most powerful expressions in Nietzsche's work where he argues how truth is as enigmatic and as deceptive as women, "Woman, conscious of man's feelings concerning herself, walking beautifully, dancing, expressing delicate thoughts: in the same way, she practices modesty, reserve, distance realizing instinctively that in this way the idealizing capacity of man will grow" (425)[114]. By comparing truth, veil and women Nietzsche was offering a scathing critique of the philosophy of truth. He refutes the idea of an essence or a "real" behind the veil (Yegenoglu 52). Veiling women, according to Zizek, shows an "extremely sexualized" perception of the universe where even a cursory glance can provoke desire that no man could resist (78). There is a conflation of the possible and the actual in the way Muslim symbolic space is conceptualized. The interaction of men and women creates the possibility of a sexual act which is assumed to have taken place (85). Zizek points out how Khadija assured Muhammad of the visions he had received. There is therefore a "slippage between the woman as the only one who can verify Truth itself and the woman…as an ontological scandal" that needs to be concealed from God (81). He recommends that we read the ideology behind veiling by looking at Lacan's reading of the competition between two Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, over who will paint a more believable illusion. Zeuxis painted a realistic picture of grapes which deluded birds into picking it but the competition was won by Parrhasius who painted a realistic picture of a curtain on the wall of his room. Zeuxis asked him to pull aside the curtain to show what was behind it proving that in Parrhasius' painting the illusion resided in the belief that the covering was a veil to hide the "real" thing. Lacan refers to this incident to show the workings of feminine masquerade

[113] Shelley, p. 47. Cited by Brooks, p. 215
[114] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power.* Cited by Yegenoglu, p. 51

which has the structure of mimicry. In mimicry one imitates not an image but those aspects of the image which make it seem that there is a reality behind it:

> What if the true scandal this veil endeavors to obfuscate is not the feminine body beneath it, but the inexistence of the feminine? What if, consequently, the ultimate function of the veil is precisely to sustain the illusion that there *is* something, the substantial Thing, behind the veil? If, following Nietzsche's equation of truth and woman, we transpose the feminine veil into the veil which conceals the ultimate Truth, the true stakes of the Muslim veil become even clearer. (85)

Rushdie's Narrative Devices

Rushdie employs the trope of the veil, the idea of being veiled and unveiled to reveal the predicament of the veiled and the daily negotiation that it involves. When Bilquis' father's Empire Talkies was destroyed in the blast, the wind that puffed outwards burnt her eyebrows and tore her clothes off, leaving her stark naked in the street, but she was oblivious of her nakedness because "the universe was ending." Rushdie compares this nudity of Bilquis with the predicament of all migrants who are forced to leave their pasts behind. They make desperate attempts to roll up their pasts in their bundles with the intention of unrolling it like a carpet in a different country but on the journey something seeps out of those remnants of their past, they are "stripped of history" (63). Bilquis lost everything except the "blackened remnants of the garment of womanly honour", the "dupatta of modesty" (64). It is in this state that Raza Hyder finds his future bride and tells her how their courtship is the reverse of the usual etiquettes of wooing, in which the husband instead of doing a slow, gradual unveiling of his bride has to first clothe her. Their relationship blossoms in the days before partition, in a red fortress where the government had rounded up Muslims to protect them from the wrath of Hindus. After their betrothal she was made to sit behind a screen of stone lattice-work and her territory was guarded by a young foot soldier. Isolated behind that screen, Bilquis dreamt her dreams of queenliness and the grandeur of her wedding day. Later in the novel when Rushdie talks about migration he talks of the hopefulness of individuals and nations who come unstuck from their native land but

he also poignantly talks of the "emptiness of one's language" (87). The analogy that he draws between Bilquis being stripped of her clothing and immigrants being stripped of their past/history reveals the ambivalence in his attitude towards the veil. As argued by Uma Parameswaran, Rushdie, Attia Hosain and Rama Mehta associate purdah with oppression of women and also look at it with some nostalgia (Parameswaran 151). But Rushdie's writings also rework historical accounts by narrating her-stories in which women occupy centre-stage and steer the course of history, time and narrative in the directions they choose.

Later, of her own accord Bilquis dons the burqa to protect herself from that wind that had stripped her of her honour. She donned this "veil of solipsism" and was rendered invisible, a shadow searching the corridors for something that it had lost. She became, "less than a character, a mirage, almost, a mumble in the corners of the palace, a rumour in a veil" (209). When her husband rose to power and a dictator was born who listened to the likes of Maulana Dawood, the fanatical society of Pakistan/Peccavistan objected to unveiled women walking the streets or going about their business improperly attired.

Ayelet Ben Yishai puts forth the importance of the idea of representation in *Shame.* There are a number of narratorial/authorial asides in the novel which ostensibly transparent are the most "pregnant with mediation and consequently, with ideology" (Bloom 249).The real question according to Yishai is not the representation of women or Pakistan but the possibility and meaning of the act of representation. In one of his narratorial asides, in *Shame,* Rushdie wonders how different this novel would have been if he were writing in a realistic vein. In that moment of candor and honesty Rushdie lays bare the limitations of his perspective about Pakistan, "I have learned Pakistan in slices, the same way as I have learned my growing sister" (69). The confessional, autobiographical mode is used here in an ironic way since the text itself implies that the inadequacy of the narrator would be shared by all human perspectives and narrators. The repeated allusions to censorship also make the possibility of a realistic account of the political, ideological, religious climate of Pakistan distant. Rushdie's comment also raises questions about the oxymoronic nature of realistic fiction, had he documented verifiable facts in his narrative it could not have been a novel, as he says, "Realism can break a writer's heart" (70). Edward William Lane's *Modern Egyptians'* narrative resembles that of an eighteenth-century novel. The book begins with a description of the setting, then moves on to personal characteristics,

pedagogical methods, customs, rituals, festivals and ends with a description of funeral rites. In Lane's book, the narrative voice is timeless while the subject of the book passes through a cycle of life and death. According to Said, this device by which "a solitary individual endows himself with timeless faculties and imposes on a society and people a personal life span" is one of the very many narrative devices which lend authority to a text. Rushdie, in *The Satanic Verses* on the other hand, refuses this objectivity and omnipotence of Orientalist discourse. While Lane's approach tried to convert an "artless text into an encyclopedia of exotic display and a playground for Orientalist scrutiny" (Kabbani 161), Rushdie's metafictional narratives insist on the mediated, subjective, ideological and flawed nature of all historical and fictional accounts.

This metanarrative about the larger narrative we are reading constantly blurs the distinction between fact and fiction and reveals the unreliable/fragmented perspective of the narrator, hence foregrounding the centrality of the question of representation. The narrator of *The Satanic Verses,* says, "I know the truth, obviously, I watched the whole thing" (10) but does not make any claims of being omnipresent, "And one day (it was so, it was not so)" (37). There are moments in the narrative where the narrator-creator of this fictional universe is God himself, who once he has created the universe and set the rules, does not want to intervene but the narrator confesses to having lost his sense of self control and intruded in the narrative as "Ooparwala" (409). One of Gibreel's dreams is about an immigrant from Persia named Salman and his disillusioning discovery of the unscrupulous, deceptive nature of Prophet Muhammad's revelations. This fictional Salman is a thinly veiled version of the other Salman who is outside the narrative. Salman tells Baal-the satirist how the Prophet's rules curtailed each and every aspect of public and private life but these well-timed revelations were businesslike not angelic/divine. Salman's Prophet is a fallible human being who married women much older or much younger than him because he did not want to be answered back. After his realization of the true nature of the Prophet and his revelations, Salman surreptitiously began to change the meaning of the verses recited by the Prophet. This reworking or rewriting of the meaning of the verses serves as a synecdoche for the novel, *The Satanic Verses,* and again dissolves the boundary between fiction and reality. Similarly, in *Midnight's Children,* Rushdie inserts himself in the narrative when Saleem Sinai looks at Rushdie with envy since he being a prefect gets the best girls in the Cathedral School Social.

Rushdie's magic realist fiction, quite often metaphorises the literal or literalises the metaphor. The unconscious, subtextual association of the veil with that which is illicit, forbidden and erotic is shifted by him from the connotative to the denotative register. Gibreel dreams a brothel in Jahilia called Hijab in *The Satanic Verses*:

> An enormous palazzo of date-palms in water-tinkling courtyards, surrounded by chambers that interlocked in bewildering mosaic patterns, permeated by labyrinthine corridors which had been deliberately decorated to look alike, each of them bearing the same calligraphic invocations to Love, each carpeted with identical rugs, each with a large stone urn positioned against the wall. (376)

None of the clients could find their way without assistance into the rooms of their favorite courtesans or from the brothel into the street. Norman Bryson talks of the transformation of rococo space wherein the creatural body presented for the gratification of the viewer's desires is without a specific spatial, temporal setting. The Orientalist paintings represent women in a similar libidinous manner but in a "well dressed room" with its elaborate tapestries, rugs, jewels, sofas etc (Kabbani 117). The curtain is Rushdie's parodied, exaggerated version of the harem of Orientalist discourse, the harems which were guarded by eunuchs. It was these eunuchs, "lamp genies", who escorted these customers to the courtesans with the help of a ball of string. This "windowless universe of draperies" was managed by a nameless Madam whose identity was a secret. Her oracular, sibylline voice was the profane opposite of Mahound's sacred verses. In Orientalist discourse, the harem is a place of "overburdened signification", a space characterized by tyranny/despotism, excess (women, passions, opulent interiors), perversion and violence which the West abhorred and was fascinated by (Lewis 183). *Floris and Blauncheflur*, according to Kabbani, offers one of the first descriptions of a harem which fixed the East as a land which traded in sensual pleasures. The description of harems which was a "self perpetuating topos" represented the luxury, languor, sensuality and excess of the East. The harem was "bourgeois drawing room's secret foil" (121). Oliver Goldsmith[115], in *Citizen of the World,* couldn't help discussing the charms of the Orient like many others "I am told they have no balls,

[115] Cited by Kabbani, p. 60

drums nor operas in the East, but then they have got a seraglio… Besides, I am told, your Asiatic beauties are the most convenient women alive, for they have no souls; positively there is nothing in nature I should like much as ladies without souls; soul, here, is the utter ruin of half the sex" (138-9).

Home and Harem

The categories of 'home' and 'harem' are spatial constructions that "metaphorically and metonymically" construct home and away or empire and nation using female bodies "within the antagonistic and comparative framework of colonial epistemology" (Grewal 4-5). In the colonial framework, purdah, zenana and antahpur are employed interchangeably because they are a 'phatasm' (Alloula[116]) of the secluded Eastern woman, signifying, her submission and her inaccessibility. Travellers to the East were dazzled by what they saw as the exoticism and mystery of the East and the Eastern woman but the English aesthetic of beauty revolved around clarity. The East was seen as an opaque, dark land; what Foucault[117] considered the opposite of the panopticon, "unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchial caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and illusions of ignorance were fomented" (153). For writers like Burke and Ruskin, physiognomy was the sign of spiritual and moral qualities and the attempt to conceal was a sign of immorality and vice. The aesthetic of beauty was implicated in the discourses of knowledge and power and was indicative of the desire to establish a monolithic, homogenous English identity and a submissive, non-threatening other in the colonies (Grewal 28). Burke[118], considered beauty, an essentially feminine quality that was associated with submission, since, "We love what submits to us", what has "softer virtues"(110). It was also racialized since a non-white woman was not seen as beautiful by Burke. The bodies that were "pleasant to the touch, are so by the slightness of the resistance they make" (229). 'Harem' becomes a nodal point around which sections from both the colonizing and colonized groups "can formulate different and related hegemonic relations and their own subject positions" (18). The Indian nationalists constructed the figure of the Indian woman as morally and spiritually superior to the idle, frivolous and loose English *memsahib*. Thus, the category of 'home' was deployed by multiple agents shaped by colonial education, "For the Indians what

[116] Cited by Grewal, p. 5
[117] Cited by Grewal, p. 25-26
[118] Cited by Grewal, p. 29.

colonial discourse termed the *harem*, a space of opacity, became then *home*, a reconstituted Victorian space that was transparent in its clear manifestation of moral virtues as symbolized by Indian middle-class women" (25). Transnational influences, for both the colonizer and the colonized, were seen as enabling forms of sexuality which were considered deviant or contrary to the dominant ideology. Thus, we see, what Spivak[119] calls, the "worlding" of the Third World in this problematic use of colonized people for the constitution of the Western subject. Leila Ahmed argues how the harem fascinates and is loathed by Western scholars. The harem is defined as a system which permits a man to have sexual access to more than one woman. It can also be described as a system which allows the female relatives of a man to share living time and space and have access to each other and to other women in their community. It was the second aspect of the harem which elicited more attention and fascination, as compared to the first, "What recurs in Western men's accounts of the harem is prurient speculation, often taking the form of downright assertion, about women's sexual relations with each other within the harem" (524). Men before entering the inviolable space of women have to give a warning in the form of coughing or calling. A segregated society such as that of Saudi Arabia might not be a feminist utopia but it does not allow men to completely control how women think and talk about themselves or about others (528). Ahmed talks of Carla Makhlouf-Obermeyer's account of the Yemeni custom of women's afternoon gatherings, called *tafritas,*where they met to smoke, sing, dance, satirize and ridicule men (529). The harem was a site of "generalized perversion and of the absolute limitlessness of pleasure." Another feature associated with the harem of the Western imagination is "the interplay of pleasure and frustration." It is characterized by an absence of the phallus which is symbolized by the figure of the Lord who cannot enjoy or satisfy all the women in the harem and the eunuch who guards the harem (Alloula 95-96).

As in many other places in Rushdie's oeuvre, the veil becomes an instrument of subterfuge and deception. Mahound's guards could not find Baal-the satirist in the labyrinthine corridors of hijab, the brothel in *The Satanic Verses*. The curtain by the very fact of its being and by the confessions of the customers during the sexual act to the "horizontal staff" is concomitant of the voices of dissent in Jahilia. The grocer Musa confessed to offering prayers to the goddesses even after Mahound's imposition of the belief in one God, "you can't beat a female

[119] Cited by Grewal, p. 64.

goddess; they've got attributes the boys can't match" (378). It is during one of these rendezvous that Musa's obsessive fantasy about the Prophet's wives is revealed, about which the courtesan comments, "No wonder Mahound secluded them, but it's only made things worse. People fantasize about what they can't see" (380). It is the lure of the hidden that purdah culture perpetuates and Rushdie employs in his narrative strategies. Giving in to the law of supply and demand, the Madam of hijab agrees to satisfy the forbidden longings of her clients. Each of the twelve courtesans assumed the identity of Mahound's twelve wives. The alliances in the brothel came to mirror those of Mahound's household in Yathrib mosque. In this anti-mosque, Baal became the husband of the twelve wives of Mahound, who expected him to act like him. Their work, instead of making them cynical and disillusioned had made them traditional and docile, "Sequestered from the outside world, they had conceived a fantasy of 'ordinary life' in which they wanted nothing more than to be obedient, and –yes submissive helpmeets of a man who was wise, loving and strong"(384). Baal, whose life mirrorred the life of Mahound, also espoused his ideology of segregation to preserve the honour of women and to curtail their sexual freedom. At his trial, Baal narrated the story of his and the customers' illicit longings in the simplest language, much to the amusement of the crowd. He was sentenced to be beheaded since Mahound saw no difference between "writers and whores", both, strategically conceal and reveal to alternately satisfy and frustrate the expectations of their audiences.

Nicholas D. Rombes Jr. argues how Rushdie often uses cinematic techniques and the vocabulary and references to films to draw attention to the myriad ways of seeing the world. Rushdie privileges the curious, involved and omniscient/semi omniscient perspective of the narrator over cinematic perception since the narrator sees, poses questions and attempts to understand what he sees; as Rushdie says there are "places which the camera cannot see" (*The Satanic Verses* 457). A camera is limited as compared to human beings. It can see what is shown by klieg lights. A helicopter hovers over Club Hot Wax and sheds streams of light on it, its noise drowns the noise of the people. The fragility of the camera prevents it from going beyond the shielding walls, invariably taking sides. For instance, the camera did not see the death of Dr.Uhuru Simba who died in prison under suspicious circumstances, the attacks on black families, police brutality, and grievances of young men and women of Brickhall. One of the focal issues of the novel is the issue of representation and this is reiterated by Rushdie's choice of a narrator who could be God, shaitan or Rushdie himself. The video recording of the raid on

Pinkwalla's club flattens these characters, thus making them vulnerable to distortion and manipulation. This epistemological concern with the ways of perception, with the ideas and ideologies which condition viewing is one of the most persistent concerns of his work. He constantly blurs the boundaries between inside/outside, East/West, colonizer/colonized, native/migrant, dream/reality, sacred/profane through various narrative strategies, one of them being "historically authenticated references" (Finney 191) in a narratological framework of magic realism. Gibreel's dreams are made up of vignettes from Prophet Muhammad's life. In the novel, Rushdie attempts a genealogical reading of Islamic discourse, how it was born and the circumstances that shaped it to its present form. In a similar way, the story of Ayesha is a not so oblique reference to Naseem Fatima from Pakistan who led thirty-eight Sh'a followers into the sea in 1983. Through his wordplay and extensive charting out of the "polysemantic nature of language", Rushdie pushes his readers to read in more than one way (Finney 191). Gibreel Farishta, who was the biggest star in the history of Indian cinema, who was accorded a godlike status by the country, whose relationship with Rekha Merchant was much talked about and who had an accident while shooting a scene is an oblique reference to Amitabh Bachchan.

Rushdie's narrative technique which uses veil as a self-conscious narrative device offers tantalizing glimpses of what is to come to his readers, concealing and revealing, arousing and frustrating their desires. In the very first chapter in *Shame,* the narrator tells the readers how Omar Khayyam took the never to be reversed decision to cut down on his sleeping time, a decision he followed the rest of his life, till his wife went up in smoke but immediately after that the narrator clams up, "but no, ends must not be permitted to precede beginnings and middles" (22). When his erstwhile friend Iskander Harappa spurns Omar Khayyam to pursue his political ambitions, Omar suffered an attack of vertigo so severe that he was sick in the back of the taxi but about that the narrator says, "I draw a fastidious veil" (133). In *The Satanic Verses,* he mentions Rekha Merchant's love for Gibreel Farishta and her suicide in a cursory fashion and after a few pages says, "I see that I must, after all, spill poor Rekha's beans" (25). After making a series of revelations, Saleem, in *Midnight's Children,* retires behind his veil of secrecy "But I musn't reveal all my secrets at once" (10). To the enchanted Padma, who is Saleem's sole audience in the narrative, he like Naseem Aziz, offers glimpses of himself. He defines this narrative technique as the "Matter of fact descriptions of the outré and bizarre, and their reverse, namely heightened, stylized versions of the everyday…" (303) The unreliable narrators in

Rushdie's fictional universe enable the readers to question all kinds of representations. He compares himself to Lifafa Das, the Dugdugee man, the peepshow man, in the urge to "encapsulate the whole of reality" (97). He confesses to having written the story in an erroneous fashion by recording the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on the wrong date. He asks himself and his readers, "Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything-to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (230) It is the truth of memory that the narrator relies on, the memory that "selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also…" (292). This is a narrator who is tempted like many other autobiographers to the belief that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words that one uses to describe them, "it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred" (619).

The veil in Orientalist discourse is seen as a mask hiding the woman who does not yield herself to the Western gaze. The veil turns the Oriental woman and by metonymic association the Orient into an enigma which hides something behind the mask. The figure of the masquerade is constantly employed to talk about veiled women. Edmondo de Amicis expressed his bafflement at the "strange" nature of these practices:

> The first impression is most curious. The stranger wonders whether all those white veiled figures in bright coloured wrappers are masquerades, or nuns, or mad women and as no one is ever seen accompanied by a man, they seem to belong to no one and to be all girls and widows, or members of some great association of the ill married . . . One is constrained to stop and meditate upon these strange figures and stranger customs." (206)[120]

In his study of modern forms of control, Foucault demonstrated the nexus between knowledge and power, that Edward Said draws upon to talk about the power of Orientalist discourse. Foucault's reference to Bentham's panopticon talks of the modern, disciplinary forms of control which organize space and its individual occupants in a strategic way so that they are

[120] *Constantinople.* Cited by Yegenoglu, p. 44

visible and transparent. Yegenoglu talks of how the colonial subject's desire to control and dominate the foreign land is not independent from his scopic desire, the desire to penetrate through his surveillance eye what the veil hides. Similarly, since the veil allows the woman to see without being seen, it "disallows reciprocity" and implies that the woman is not surrendering or making herself available for vision (Fanon). The structure of voyeuristic pleasure which is predicated on the "invisibility of the subject" and "visibility of the object" is reversed in this scenario thus disturbing and frustrating the voyeur (Yegenoglu 62-63). Omar, Salim, the narrator and the readers are complicit in this structure of voyeuristic pleasure. Leading a sequestered existence in Nishapur, Omar (*Shame)* suffered the sensation of being lost inside a cloud, "whose curtains parted occasionally to offer tantalizing glimpses of the sky…" (37), turning our peripheral hero into a voyeur who used a telescope to gaze at Farah Zoroaster. This peeping revealed to him the infinite texture of human life and also provided him vicarious pleasure of living through other human beings. It is for the same reasons that he became a doctor, because a doctor is nothing but a "legitimized voyeur" (49), a stranger who is allowed to poke fingers and even hands into places which people take most trouble to hide. In a dramatic gesture, when Iskander Harappa tears off his shirt to show how his heart, Rushdie compares him to Richard Burton winning over the soldiers by showing his battle scars in the film *Alexander the Great.* The male body is often seen in a heroic framework flamboyantly displaying its rugged masculinity. Laura Mulvey, while talking about cinema, says:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at ness." (25)

Rushdie's oeuvre is peopled by both male and female voyeurs, although male voyeurs outnumber female ones. In Orientalist paintings, the voyeuristic atmosphere is deeply unsettling and the women in the paintings are oblivious of being watched. Omar's mothers couldn't help

themselves from quizzing Omar about the goings on of the world, the minutiae of ladies' fashion, of town life, thus spying on the world through the eyes of their son and this "voyeurism by proxy" (46), had the effect of weakening their moral fibre. Gibreel's confessions of the 'carnal ecstasy' (437) he shared with Alleluia Cone and Saladin's attempt to destroy Alleluia's certainties turned Saladin into a voyeur. Gibreel inflicted his intimacies on the non-participating Saladin and aroused him, so much so that he began to imagine himself standing at her window where she stood naked like an actress on a screen while a man's hand caressed her. Saladin saw himself as that pair of hands, thus turning himself into a voyeur and a part of the spectacle-watcher and watched.

Peter Brooks talks of his interest in the visual representation of the body, since viewing the body especially in the realist tradition is of enormous importance in literature as well as other arts (xi). Sexuality, he argues, belongs not just to the physical body but to the whole web of fantasies and symbolizations which involve a dynamic of curiosity that is the foundation of all intellectual activity. The dynamic of the narratives that Brooks discusses in his book derive in large part from the curiosity about the body and their explicit or implicit postulation that the body, another's or one's own, holds the key to pleasure as well as knowledge and power (xiii). Rushdie's writings like Brooks' project revolve around the stories about the body and the body/bodies in the story. In many narratives, such as the one under discussion the protagonist desires a body and that body comes to represent for the protagonist an apparent ultimate good, since it seems as if the body holds within itself the key to satisfaction, pleasure, knowledge and power. According to Brooks, "The libido amandi, the libido dominandi and the libido capiendi-lust for love, lust for power and lust for knowledge" are intertwined (11). The story of Pygmalion and Galatia, which Brooks considers the allegory of the narratives that interest him is the story of how the desire of Pygmalion for Galatea animates the body and how this body marked and imprinted by desire can enter narrative, "The desire for the body is a part of a semiotic project to make the body signify, to make it part of the narrative dynamic" (25). The narrator of *Shame,* accuses Omar of the same tendency, "I accuse him of playing God or at least Pygmalion, of feeling he had rights of ownership over the innocent whose life he had saved" (144). Narrative desire becomes oriented towards knowledge and possession of the body, "Narrative seeks to make the body semiotic, to mark or imprint it as a linguistic and narratives sign" (Brooks, 8). The narrator talks of the smallness of Sufiya Zinobia as against the rangy, elongated Good News

Hyder but having said that, he says, "no, we shall avoid, at all costs, comparing her to an Oriental miniature" (137). The self confessed, self proclaimed refusal to Orientalise the heroine exposes and critiques the rampant Orientalisation and feminization of the East.

Peter Brooks in *Body Work* talks of the link between scopophilic and epistemophilic projects, suggesting that the desire to know and master is closely intertwined with sexual desire and curiosity. Scopophila, an erotic pleasure in looking, according to Freud is one of the constituent elements of human sexuality since childhood. A realist narrative has a similar erotic investment in comprehension or knowing or what Toril Moi described as "epistemophilia" (189[121]). The visual is often valorized as the privileged instrument which provides access to truth. The uncovering of truth thus becomes a process of unveiling and revelation. According to Barthes[122], the realist narrative is predicated on the hope of reaching the denouement and knowing the end of the story. In his reading of *Emma Bovary,* Brooks shows how the pursuit of truth implies an erotic pursuit of nudity, an act of exposing and laying bare the body that is the ultimate object of knowledge. In a tradition of patriarchal economy, the body that needs to be laid bare is the body of a woman and the gaze is masculine. Barthes uses the analogy of the striptease to talk of the narrative strategy of a readable text which entails a progressive unfolding of the truth leading ultimately to a "plenitude of meaning" (19):

> The object of attention and desire-most obviously, the person of the beloved is not detailed in its nakedness but rather approached by way of its phenomenal presence in the world, which means by way of the clothing and accessories that adorn and mask the body. The approach to the body of the beloved may strive towards unveiling but it also tends to become waylaid in the process of this unveiling, more interested in the lifting of the veils than in what is finally unveiled. (19)

It is this dual sense of unveiling that we see in Rushdie's work, where the characters within the fictional universe strive to engage with the "phenomenal presence" of the over-dressed/ veiled

[121] Cited by Brooks, p. 99
[122] Cited by Brooks, p. 19

woman such as Nassem Aziz (*Midnight's Children)*, making earnest attempts to unveil her and the readers on their part are offered a striptease which removes or offers to remove the obstacles in the path of denouement. It is this link between scopophilic and epistemological desires that is conspicuous in colonial discourse as illustrated by Fanon in *A Dying Colonialism.* To unveil the Orient, is to understand it, to control it, to make it available for the Occident. Rushdie explores and plays with this link between the two but also refuses to be tied down by its ideology. The veiled and unveiled Oriental women in Rushdie's oeuvre resist even the attempts of the narrator to confine them to the narrative fabric he weaves. The excess, overabundance of meaning conveyed by the veiled body is over and above the meanings it was believed to convey. Rushdie by employing the narrative strategy of veiling and titillating the readers makes them also complicit in this drama of Orientalism.

Shame, though it promises to unveil the secrets of its characters moves from nudity to clothing. It is the burqas of Bilquis, the "head-to-toe cloaks of invisibility", which enable Raza, Bilquis and Omar to escape, since, "Nobody questions women wearing veils" (262). In a similar "cloak of invisibility" Jamila Singer escapes into a nunnery from the clutches of the state, "exchanging one kind of invisibility for another". Here, Rushdie by referring to a nunnery collapses the distinction between East and West condemning both for their confinement of women. This motif of disguise is also a recurrent feature of Orientalist discourse. In many accounts, such as Burton's, who disguised as a Muslim to go to Mecca, one comes across the attempt made by a Westerner to pass off as an Oriental, to live among them, to penetrate their sensibility to better understand them, but never to become them (Kabbani 144).

It is the reworking, re-articulation and re-signification of the same structure of voyeuristic pleasure that Rushdie achieves in his writings. While talking about Algerian women's willful embrace of the veil as a mark of their resistance against colonization, Mary Ann Doane argues how this was an enactment of "a defamiliarised version of the Orientalist representations of the veil."[123] Irigaray, insists that a mere reversal of the system cannot be the be all and end all of subversive politics since that reversal remains constrained by and within the economy of that system. The only possible way to shake the foundations of the phallocentric order is a "purposeful but distorted imitation" of what it means to be feminine:

[123] Yegenoglu, 65

> There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path," the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it . . . To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere. (76)[124]

It is this mimicry of the role assigned to the Oriental woman that Rushdie embraces, in the way he employs the veil as a narrative technique. This mimesis makes visible and reiterates the constructed nature of this 'natural' attribute of the Oriental woman.

One of the issues that Said grapples with in his monumental work is how does one talk of human experience and how does one represent other cultures. Taking the example of Jacques Berque and Maxime Rodinson he shows how "methodogical self consciousness" about one's field of study can free oneself from ideological straitjackets. The problem with Orientlists texts is their complacency, insulation and supreme confidence in their neutrality and objectivity. Edward Said advocates submitting one's approach to critical scrutiny, which Rushdie achieves through his flawed, discontinuous and fragmented narratives. While talking about how Islam is misrepresented in the West, Said raises the question about the possibility of a true representation since representations are embedded, implicated, intertwined first in language and then in culture,

[124] Cited by Yegenoglu, p. 64

history and institutions which gave them birth. The methodological conundrum can be resolved by looking at the "common field of play" of representations, whose contours are defined and limited by "some common history, tradition, universe of discourse" (273). In the Afterword, Said, talks of how his book was often celebrated by religious fundamentalists as an anti West and pro Islam work. He clarifies his position on fundamentalism by talking of the anti-essentialist stance of his book. Fundamentalists think of the "fundamentals" of religion as ahistorical categories because of which they are unsettled by Orientalists and writers like Salman Rusdie.

Conclusion

The East is a site of lasciviousness, lethargy and violence in Orientalist discourse. There is an exteriority on the part of the narrator in most accounts of the Orient and its women. The racialization and feminization of the Orient go hand in hand. Sorabji was given an access to the zenana because of her gender and profession but there is a chasm between her and the women she describes, which is strongly reminiscent of Orientalist literature and paintings. Despite facing hurdles in her ambition to practice Law, there is no understanding or empathy on her part for the *purdahnashin.* The ability to penetrate the zenana makes her believe that she understood, "the Indian *Purdahnashin."* While Sorabji is physically close/ inside the zenana, Salman Rushdie is geographically and culturally distant and unlike her, he refrains from making a claim about knowing or representing the 'real' East or Eastern woman. On the contrary he foregrounds the aesthetics and politics of representation. Veil is not only used to refer to the cloth that conceals a woman, it is a loaded signifier with various layers of meaning and significance. Rushdie's veiled women are not confined to the passivity of victimhood, instead, the narrator feels compelled to narrate their stories because they pushed themselves from the periphery to the centre. While Sorabji's claims to know the 'real' *purdahnashins,* and explain their predicament for the benefit of the Occident, align her writings with the tropes of Orientalist discourse, Rushdie's parodic, ironic appropriations of Orientalist tropes, make his writings an aesthetic equivalent of Said's scholarly endeavor. He draws upon the Orientalist trope of the exotic and erotic veiled Oriental woman, enacts the congruence between scopophilic and epistemological desires, turns the very act of narrating into a drama of revealing and concealing and above all questions and parodies all modes of representation.

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Chapter 4

Battle of the Veil

The potency of the veil as a symbol of deeper meanings or nuances could be better understood by analyzing the historical situatedness of this discourse. Fanon wrote about the "historical dynamism of the veil" (63), which has been used as an instrument in the hands of various forces, to serve different political ends. The way people dress or the strictures about clothing, dictated by custom constitute a society's distinctive identity because they are immediately noticeable. In this chapter I propose to look at the centrality of the veil in colonial discourse which stimulated a similar kind of a centrality in anti or post-colonial discourse.

There are various ways in which we can analyse the predicament of purdah clad women in the twentieth century. The impact on the structure and patterns of family, especially women because of the wave of modernity and nationalism is one such way; the efforts towards modernization in west Asia, which had a tremendous influence on Muslims is another possible lens through which the notion of purdah could be approached. The creation of a pan-Islamic discourse could be seen in Kazi Nazrul Islam's praise of Kemal Ataturk (Akhtar and Bhowmik xi).

Women and Culture

Qasim Amin, an Egyptian philosopher, hailed as one of the first feminists of the Arab world, made an impassioned appeal for the renunciation of the veil since it had moved beyond the shar'ia strictures. He wondered, "What sensitive spirit will accept life in a cage with clipped wings, a drooping head, and closed eyes when the wide-open space before her is endless, the sky is above her, the stars play with her vision, and the spirit of the universe calls and inspires her with the hope and desire to open its treasure of secrets? (15)

The immediate context of the book was the slowly changing nature of Egyptian society, especially the bourgeoisie and the middle class. Family, for him was a microcosm of the state where the colonial oppression was reflected in the subjugation of women by men (xiii). He wondered why Muslims believed that their traditions were for all times since they, and the universe they inhabited were subject to the laws of change (5). Amin, in a Wollstonecraftian

fashion wished for women to have intellectual and cultural knowledge in addition to an understanding of household chores so that they could be better wives and mothers and be led into the "community of the living" by actively participating in society (13). Western and rural Egyptian women were as experienced and enlightened as their men because of their constant dealings with the world. He argues that the age in which a woman starts veiling constitutes the most formative years of her life, an age in which she needs to experience, explore and understand the world (48). Instead of secluding her and stunting her growth, her upbringing and education should become an "impenetrable veil" which will safeguard her from all kinds of degradation (56).

Amin's book, caused a furore, not because of the substantive reforms advocated by him but the symbolic reform in the form of the abolition of the veil which he considered a prerequisite for the advancement of Egyptian society. His work is considered as heralding the beginning of a new discourse about women and culture. It led to the first debate about the veil in the Arab press and turned the veil into a complex and dynamic signifier of the condition of women, conflict between different classes and the clash between different cultures (Ahmed, *Women and Gender* 144-145). This debate became the "precursor and prototype" of the debate that took place about the veil in many other countries. For instance, in Turkey, in the attempt to introduce westernizing reforms, a similar denunciation of the veil was conducted since it was believed that it reflected badly on the society's state of civilization. In the 1920s, Reza Shah banned the veil to reform Iranian society (164). There are various reasons behind Muslim men and women making such scathing statements about the veil, chief of them being the global hegemony of Western discourses and the alignment of the upper middle class and their interests with the West. As argued by Ahmed, there is no "intrinsic or necessary connection between the issue of women and the issue of culture, as the history of Western feminism shows." In response to androcentrism and misogyny, Western feminists do not argue for a complete rejection of their culture and a wholesale adoption of another culture. Instead, they find creative and stimulating ways to engage and critique dominant ideological positions, whereas, with respect to women in the Islamic world, the discussion always is about the "innate" misogyny of Islam and hence the need for its complete rejection (128). It was with colonial domination that the link between women and the ideas of nationalism and culture was forged and then continuously reiterated. As put forth by Ahmed, "It was at this point that the veil emerged as a potent signifier, connoting

not merely the social meaning of gender but also matters of far broader political and cultural import. It has ever since retained that cargo of signification" (129).

Veil in Colonial, Anti-Colonial and Neo-Colonial Discourse

Although, from early on, the argument about Islam's "oppressive" attitude towards women was found in the European narrative of Islam, it assumed centre stage in the nineteenth century with colonial domination.[125] There were a number of strands of thought, such as the old narrative of Islam, the general narrative of imperialism about the inherent inferiority of other cultures, and the language of feminism which coalesced to reorganize the narrative around the oppressed position of Muslim women. By employing the emergent discipline of anthropology to make claims about the biological inferiority of women and their "natural" disposition suited to domesticity, the Victorian patriarchal establishment vehemently contested feminist claims. However the language of feminism was used by them to deride other cultures and other men. It was in this amalgam of the language of colonialism and that of feminism that the link between the position of women and the issue of culture was forged (150). Ahmed points out that Cromer saw veiling as a "fatal obstacle"[126] in the path of progress of Egyptian society but he was also the founding member of the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. Cromer made a case for the superiority of Christianity over Islam by comparing and contrasting the predicament of a Muslim women who "is veiled when she appears in public" to that of a European woman whose face is "exposed to view in public. The only restraints placed on her movement are those dictated by her own sense of propriety" (1908, 155-57).[127] Veiling, according to him was a major hurdle in that "elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of European civilization" (156, 539).[128] The Manichean framework of "civilized" and "uncivilized" and the taming of the latter by the former was the "habitus of the suffragists" (Grewal 71). English women, saw themselves as free, in comparison to their Asian and African counterparts, although many of these women travelled to the East for the lack of empowering alternatives at home. Flora Shaw described purdah clad women as "plain women, dressed in vulgar adaptations of European clothes, [who] sat about listlessly hour after hour, with neither work nor

[125] Mitchell, 1988. Cited by Ahmed, p. 150
[126] Guerville, p. 154. Cited by Ahmed, p. 153.
[127] Cited by Ahmed(2011), p. 30
[128] Ibid, p. 31

entertaintment to enliven the long days" (Trollope). Edith Durham, said that they were kept, "mainly for breeding purposes" and their conversations were "much like that of a cow might be, could it talk" (Birkett). Harriet Martineau, spoke of them as "wholly and hopelessly baulked" (Dierdre).[129] None of these women travellers looked at peasant women working in the fields. Freedom, was conceptualized in spatial terms. Indian women were unfree because they lived in purdah, while English women who did not have voting rights and some of whom especially the working class, lived in deplorable conditions were seen as liberated. According to James Mill[130], "among rude people the women are generally degraded, among civilized people they are exalted."

The complicity of certain forms of feminism with colonial discourse should make us look at the conditions of possibility and existence of these feminisms. They need to be historically contextualized. The discourse of nationalism, imperialism, colonialism and reform played a crucial role in shaping the contexts of feminist subjectivity, thus interpellating them in various discourses (11). *Warrior Marks*, a film by Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, portrays all women of sub-Saharan Africa as victims of clitoridectomy with Walker and Parmar as empowered and conscious rescuers. The manner in which women's bodies are disciplined through plastic surgery, mastectomies and hysterectomies in the west is not considered as part of the continuum of a certain kind of subject position constructed for women. Lady Mary Wortely Montagu[131], acknowledged the severe disciplining of women's bodies that happens in the 'civilized world',

> One of the highest entertainments in Turkey is having you to their baths. When I was introduced to one, the lady of the house came to undress me .... After she had slipped off my gown and saw my stays she was very struck at the sight of them, and cried out to the other ladies in the bath: "Come hither and see how cruelly the poor English ladies are used by their husbands. You need boast indeed of the

[129] Trollope, Birkett and Dierdre cited by Grewal, p. 82
[130] Cited by Grewal, p. 167.
[131] Cited byAhmed (1982) p. 525

superior liberties allowed you, when they lock you thus up in a box." (1:247)

The locations from which feminists speak and the mediated nature of their voices needs to be examined as well (12-17). The understanding of one kind of oppression, does not lead to an understanding or an antipathy to all kinds of oppression. The locational politics of feminism needs to be probed to understand how the "liberatory possibilities of a singular identity politics" simplifies the connections between state, social and communal divisions and the multiple subject positions occupied by women (58).

In a book, which ostensibly championed the cause of Egyptian women, they were the butt of Amin's ridicule and vitriol. Men, did not have access to women's quarters, thus, his observations are based on Egyptian and European men's conception of women. His was an "internalization and replication of the colonialist perception" in a native bourgeois voice (Ahmed *Women and Gender* 160). He says the following about veiled women:

> …they do not comb their hair daily, they do not take a bath more than once a week, and they do not know how to use a toothpick. They do not take care of the clothing worn close to their bodies, even though the suitability of these clothes and their cleanliness are quite influential on a man's desire. They do not know what creates a man's desire, how to maintain it, how to develop it, or how it is satisfied. This ignorance prohibits a woman from knowing the inner self of her husband or from knowing the causes of attraction or aversion between man and wife. Thus, whenever she wishes to attract a man, she quite often drives him away from her. (21)

He draws constant comparisons between Egyptian and Western women and points out that Egyptian women woefully lack subtlety and sophistication in their interaction with men (32). The injunction to avert the gaze in the Qur'an, is directed at both men and women and Amin asserts that there is no connection between desirable behavior and the veil, instead, the veil,

increases the risk of temptation by hiding the blemishes (42). He argues, that as against free women who are better equipped to abide by standards of morality, these standards are imposed on secluded women. He says:

> Do Egyptians believe that European men cannot find ways to ensure and safeguard the chastity of their women? These are the people who amaze and intrigue us with their intellectual and emotional maturity. They have discovered and harnessed the power of steam and electricity, as we have seen with our own eyes. They risk their lives everyday in the search for knowledge and progress, and prefer the pursuit of honor to earthly pleasure. Can we believe that such people would have eliminated the practice of secluding women, which was firmly established in their societies, if they had found any advantage in it? Definitely not. The exaggerated seclusion of women is an idea of native minds which cling to it even though it has been discarded by every other refined and sensitive person (60).

Amin espouses the rejection of the veil because western men do not urge women to veil. They are seen as relentless pursuers of knowledge and progress, models of humanity worth emulating. In a manner similar to Cromer and Amin, who made use of the issue of women and the veil to launch an attack on cultural values, the opposition to his book vociferously argued in favour of veiling and segregation. Thus, "the opposition appropriated, in order to negate them, the terms set in the first place by the colonialist discourse" (Ahmed *Women and Gender* 162).

Fanon, makes a similar argument about the battle between Algerians and the French over the veil. As early as the 1930s, the French colonial officers tried to destroy all those aspects of Algerian culture which could evoke a national reality, and they concentrated all their energy on women's clothing. The colonial policy was to conquer Algerian women by unveiling them (37-

38). The dominant attitude of the colonizer was a romantic, sensual desire for the "exoticism" that the veiled woman was:

> But there is also in the European the crystallization of an aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence before the Algerian woman. Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure. Hiding the face is also disguising a secret; it is also creating a world of mystery, of the hidden. In a confused way, the European experiences his relation with the Algerian woman at a highly complex level. There is in it the will to bring this woman within his reach, to make her an object of possession.
>
> This woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not give herself, does not offer herself. (43)

It is this denial of reciprocity, refusal to yield to the gaze of the colonizer and the power that the gaze entails that aroused and frustrated desires. He tries to unravel the "psychology of colonization" by arguing how the history of colonial conquest and occupation, confiscation of property, raping women and the freedom given to sadism and eroticism leads to "fertile gaps", because of which a European's dream of raping an Algerian woman is "always preceded by a rending of the veil" (45). It was this obsession with unveiling the Algerian woman, which led to an equally strong, principled position about a "formally inert element of the native cultural configuration", thus creating the centers of resistance of the colonized. Later, he attributes the revulsion among the Algerians for the radio to how it is "the opening of oneself to the other that is organically excluded from the colonial situation" (89). For a fellow Algerian, the attitude to the veil of an individual Algerian woman was related to her attitude to colonial occupation (46), while for the French colonial officers, "What is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern

with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior" (41).

In a similar vein, neocolonial discourses such as that of the U.S about Afghan women, by constructing them as "gendered slaves", who needed to be saved by the West, created the conditions for both epistemic and physical violence (Ayotte and Husain 112-113). Representation of Afghan women as victims fits well with the "patriarchal social mythologies" that conceal the anxieties about women behind a paternalistic logic of saving women from certain kinds of jobs. In a radio address, Laura Bush said:

> Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror not only because our hearts break out for the women and children of Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us…The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.[132]

This logic is extended to international relations as well where "the heroic, just warrior is sometimes contrasted with a malignant, often racialized, masculinity attributed to the enemy" (Tickner 57).[133]

When Imtiaz Ahmed asks "Why is the Veil Such a Contentious Issue?", he answers the question by saying that every attack on the veil is poignantly reminiscent of that earlier more virulent colonial attack, "This is true of the reaction against Qassim Amin in Egypt, Kemal Ataturk in Turkey or Shabana Azmi and other feminists, whether Muslims or others, in India" (5038).

One of the ways in which the debate or the battle over the veil has been fought over the years is by aligning it with religion and equating unveiling with secularism. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded a republic based on the principles of secularism and a changed social order, based on the principles of Western modernity. The emphasis on secularism was coupled

[132] Cited by Ahmed (2011) p, 14
[133] Cited by Ayotte and Husain, p. 122

with and premised on a repudiation of the Ottoman past, which was seen as traditional and backward (Yegenoglu 227). In response to the fetishization of the veil by Islamists, secularists fetishized icons of Ataturk and frequent visits to his mausoleum. The headscarf, was not seen in terms of a personal choice, it became a lexicon of a political battle:

> The headscarf functioned as a very convenient visible symbol, not only of the presence of people with Islamic faith, but also of the presence of a way of living that is guided by the principles of Islam. The headscarf came to signify that Islam is present and alive not only as an individual faith, but as a collective social and cultural set of principles guiding people, manners and styles of living. But most important of all, it signified that the sacralized and defended space of the public was now becoming vulnerable to the intrusion of religious signs. (233)

The ban on hijab in public schools in France was also ostensibly an attempt to separate religion and the state. "Like it or not", President Jackques Chirac stated in 2003, "wearing a veil is a kind of aggression."[134] Bronwyn Winter saw it as the "female face of a politicized Islam" (289) which denotes "allegiance to conservative religious values and increasingly Islamism" (295). Naipaul also considered headscarves a sign of "Muslim aggressiveness" (*Beyond Belief* 86) , "mask of aggression" (*Among the Believers* 266) and a "void where time was without meaning" (346). While talking about Pakistan, he cursorily mentions his encounter with Saleem's (a custom officer) sister. He was told that she had decided one day that she wanted to go into purdah, "And she was much calmer now. She didn't say much more, and perhaps there was nothing more to say." The appropriation of her voice and her motivation behind donning purdah is explained away as the "possibility of constant personal theatre" that the veil afforded (323). It is this erasure, that prompted my research into the purdah and the myriad ways in which it is negotiated with.

The thesis of colonial discourse is countered with an anti-thesis, although the resistance narrative reversed the arguments, it also accepted the parameters set by the colonizers. It was

[134] Deltombe, p. 347. Cited by Scott, p. 84

western discourse which created the framework within which the veil would be analyzed which later made it emerge as a symbol of resistance (Ahmed *Women and Gender* 164). Despite the claims of Islamist groups, that they propose to restore or rejuvenate indigenous culture as against Marxism, secularism, feminism which are western discourses, the West is everywhere, "in structures and minds" (Nandy)[135] and it permeates all cultures. There is no possibility of a return to an unadulterated, pure past.

Whenever items of clothing such as bras or bloomers have been the focus of debate and engagement in the feminist struggle, it is western women themselves who have identified and grappled with them, unlike the case of Islamic feminists, for whom the veil was invested with meaning by others. The use of the language of feminism by colonial interests has also made it suspect in the eyes of non-western societies, thus hindering the feminist struggle within those societies (Ahmed *Women and Gender* 166-67).

Islamic Feminism

The first few decades of the twentieth century saw the development of the founding feminist discourses in Egypt. The dominant strand of feminism was the one that allied itself with Westernizing tendencies, primarily of the upper middle class. The Islamic strain of feminism, that became dominant in the last decades of the century tried to give voice to female subjectivity in a vernacular, Islamic framework arguing for a complete regeneration of the society (174). In Egypt, it was its defeat by Israel which motivated people to think that it was perhaps God's decision to abandon Egypt since the people had been led astray by Nasser's secularist and socialist tendencies. Other believe that it was the oil wealth gained by Saudi Arabia and Libya that was used to boost the membership of Islamic groups and coax, cajole and coerce women into wearing the veil (216-18).

On the basis of a study that was conducted at Cairo University among veiled and unveiled women, Ahmed argues that there are similarities in the psychosocial composition of those donning the Islamic dress, in terms of the challenges they had to face and the means they evolved to combat them. Most of these women were upwardly mobile, living in a society which constantly tried to frustrate their ambitions. They were relatively new to the bewildering,

[135] Cited by Ahmed, p. 236.

cosmopolitan and sexually integrated cities and were usually the first-generation women from their families to inhabit such a world. In a scenario like this, adopting a form of dress which proclaimed their educational and upward mobility and at the same time remained truthful to conventional clothing traditions was a "practical coping strategy", since the Islamic dress procured many advantages:

> On the simplest level, most material level, it is economical. Women adopting Islamic dress are saved the expense of acquiring fashionable clothes and having more than two or three outfits. The dress also protects them from male harassment. In responding to a questionnaire, women stated that wearing Islamic dress resulted in a marked difference in the way they were treated in public places. (223)[136]

Ahmed, sees this trend as a democratization of culture since it is the emergent middle classes that constantly define and redefine this vocabulary of dress through their daily negotiations, to diffuse the sexually integrated world of its tensions and improprieties. What we need is a feminism which is "vigilantly self-critical" (247) so that we do not become unaware collaborators in the project of colonizing and or demonizing other cultures. Taking cue from Spivak[137] (1999), it is crucial that we, "Fix the critical glance not specifically at the putative identity of the two poles in a binary opposition, but at the hidden ethico-political agenda that drives the differentiation between the two" (331-332).

The issue of the veil in France demonstrates that, in circumstances like these, the host country tries to send a double message, that there are things such as killing and hounding authors which cannot be done there and secondly, the minorities are invited to be part of the democratic process. A unilateral application of the first principle should be avoided according to Taylor, since in a society marked by plurality, different religious groups should be seen as interlocutors instead of as a menace (*The Power of Religion* 36). Religion is often seen as a private matter

[136] Mohsen, p.69. Cited by Ahmed
[137] Cited by Ayotte and Husain, p. 116

which should be kept outside of the public sphere, which is a space of rational deliberation. Feminists have long challenged this neat division of the two and raised fundamental questions about their imbrications. Habermas, in his recent work, points out that as argued by Rawls, the secularization of political authority has not diminished the impact of religion in the public sphere since the secularization of the state does not necessarily lead to a secularization of the society:

> Those same people who are expressly authorized to practice their religion and to lead a pious life in their role as citizens are supposed to participate in the democratic process whose results must be kept free of any religious 'contamination'. Laicism pretends to resolve this paradox by privatizing religion entirely. But as long as religious communities play a vital role in civil society and the public sphere, deliberative politics is as much a product of the public use of reason on the part of religious citizens as on that of non-religious citizens. (24)

He suggests that all citizens should be free to use, if they so wish, religious language in the public sphere but they should translate the "potential truth contents" in an accessible language, before it can be discussed in administrative spaces and play a role in decision making. This kind of an approach to religion and its place in the public sphere shows a greater "sensitivity to time" (Metz)[138] enabling a more dynamic understanding of constitutional and democratic principles.

It is this "translation" of the "truth contents" of the Qur'an that we see in the theorization on the issue of the veil by Islamic feminists, who articulate their dreams and dreads from within an Islamic framework. Many feminists tend to look at religion as an abstraction and an instrument to impose restraints on the mobility of women. This charge is leveled at all religions but Islam in particular is seen as anti-women. The admission of a religious affiliation is seen as false consciousness. The Enlightenment emphasis on "reason" created a schism between religion and all other aspects of social existence (Castelli 5). On the other hand, a feminist attempt to ameliorate the condition of women from outside the framework of Islam is seen as cultural

[138] Cited by Habermas, p. 28

imperialism or neo-imperialism, as argued by Kandiyoti.[139] Islamic feminists advocate a return to the Qur'an and not the other Islamic sources such as the hadith and the shariah, since they are commentaries on the Prophet's life and sayings, and not the word of God (An-Na'im).[140] They are thus a result of human interpretations of the Qur'an determined by the context of the interpreters. They also differentiate between two aspects of Qur'anic instructions-the socio-economic and the ethical-religious. While the first is an aspect of constantly changing social relations (*mu'amalat),* the other (*ibadat)*, that identifies the spiritual equality of men and women is seen as immutable (11). While discussing other religions, scholarly care and attention is given to the distinction between faith (ethics, morals, values) and organized religion (institutions, laws) but there is a conflation between the two when it comes to Islam, "The result is the pervasive polemical and rhetorical tricks of either glorifying a faith without acknowledging the horrors and abuses that are committed in its name or condemning it by equating it with those abuses" (Hosseini 632). There is also a tendency to confuse sharia with fiqh. While shariah, literally means 'the way', i.e. "the totality of God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, fiqh is 'understanding', a human attempt to extricate legal bindings from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. While the first is sacred, the second is mutable and fallible (637). As argued by Hosseini:

> This exposure can have important epistemological and political consequences; epistemological, because, if taken to its logical conclusion, one can argue that some rules that until now have been claimed as Islamic and part of the sharia are in fact only the views and perceptions of some Muslims and are social practices and norms that are neither sacred nor immutable but human and changing; political, because it can both free Muslims from taking a defensive position and enable them to go beyond old fiqh dogmas in search of new questions and new answers. (644)

[139] Kandiyoti, 1991. Cited by Hashim, p. 8.
[140] Cited by Hashim, p. 11

In a huge part of the Muslim world, it is the Islamists who set the parameters of religious and political discourses. It was secular feminism that paved the way for the entry of women in the public sphere in the twentieth century but with the rise of political Islam, only an attempt to challenge fiqh in a religious language has hopes of ameliorating the condition of women. The daily actions of Muslim women regardless of whether they are living in a theocracy or a liberal state are governed by patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, "A movement to sever patriarchy from Islamic ideals and sacred texts and to give voice to an ethical and egalitarian vision of Islam can and does empower Muslim women from all walks of life to make dignified choices. This, in the end, is what Islamic feminism is all about" (644-45).

The appeal to religious texts to offer a critique of the patriarchal social order is not specific to Islamic feminists. Christian and Jewish texts had also assumed gender inequality like Islamic texts but Western feminists make their claims by asserting the ethical principles or values of the Bible instead of completely rejecting it. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* refers to passages from the Bible when talking of the equality of men and women.[141]

The theoretical model of 'Islamic Feminism' was used for the first time in the 1990s, primarily in Western literature which tried to understand women and their relationship to Islam (Mojab 124). The first woman to look at the Qur'an from the perspective of women's rights was Nazira Zain al-Din. Born in Lebanon in 1905, her first book *Unveiling and Veiling: Lectures and Views on the Liberation of the Woman and Social Renewal in the Arab World* argued that the miserable plight of women is a consequence of the misogynist interpretations of the Qur'an. She said, "The veil is an insult to men and women" (Badran and Cooke 275).[142] The debate on Islamic feminism began in 1994 when Najmabadi delivered a talk at the School of Oriental and African Studies, in which, by referring to women's magazines like *Zanan* and *Farzaneh*, she spoke of Islamic feminism as creating the possibility of a dialogue between religious and secular feminism. In the inaugural issue of the magazine *Zan-e-Rouz,* Shahla Sherkat wrote, "We believe that the key to the solution of women's problems lies in four realms: religion, culture, law and

[141] Hosseini, p. 641
[142] Cited by Mojab, p. 127.

education. If the way is paved in these four principal domains then we can be hopeful of women's development and society's advancement" (1992, 2)[143]

The Islamic feminist approach is outlined by Asma Barlas[144], when she states that:

> The hermeneutical aspect of my argument seeks to recover the Quran's egalitarian and antipatriarchal epistemology in a series of steps. The first is to challenge interpretive reductionism, i.e. the idea that the Quran has only one set of patriarchal meanings-by emphasizing the principle of textual polysemy. The second is to argue against interpretive relativism-i.e the opposite idea that all readings are equally correct and that, therefore a patriarchal reading of the text is as appropriate as an antipatriarchal reading on the grounds that some readings are in fact neither contextually legitimate nor theologically sound.

She suggests that the directive to Muslim women to cover themselves using their outer garments was specific to seventh century Arabia, a society where slavery was practiced and sexual abuse, especially of slaves was rampant and women had no legal recourse against it. A society which was still governed by pre-Islamic sexual norms used the veil to mark the sexual unavailability of some women. Barlas' implication is that it is in these social structures and not others, that the jilbab would "render [Muslim women] visible" and "recognizable" by "Jahili men, as a way to protect the women" (*Believing Women* 56).[145]. In a similar vein, Amina Wadud in *Inside the Gender Jihad* argues that it is important to question the supposed fixity of the Qur'an. It is "a word or text in process" (191) and thus should be open to the possibility of questioning, refuting and reinterpreting.[146] She points out that some of the greatest restrictions placed on women are because of the universal application of the Qur'an's historically contingent and particular verses. The original society of the Qur'an's revelation might be patriarchal and sexist but that does not

[143] Cited by Mogadham, p. 23
[144] "Text, Tradition and Reason" Cited by Adujar, p. 70
[145] Cited by Hidyatullah, p. 78
[146] Ibid, p. 70

mean that the text prescribes those circumstances "…the Qur'an is thus responding to the needs of this contextual situation but not endorsing the contextual situation itself" (99)[147]. Islamic feminists assert their right of *ijtehad*, a revisionist reading of Islamic texts through independent reasoning. Islamic feminists like Shabaan[148] argue that if women were expected to be completely covered there was no need to ask men to lower their gaze. She also suggests that if women are not supposed to cover their faces during pilgrimage or prayer, the expectation that they should be veiled ordinarily is baseless.

While analyzing and critiquing the unquestioned equation of the practice of veiling with oppression of women, we also need to be cautious about unthinkingly embracing the opposite end of the spectrum. Although, women are not passive victims, their acts of everyday resistance cannot be mindlessly glorified. One needs to avoid the pitfall of being overoptimistic about the efficacy of their defiant acts or conflate their resistance with their agency. Instead of looking at women as victims or agents, we need to explore their daily engagements and negotiations and their agency despite their subjugation (Sangari[149] 1996). The idioms employed by politicized religion "naturalize" notions of race, religion, ethnicity and purity and insist on absolute and unwavering loyalty to the collective to which one belongs. These are socially and politically constructed frameworks but "they assert a truth and authenticity that they refuse to concede to countervailing feminist claims" (Jeffery 468). Jeffery is dismissive of basing feminist arguments on religious texts because of the ambiguous nature of these texts and the ease with which male clerics can either dismiss or counter such arguments.

'Islamic Feminist' is a term coined and employed by secular academics residing in the West to refer to Iranian activists lobbying for legal reform, to restructure gender relations within the framework of the Islamic Republic. These activists themselves do not employ the label (Mojab 130). Islamic Feminism has been challenged by various groups, such as, Muslim traditionalists who resist any attempt at change in social and gender relations and Islamic fundamentalists who propose a return to "pure" fundamentals of their religion. As a result of this narrow way of talking about gender and the nation state, Muslim women's attempt to re-read and revisit the *Qur'an* is seen as a betrayal and an internalization of Western modes of thinking

[147] *Qur'an and Woman.* Cited by Hidyatullah, p. 70
[148] Cited by Hashim, p. 10.
[149] Cited by Jeffery, p. 467.

(Hidayatullah 2). Islamic Feminisms is also questioned by secular fundamentalists who assume that Islam is misogynist and needs to be completely denied to improve the condition of women, "In so doing they end up essentializing and perpetuating difference and reproduce a crude version of the Orientalist narrative of Islam" (Hosseini 641). Due to the formidable, dominant role of the U.S academic publishing industry and its international reach, the language of Islamic feminism is English, as pointed out by Margot Badran (2009, 245) which discredits them in the eyes of some Muslims[150].

There are some such as Shahidian[151], who look at Islamic Feminism as an anomaly:

> If by feminism is meant easing patriarchal pressures on women, making patriarchy less appalling, 'Islamic Feminism' is certainly a feminist trend. But if feminism is a movement to abolish patriarchy, to protect human beings from being prisoners of fixed identities, to contribute towards a society in which individuals can fashion their lives free from economic, political, social and cultural constraints, then 'Islamic Feminism' proves considerably inadequate. I define feminism in these latter terms, and for that reason, I consider 'Islamic Feminism' an oxymoron. (51)

Mojab also offers a critique of Islamic Feminism by arguing that "gender is a site of the exercise of power which is unequally distributed and hierarchically organized." Religion is one of the institutions that plays a significant role in the struggle for power but the conflict cannot just be reduced to one's religious identity (135). Islamic feminists claim to fashion an indigenous, culturally specific movement of reform but when they talk of equal rights of men and women, sanctioned by the Qur'an, they are employing the framework of Western societies. The question of rights is intrinsically linked to the question of democracy, civil society and citizenship (137). By appealing to the law as neutral and untainted by the exercise of political

[150] Cited by Hidyatullah, p. 6
[151] Cited by Mojab, p. 130

power, their optimism smacks of what Weisberg[152] calls, 'legal positivism'. Law is seen as an "autonomous, self contained system", untouched by the production and reproduction of power relations" (403). The question of citizenship is not raised by Islamic feminists who argue that citizenship will automatically follow the liberation of women. They do not investigate the abyss between theoretical equality and equality in actuality (140). Hashim also states that this feminist reading of the Qur'an is insufficient in itself since many women do not have the political, economic and theological wherewithal to undertake such a reading of the 'word of God'. It thus remains "an academic and intellectual exercise" (12).

Mogadham argues that feminists across the world evolve different strategies to empower women, hence, a narrow definition of feminism is not feasible for dialogue, support and coalition. Islamic feminism is a "part of the already diversified and colorful spectrum of the transnational women's movement and a contributor to a 'global feminism'" (44-46). She concludes by saying that a feminist rereading of the Qur'an is historically necessary but an Islamic feminist strategy needs to be combined with secular-feminist approaches (43).

Redefining Agency

One of the most crucial questions that has elicited a lot of debate and discussion is how historical and cultural specificities should inform feminist theorization and politics. Although this question has revolved around issues of class, sexuality, national and ethnic difference, the dimension of religious difference has not received the kind of academic attention it should. The fraught and highly charged relationship between feminism and religion is usually discussed with reference to Islam. This is due to the historically conflictual relationship between Muslim societies and the west, and the challenge that Islamist movements pose to secular-liberal philosophy, which is espoused by feminists. Saba Mehmood's ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement in Cairo is richly illuminating in terms of the ways in which women imparted lessons in Islamic doctrine and bodily comportment to each other. This was the first time in Egyptian history that so many women held public meetings in mosques, a space that is often not welcoming of them. At the same time, women's involvement in Islamic pedagogy, made them agents of a tradition which is premised on the "subordination to a transcendent will

[152] Cited by Mojab, p. 138

(and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal" (2). Like the Iranian Revolution, there was a turn in many other Muslim societies towards Islamist ideals and practices. Scholars like her, who were self proclaimed progressive leftists, found various reasons to explain this turn, reasons such as illiteracy, the increasing influence of Saudi Arabia's version of Islam and sociability, the alliance between America and oil-rich Gulf states which facilitated the spread of a conservative version of Islam (x). She attributes the bafflement faced by her to "our profound dis-ease with the appearance of religion outside of the private space of individualized belief." The fear of Islamic resurgence is "accompanied by a deep self assurance about the truth of the progressive-secular imaginary, one that assumes that the life forms it offers are the best way out for these unenlightened souls. . . " (xi). She is not interested in looking at the emancipatory possibilities or redeeming qualities of this movement. Her interest lies in unpacking the ideas about self and moral agency that were embodied in this movement. She also wanted this analysis to address "normative liberal assumptions" such as, "the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on " (5).

The idea of agency which most feminist scholars draw upon "locates agency in the political and moral autonomy of the subject." She points out the fallacy of this approach since this mode of analysis understands agency as the ability to realize one's desires against the odds of societal norms of propriety, custom, tradition etc. This understanding of agency, often ends up romanticizing all acts of resistance and ignores the insidious, surreptitious workings of power. Lila Abu Lughod addresses that temptation, which most feminist scholars succumb to when she says:

> In some of my earlier work, as in that of others, there is perhaps a tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the working of

power (1990, 42).[153]

Lughod recommends that we look at acts of resistance as a "diagnostic of power" (42) which leads to new kinds of alignments and inscriptions of power relations. She gives the example of young Bedouin women wearing sexy lingerie to confront patriarchal authority. This act of "resistance" reinscribes capitalist, consumerist, urban, bourgeois values into the dynamics of power (50).[154]

Mehmood goes further, and raises questions about the very use of the term, "resistance" by Lughod. Is it possible to use the term to talk about social, cultural and political actions which do not subvert hegemonic understandings? She also wonders whether the category of resistance imposes "a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power", which makes it difficult for us to comprehend actions which lie outside the narrative of assimilation and subversion. She finds the distinction between negative and positive freedom analytically useful to look at the question of agency. Negative freedom is identified as the absence of restrictions on one's choices and actions. Positive freedom is the ability to realize an independent will which is unburdened by the demands of custom, tradition and is dictated by the faculty of reason or self interest. Liberal theorists argue that self realization and fulfillment is predicated on exercising one's independent will:

> To the degree that autonomy in this tradition of liberal political theory is a procedural principle, and not an ontological or substantive feature of the subject, it delimits the necessary condition for the enactment of ethics of freedom. Thus, even illiberal actions can arguably be tolerated if it is determined that they are undertaken by a freely consenting individual who is acting of her own accord. (11-12).

Mehmood tries to delink this project of self realization from an autonomous will through a poststructuralist critique of a coherent, unified, independent and transcendental subject. But at

[153] Cited by Mehmood, p. 8
[154] Ibid., p. 9

the same time, she also questions the poststructuralist conception of agency as subversion or resignification. By looking at agency in terms of the binary of suppression and subversion, this scholarship does not address those dimensions of political and ethical action which lie beyond this rubric (14). It is the Foucauldian idea of power and subject formation that informs Mehmood's analysis of the question of selfhood and agency. Foucault talks of power as productive of certain kinds of desires, relations and discourses. Secondly, the subject according to him does not exist outside or precede power relations. The "paradox of subjectivation" is such that the very conditions which produce the subordination of the subject are also conditions of its construction (1980,1983).[155] If we argue that the desire for freedom is not inherent in us, but mediated by historical and cultural conditions, then, as Mehmood points out:

> …how do we analyze operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledges, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics? . . . viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency-but one that can be understood only from within the discourse and structures of subordination. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms. (14-15)

This kind of an analysis of power and subjectivity, enables us to move beyond equating agency with resistance and understand it as the "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (18). She gives the example of a pianist who accepts and submits herself to a hierarchical regime of apprenticeship to acquire the ability to play the piano, "her agency is predicated upon her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as 'docility'." Although docility is often equated with passivity, Mehmood talks of a certain kind of malleability which is needed when one is trying to acquire a new skill or form of knowledge, "a

[155] Mehmood, p. 17

meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion and achievement" (29).

The participants of the mosque movement and the women who don the veil as a robe of piety and modesty often evoked ethics and morality while talking about their behavioral patterns. The act of donning the veil for some of these participants was not a consequence of the virtue of modesty or piety but a behavioral code which would lead to a modest disposition. Judith Butler's conceptual framework reveals that "the iterability of performativity is a theory of agency" (*Gender Trouble* xxiv). There is no undoing of social norms that lies outside the doing of norms. The stability of norms relies on the constant iteration and this iterability opens the possibilities of consolidation, resignification and reappropriation. (Mehmood 19-20)

Jeffery Minson argues that the Kantian legacy can be seen in the lack of scholarship on the forms taken by ethical actions.[156] For Kant, morality is linked to the neutral exercise of the faculty of reason, regardless of social, cultural and historical specificities. Saba Mehmood finds Foucault's distinction between ethics and morals tremendously useful. While morals refer to ideas, principles, guidelines; ethics mean a set of practices and techniques applied by the subject on himself/ herself to reach a certain state of being (1990, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). This is not to say that this subject is an autonomous subject, free to mould itself according to its whims. The historically specific nature of certain practices and injunctions are the "modes of subjectivation" of the subject. There are different ways in which one can formulate a relationship between oneself and a moral code. It is only by examining the shape and nature of ethical practices that one can attain an understanding of the ethical subject that gets formed through and in these practices. These techniques which include corporeal and spiritual exercises are important not in terms of the meanings they have for their practitioners but the way they constitute the subject (28-29).

Foucault talks of four aspects which are essential to the study of ethics. The first is what he calls the "substance of ethics" which refers to those dimensions of the self which are the focus of ethical judgment ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 263).[157] The second aspect is the "mode of subjectivation" which refers to the strategies through which people are made to abide by certain

[156] Ibid., 25
[157] Cited by Mehmood, p. 30

ethical obligations either through the appeal to reason or divine law. The third refers to the "techniques of self" by which the subject performs certain operations on herself to become an ethical subject. The fourth aspect is the self that one aspires to be or ought to be within a specific historical context. Mehmood, draws upon this model to look at the rituals, "as a means of training and realization of piety in the entirety of one's life" performed by the mosque participants (48). This is a different conception of religiosity which distinguishes between a religious practice which aims to cultivate Islamic virtues in each and every aspect of one's life and a practice that is religious only in terms of appearances but does not create a pious self or ethical disposition (51).

Pierre Hadot's idea of "spiritual exercises", i.e. "practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation or intuitive, as in contemplation, but which were all intended to effect a modification and transformation in the subject who practiced them" (6) focuses on the work these exercises accomplish by crafting a certain kind of subject.[158] On the basis of her fieldwork, Mehmood argues that desire in this model is not antecedent to moral actions but a product of the "spiritual exercises" these women performed on themselves to cultivate a pious disposition "While wearing the veil serves at first as a means to tutor oneself in the attribute of shyness, it is also simultaneously integral to the practice of shyness: one cannot simply discard the veil once a modest deportment has been acquired, because the veil itself is part of what defines that deportment" (158).

The veil, for these women was not a symbol of their cultural identity. It was a means to attain a certain state of being and it was an inseparable aspect of that state of being. El Guindi looked at the emergence of the veil in the context of the pervasive mood of Islamic religiosity which had a significant influence on students. Those who aligned themselves with this Islamist movement underwent an "internal transformation" and strictly followed the "rituals, behavioural and verbal prescriptions", chief of which was the prohibition against a free mingling of the sexes ("The Emerging Islamic Order" 253).[159] Those who were not associated with this movement looked at it with befuddlement and considered it, "our version of America's hippie movement, a

[158] Ibid. p, 122.
[159] Cited by Ahmed (2011), p. 79

fad, a youth protest or ideological vacuum" (*Veil* 161).[160] The question raised by Islamic feminists paves the way for looking at the veil outside of the rubric of oppression and liberation. Veiling, as argued by Mehmood, could be a "spiritual exercise" (Hadot) or "technique of the self" (Foucault), a practice which requires us to redefine our notions of cultural identity, selfhood and agency.

Vishwapriya Iyengar's "The Library Girl"

Vishwapriya Iyengar's "The Library Girl" begins with signs of recognition and affection for Talat who is lovingly called 'library girl' on account of her frequent visits to the library for her immense love of stories, "She liked to sit on the cold, white steel chairs and open the pages. She liked to become a tiny ant that moved between the letters of the words" (145). The story narrates the dehumanization and depersonalization of a woman clad in a burqa. Talat's mother wanted a vibrant, yellow satin ghagra for her but, "The shopkeepers had laughed at this ghost-woman in a burqa who spoke so intensely about yellow" (146). Talat liked to read about people who changed things that seemed rigid and inflexible. She got a book about a dancer who asked death to dance in her shadows and then sang to the sun to slay all shadows, " But the sun said, 'How can I kill death if there is no death?' So the dancer told the sun to give her night and the sun agreed. In the night the dancer lost her shadow and danced forever" (148). The story of Talat delineates the congruence of divine and patriarchal authority. It is the azan which reminds her that her abba would be home and she needs to rush back, "The attenuated cries of 'Allah ho Akbar' froze her fantasy" (148). Her father comes and sits on the divan where she had hidden her book about the dancer and he gifts her a long, black burqa of silk. The simultaneity of her mother preparing the meat to be cooked and Talat donning the burqa conveys Iyengar's disdain for this sacrifice of women's lives and liberties at the altar of patriarchal fears and anxieties:

> Talat picked up the black fabric and she exclaimed with delight, 'Why! It is the most perfect burqa ever!' She lifted it up against her for all to see. The face mask was a fine net mesh. 'See, the net is as fine as the lattice-work in Fatehpur Sikri.' Her mother rubbed salt into the goat's breast and did not know if glass crystals

[160] Ibid, 84

were not being rubbed into her own. The old woman dropped her eyes onto a crocheted flower. (149)

When Talat walked to the library in her burqa, nobody recognized her. Those who used to wait for her daily wondered where she was and longed to see her. It is not the burqa itself but the denial of an identity, a selfhood to her, which perturbed her:

> Within the veil, a darkness seized Talat. It bandaged her mouth, her eyes, and sealed her voice. Today her smiles had lit nothing. Blank faces had become ash in her gaze. She wanted to . . . she wanted to lift the veil and say, 'Look…It's me. Only me in a Persian robe. It's a joke.' But the robe had hands that clasped my mouth…Talat cried and Talat screamed inside her black veil. But they did not hear and did not see. Long after the name of Allah had turned evening into night she walked home slowly, very slowly. (151)

It is this "name of Allah" that is often evoked to make women lose themselves within the four walls of the house or to make them obliterate their selves by making them wear a veil. The story poignantly offers a critique of this instrumental role of religion, but it also hints at how a veiled woman's perception of herself is determined by how she is perceived by others. It was only when Talat's existence was not ratified by others that she feels stifled by the burqa.

Iqbalunissa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* (1944)

Hussain, born in 1897 in Bangalore, was married to Syed Ahmed Hussain, an officer in the Mysore government, when she was fifteen. He encouraged her in the pursuit of learning and she was one of the first few Muslim women to go to the UK for higher education. Iqbalunissa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household,* is one of the first few Indian novels written in English by an Indian Muslim woman. It narrates the lives of the inhabitants of Dilkusha, with its high and mighty walls, which made an outsider think that it was an "unguarded jail." There was only one door that opened to the street, hence, every time a man

entered the house he shouted "Gosha" thrice so that the women who were in the courtyard could run into their rooms. "The presence of men at home meant the desertion of the yard which was their only source of light and fresh air." (1) Umar's wife, Zuhra was not allowed to step outside and no vendor or male servant was permitted near the house. Zuhra's adherence to the behavioral codes espoused by Umar earned her his praise for her "virtue, modesty and obedience" (2). Only those women who were permitted to be unveiled before Umar were allowed to see his dead body, as "After all a man is a man even dead, and purdah before him is essential" (8). The obedient, subservient Zuhra becomes an enforcer of purdah values with regard to her son Kabeer's wives. She believed that it was not becoming for a respectable woman to go to the cinema or to be treated by a male doctor, " 'A man can't own a woman as his wife after she had been touched by a man. There were men in former days who used to cut off that part of the body which was touched by a stranger', said Zuhra" (65). The purdah code also prevented a woman from expressing herself freely. Maghbool, Kabeer's third wife who was well versed with romantic poetry and music had dreamt of a happy, conjugal union, a possibility that appeared to be remote with Kabeer, "a three-headed dragon" (141). She realized she will have to please not only him but her two rivals and her mother in law. Her dislike for the match remained hidden inside her heart, she did not have the courage to articulate it to her parents. When Maghbool's father notices her unhappiness after her marriage he tells her that:

> Thinking women don't make good wives even with a monogamous man. When a woman begins to think for herself she gives less regard to her husband's comforts.She must have implicit faith in him if she wants to make her life happy. Marriage is one of those things that are not proved at all by reason. Submit to him like a child and be happy. (188)

He says that he wanted to get her married, even if it was to a man who had two wives to save her from the curse of spinsterhood as, "A Muslim woman, confined to the house, has no other way to make use of her energy than married life, which is the only recognized goal for her" (190). When Maqhbool tells Kabeer's second wife, Munira, that her father had opened an account in a bank in her name, Munira finds that disgraceful, "What is the use of living in purdah when your name is pronounced by strangers? You have lost your Gosha and your virtue. What is the use of living when one's name is spoilt?" (197) When Maghbool's cousin Azeem, offered to get her poetry

published, Kabeer told her that it was not only dishonorable for a woman in purdah to have her name in print but also discouraged her by saying that nobody would be interested in her works:

> A woman enclosed in the four walls always thinks what she does is the only thing worthy. She is the best person in the world. Earning money out of it is only your imagination. Who will care for your poems? The world is full of rubbish and no one bothers to waste his time on reading when he is busy in the life and death struggle to make both ends meet. (242-243)

Hussain argues how a home which fulfills the physical, social, cultural, emotional and intellectual needs of a child plays a crucial role in shaping his/ her character but such a home is "rare in a country where parents are enslaved by dogma, customs and a false sense of dignity." (246). The anxieties and insecurities of Zuhra about losing control over her son and taming her daughters-in-law contributes to turning Kabeer into a treacherous and narcissistic man.

The novel ends with Kabeer and Zuhra's death and Munira and Maghbool continuing under Nazneen's regime. The unquestioning acceptance of purdah ideology is indicated through the lack of questioning or rejection of such values by women. It is enlightened men, such as Nazneen's brother who question these social and cultural iniquities. Her brother emphatically questions these double standards and hypocrisy of the society which punishes an innocent woman by allowing her husband to treat women like playthings and shifting his attention from one to the other, "'Whose fault is it? If she were given the same education and training she would have been quite a different person to-day. The flaw lies not in her but in man who keeps her a slave all her life in his own interest. His selfishness is responsible for her helplessness." (114-115).

Zeenuth Futehally's *Zohra* (1951)

Futehally (1904-1992) grew up in Hyderabad in a presitigious Muslim family. She went to Japan after her marriage and spent most of her life in Bombay. *Zohra,* is the story of a woman married to a man who is kind and considerate but not her kindred spirit, not a man she would have chosen for herself. It is his brother, Hamid, who kindled in her the urge to love and be loved. It is through the unfulfilled love of Zohra and Hamid that Futehally offers a poignant and subtle critique of purdah. The novel begins with Unnie, Zubeida Begum's nurse, who had served the family for generations, reprimanding Zohra for swinging in the garden with Gulabo, "But in

our days, girls never entered the outer garden, not even when it was high-walled. What is the zenana courtyard for? Your mother-may Allah bless her-never dreamed of doing such things when she was your age" (2). It is Zohra's fondness for books that is blamed for her wayward ways. When Unnie notices a man, who had climbed up a tree to pluck tamarind, he also bears the brunt of her fury because, "a man must give warning before climbing up a tree or terrace overlooking another's garden" (3). She also disapproved of schools since the proximity of a boys' school to that of the girls was unacceptable to her. Nawab Sahib's desire to let his daughter learn as much as she wanted to, was considered detrimental to her interests by his wife. Education, according to her created discontent and made it difficult for women to settle down into domesticity. The juxtaposition of the strict conformity to purdah of aristocratic women and the relative mobility of those who serve them is illustrated in the novel through the differences between Zohra and Gulab. Zohra's Arabic lesson was conducted in such a manner that the maulvi and she sat on either side of the curtain while Gulab could freely converse with the male servants who were often busy in the men's quarters.

The Nawab Sahib organized a mushaera in the men's quarters and women were allowed to attend if they could make purdah arrangements but Zohra, who dabbled in poetry could not participate and be a mere listener, "She thought of her own writings, which she had never shown to anyone, except for a few to her father. But if she had the opportunity, she thought she might share them with this poet. She became wistful, thinking how pleasant it would be to meet someone of her own age, with whom she could communicate" (20). The sixteen-year-old Zohra, who was intent on learning painting was fascinated by her teacher, Miss Woods. While justifying her decision of not getting married, Zohra voices her own ideas about marriage, "Only there was nobody to her liking, and why marry unless one is really fond of someone?" (31) She was moved by the political and aesthetic currents of the time and wanted to be a part of everything. She longed to be associated with Gandhi's struggle for independence, "And was he not bringing emancipation to the women of India, even causing a number of Muslim women to shed purdah in the zeal to work for the national cause? But reality in Hyderabad was very different. Politics was not a topic easily discussed in this house, and she knew she must rid herself of patriotic desires" (35).

She also contemplated a more realizable ambition, according to her, which was learning art and poetry at Shantiniketan. Despite her ambitions, she agreed to a marriage because of her parents "Any deviation from the accepted norm would deeply wound her parents. They might survive the shock but they would never be able to lift up their heads again for shame and sorrow" (36). Purdah and its myriad connotations are addressed by the novel, as it talks of the screen used to guard women and the "purdah in the eyes" that men should possess in their encounter with women (151). Purdah, might be stifling for women like Zohra but it had a certain allure for men like Bashir, her husband, "Whatever else might be said against the purdah system-and there was much-it certainly enhanced feminine appeal to a remarkable degree" (59). The condescension with which Bashir treats Zohra reveals the infantilization of purdah clad women since their relegation to the domestic sphere and the trivialization of their duties within that sphere is believed to make them ignorant and immature. There is a similarity in the way men like Bashir and Nikhil (*The Home and the World)* are perturbed by the influence of men like Siraj and Sandip in their respective wives' lives, "But then, he knew she had led a secluded life and had little insight into men's natures; she was naïve, and Siraj was the kind of person who could go all out to entice girls. He wondered if he should warn her; but what could he say? She might think him merely jealous and possessive" (83).

Zohra did experience a "chaos of emotions" (88) when she met Siraj who was young, ardent and enticing but she also knew that she was not in love with him. Her attraction to Siraj "was superficial compared with this deeper urge to do what was right, whose outer symbol was constancy" (88). Siraj believed that society should modify its moral standards to avoid unnecessary entanglements, "Girls should be free until marriage, and choose husbands for themselves, then the jealous husbands may put them in purdah, and spare themselves and others unnecessary heartaches" (92). When Hamid, Basheer's brother, said that mutual attraction is a prerequisite for marriage, Zohra claimed that the purdah is a "great savior" (191) since it prevents women from comparing men by denying them the opportunity to interact with them. It was her love for Hamid which made her look back on her wedding day and remember how bitterly she had wept, "I had looked forward to love, where two spirits would commune with each other, and what I felt was the funeral of my dreams" (200). Hamid is also Futehally's voice in the novel, "Look at the way we have kept our women in the darkness of purdah. Is that human? Are we following the laws of the Prophet?" (203) The acute suffering of Zohra is

concentrated in that last request she makes to Hamid about her daughter, before dying, "I don't want Shahedah to marry the way I was married. Please guard her against that, in case…" (247) Zohra, thus is an archetype of a woman whose life would have been fulfilling and meaningful, if she was not shackled by the codes and conventions of a purdah society, if she was allowed to choose the life she wanted to lead and the man she wanted to lead it with.

Imtiaz Dharker

Imtiaz Dharker was born in 1954, her family left Pakistan for Glasgow when she was nine years old. She divides time between Mumbai, Wales and London. Dharker's *Purdah,* is about the purdah that goes beyond and inside the boundary of skin and a purdah which one desires; which is a refuge, a sanctuary and a safeguard to conceal the world within. In one of her interviews, she confessed that some of her earlier poetry was about coming to terms with images. She began by looking at the "seductive image" of purdah, since it draws one's attention to the eyes and puts everything else in a "black frame." It was a beautiful image for Dharker, which she worked around as an idea, "*Purdah* was beginning to deal with territory, borderlines, the whole question of where you divide people" (138). In "The Child Sings", she shows how her musical notes do not find an aim and, "She is nothing but a crack/ where the light forgot to shine" (38). As she says in "A Woman's Place", it is not just the purdah of the face but that of the voice that needs to be worn to make oneself inconspicuous:

> Mouths must be watched, especially
>
> if you'are a woman.
>
> A smile should be stifled with the sari-end.
>
> No one must see your serenity cracked,
>
> even with delight.
>
> If occasionally you need to scream, do it
>
> alone but in front of a mirror
>
> where you can see the strange shape the mouth makes.

before you wipe it off. (40)

The rebellious mouth must be watched, smiles must be contained, screams stifled because, “Fear, you tell me, is a woman’s place” (41). It is this fear which does not give her the right to answer the curses thrown at her by her mother-in-law, which makes her burn herself to ashes, “Another torch, blazing in the dark, / Another woman./ We shield our faces from the heat” (“Another Woman”, 47).

Dharker addresses the complexities of choice by making us wonder about the one who chooses, who is nothing but “helplessly, herself?” (“Choice”, 49) The poem talks of how, “love leers close to violence”, the urge to crush and stifle those one loves, with the baggage one carries and is encouraged to pass on. The first two parts of the poem reveal the hopes, dreams and fears of the mother who wishes her child to grow away from her, till they are sure they are safe from each other. The last section of the poem is about the daughter who:

Through feverish nights,

dreaming of you, the watchdogs of virtue

and obedience crouched on my chest. ‘Shake

them off,’ I told myself, and did. Wallowed

in small perversities, celebrated as they came

of age, matured to sins.

I call this freedom now,

watch the word cavort luxuriously, strut

my independence across whole continents

of sheets. But turning away from the grasp

of arms, the rasp of breath,

to look through darkened windows at the night,

Mother, I find you staring back at me.

When did my body agree

to wear your face? (50)

The tendency to romanticize acts of resistance, that may be "small perversities", is a temptation that many feminist scholars succumb to and which Saba Mehmood cautions against. Is freedom to be defined as any act of rejection or resistance to the ideals and values one is made to imbibe? Is it still freedom if it merely counters and does not create afresh? Is it freedom if the future is constantly haunted by the past? Is this idea of freedom shaped and conditioned by those who argue against it? As argued by Chand, there are many poems in Dharker's oeuvre that address the experience of gendering by looking at mother and daughter relationships and often the daughter inadvertently and unconsciously repeats the patterns and rhythms of her mother's life (178).

In "Purdah II", it is the call for prayer that is a "coin of comfort" in a strange land, the prayers "lulled/ into thinking it had found a home" (17). The Hajji who was just fifteen, had, "nothing holy in his look" (17) and showered his attention on the 'you' in the poem. All the girls she knew had been taught:

…to bind

their brightness tightly round,

Whatever they might wear,

in the purdah of the mind. (18)

The poem, paints portraits of women who rebelled, Saleema, who married out of love and Naseem who ran away from home. The manner in which, "to save the child/ the lamb was sacrificed" these girls were annihilated "to save the man" (19):

There you are, I can see you all now

in the tenements up north.

In or out of purdah. Tied or bound.

Shaking your box to hear

how freedom rattles…

one coin, one sound. (21)

The act of shedding the veil does not liberate these women from age old beliefs and customs, the "purdah of the mind" curtails their movements and haunts them for their defiance and subversion of the norms of chastity and honor. The sound of freedom for both purdah-clad and other women is the same, a hollow and empty sound. In "Grace", a woman is prevented from entering the mosque since "She trails the month behind her", regardless of the fact that "God the Compassionate, the Merciful, /created man from clots of blood" (19). In a foreign land, where she is an "untidy shape", "a scribble leaked/ out of a colonial notebook" where "looks are whiplashes":

There is no help but Allah

and the rituals:

wash the hands to the elbows,

a fluttering of fingertips,

a kind of peace. ("Pariah", 28)

It is what Pierre Hadot calls "spiritual exercises" which fashion a certain kind of subject and in this case provide a sense of belonging, solace and a sense of continuity to the subject who is bereft of all the moorings of her identity. While the gendering of subjectivity is the overarching theme of Dharker's poetry, she also addresses the intersection of gender with other markers of identity.

In, "Purdah I", Dharker talks of purdah as,

…a kind of safety.

The body finds a place to hide.

The cloth fans out against the skin

much like the earth that falls

on coffins after they put the dead men in. (14)

Purdah is a shroud that covers her because she carries "a sense of sin" and the shame she is expected to learn "came quite naturally." It is the socialization of gender roles that make it 'natural' for her to be shamed by her body and thus desire to conceal it from strange eyes. She allows the cloth to grow close to her skin but the walls of cloth and of her body do not prevent light from filtering inward:

She stands outside herself,

sometimes in all four corners of a room

Wherever she goes, she is always

inching past herself,

as if she were a clod of earth

and the roots as well,

scratching for a hold

between the first and second rib.

Passing constantly out of her hands

into the corner of someone else's eyes…

While doors keep opening

inward and again

inward. (14-15)

Dharker, addresses the possibilities and worlds created by purdah. Rama Mehta in *Inside the Haveli*, while talking about Geeta's ability to think while the others talked, mentions similar

kinds of possibilities. The anonymity, lack of fixity and incoherence of the veil enables these movements outside oneself and also within oneself. The tangible or external purdah does not prevent doors from opening inward. It is the internalization of the value system of purdah that acts as a constraint. As Dharker says in "Going Home":

> Mummy put me in purdah
>
> or he'll see the hair sprout in my lap.
>
> Mummy put me in purdah quick
>
> or he'll see. (34)

There is an emphasis on the "multiplicity and fragmentation of the female subject" in the way Dharker uses varied pronouns in her poems and a seamless intertwining and mirroring of women's lives and histories. Dharker's subjects challenge the dichotomy of victimhood and agency by becoming victim-agents, showing that "pain is the very condition of a move towards no-pain…" (Rajan 35).[161] The first few stanzas of "Purdah I" are about a third person singular but later:

> She half-remembers things
>
> from someone else's life,
>
> perhaps from yours, or mine-
>
> carefully carrying what we do not own:
>
> between the thighs, a sense of sin. (14)

There is a subtle link forged between women's lives as the next stanza talks of the voices within "us" and the last stanza shows her inching past herself. This division of female subjectivity is a representation of the multiplicity, variety, interconnectedness and camaraderie of the subjects in her poems. A similar kind of a "dispersed consciousness" (Chand 170) can be seen in "Purdah II" as well, "There are so many of me" (19).

[161] Cited by Chand, p. 168.

Conclusion

An anlaysis of the debate about the veil in colonial, neo-colonial and anti-colonial discourses indicates how women's bodies and ways of comportment are sites of larger political, social and cultural battles. The centrality given to the veil in colonial accounts created the possibility of a similar kind of a centrality in anti-colonial accounts. While feminism has engaged with the intersection of gender with different markers of identity, it has often turned away in fear and revulsion from religiosity. The Foucauldian model of subjectivation with the focus on "techniques of the self" and what Hadot calls "spiritual exercises" is immensely useful to understand the different conceptions of agency activated by acts of piety.

In the case of writers discussed in this chapter one finds a critique of the denial of education and opportunities to women through using a skewed understanding of religious texts. Iyengar's Talat is denied selfhood by the congruence of divine and patriarchal authority in the form of the black robe she wears. It is not purdah per se but the refusal of others to see her that perturbs her. Both Iqbalunissa Hussain and Futehally talk of unfulfilled lives because of the way purdah clad women are thwarted in their desire for learning and romantic possibilities. The complex nature of the agency of these victim-agents poetically illustrates the nuanced understanding of choice and agency as outlined by Saba Mehmood. The imbrications of the women in Dharker's poetry in the structures of power which shape their subjectivities and are in turn shaped by them are further complicated by the intersection of gender, religion and geographical boundaries. In a strange land, the azan is a "coin of comfort", the "spiritual exercises" of cleansing before offering prayers lulls the protagonist into thinking that she belongs and is part of a collective experience. The fragmentation and dispersion of female subjectivity and the parallel nature of women's histories in her poems also creates a sisterhood on the basis of gender that is also alert to the differences between women. The tangible veil does not prevent doors from opening inward. It is the "purdah of the mind" which assails both veiled and unveiled women, limiting the possibilities of a fulfilling existence.

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Chapter 5

Purdah in Indian Languages Other Than English

In this chapter, I propose to look at purdah in literatures in Indian languages other than English. While the first four chapters attempted to analyse purdah in Indian English Writing, this chapter is possibly the beginning of future research projects. As discussed in the chapter, "Orientalism and the Veil" that veiling could also function as a narrative device, I intend to see if the mediation of language adds another dimension to the approach towards purdah.

There was a turn towards realism in Urdu fiction in the twentieth century. There were various factors such as the Industrial Revolution; Russian Revolution of 1917; rise in the consciousness of farmers, trade unions and society in general and the struggle for independence that were responsible for this turn (Komal 159). The Russian Revolution played a significant role in shaping the concerns of the writers of short stories. The encounter with Russian literature was another seminal influence which encouraged writers to portray the predicament of those at the margins and through that portrayal make a plea for eliminating social, cultural and economic inequities (Duggal 13).

Angarey

The book, *Angarey*, a brutally honest collection of short stories by four writers who laid bare the hypocrisy of the society was banned by the government when it was first published in 1932. It laid the foundation of the Progressive Writers' Association which was, "the most significant literary movement to have sprung up in twentieth century India" as it perceived, "aesthetic expression as being integrally fused with political and social codes" (Alvi xvi). The writers, not only questioned the conservative mores of society but also challenged conventional ways of narration by employing literary techniques such as the stream of consciousness (Babbar viii). Premchand's inaugural address at the All India Progressive Writers' Conference encouraged writers and readers to change their outlook towards literature and its relationship with life:

> We will have to change the standard of beauty. So far this standard has been based on wealth and love of pleasure…For them (artists) beauty lies in a beautiful

> woman, not in the poor and ungainly mother who is toiling hard after putting her baby to sleep in the hay. If our artists have decided that beauty definitely dwells in painted lips, cheeks and eyebrows, how can it have anything to do with tangled hair, cracked lips and sunken cheeks.[162]

Rasheed Jahan, was popularly known as 'Rasheed Jahan *Angareywali'* but she was the 'Scarlet Woman of Urdu Literature' who wrote about issues that were considered taboo/unworthy of being discussed in the public domain (xvi). The limits imposed on women, because of the purdah code were minutely observed by Rasheed Jahan, through the struggles of her parents, Sheikh Abdullah and Begum Wahid Jahan in their attempts to establish a school for girls. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, points out in his autobiography that one of the biggest oppositions to women's education was "*qadamat parasti and parda parasti"* (conservative elements and upholders of purdah values). Abdullah was a Kashmiri pandit who had embraced Islam because of its egalitarian message. Later, when he was earnestly trying to open a school for girls in Aligarh, purdah again cropped up as an obstacle in the path of women's education, "*sub se zyada rona parda ka tha aur iss bahas mein auratein bhi hissa le rahin theen"* (211)[163] (The biggest problem was purdah and women were also participating in the debate about purdah) Shaikh Abdullah, Begam Abdullah, Mumtaz Ali, Muhibb-i-Husain and many others, advocated a reform in the practice of purdah by arguing how the manner in which it was observed was excessive and not in tune with the shari'i purdah (247).

Minault (*Secluded Scholars*) looks at the various forces and factors behind the promotion of education of Muslim girls in the colonial period. She argues how there is a lacuna in scholarship about reform, which she tries to fill up by writing about Muslim women's education since, "If there is such a thing as a comparative degree of invisibility, Muslim women are even more invisible to history than are other Indian women" (2). Muslims, being former rulers, whose authority was displaced by the colonizers, seemed to be more hostile to Western education and influence. She also explains the changing connotations of the word, *sharif,* in the late nineteenth century. The military personnel, administrators and religious figures who had served under the

[162] Inaugural address, trans. Orsini, 2004. Cited by Jalil, 2014, p. 85
[163] Ibid, p. 7

Mughal dynasty, later constituted the professional, bureaucratic class under the British. They used to refer to themselves as *sharif/ ashraf/* noble. In the late nineteenth century, the meaning of the word evolved to mean someone who was "honorable, upright, cultured and respectable." There was a conscious attempt to harp on frugality and moderation and differentiate this figure from the Nawabi lifestyle of excess and grandeur (4-5). At a time when larger identities of class, region, religion and nation were articulated, the family was not only seen as a unit of kinship, it was the primary site where behavior was shaped, in line with the ideology of the larger collectivities. The need to do away with meaningless customs which were not based on religious texts, control useless expenditure, the need to create a harmonious, cooperative relationship between the husband and wife, and raise children in accordance with the values of sharif culture were some of the reasons behind the advocacy of women's education by social reformers (173). The influence of the Victorian ideal of domesticity could be seen in the way education for women was promoted for the sole purpose of cultural continuity and to make them better wives and mothers. A student recited a verse by Akbar Allahabadi at a prize distribution ceremony of a madrasa,

> *Ta'lim auraton ki zaruri to hai, magar*
>
> *Khatun-i-Khana hon, vo sabha ki pari nah on*
>
> Education is necessary for women, no doubt
>
> But let them be 'angels in the house', not social gadabouts. (253)[164]

Hindu and Muslim reformers looked at the space of the zenana as steeped in ignorance and superstition. This critique of the zenana and suggestions for reform is not very different from the 'white man's burden to civilize the world' (47). Their ideas about women's education were "more symptomatic of social change than causative" (264). There were many, especially the upper class who preferred zenana education by ustanis, over sending girls to school. It was due to economic reasons that school education was promoted in the twentieth century to cater to the increased demand. Purdah was maintained in schools through covered palanquins, high walls of the school compound and boarding schools to prevent the need to go out (215). An eleventh

[164] Cited by Minault (1998)

century Persian classic, *Qabus Nama,* urged Muslim families to teach their daughters the tenets of their faith, "But do not teach her to read and write; that is a great calamity" (125).[165] It was believed that if a girl knew how to write, she might violate the code of purdah by writing to those who are forbidden to her. When the school, Aligarh Zenana Madarsa was started, three dolis were hired to enable girls to come to the school without flouting the norms of purdah. Begam Abdullah invited parents to come and stay with their daughters in the boarding school and if it did not match their expectations, they could take their daughters back. It was this individualized attention that contributed to the success of this educational establishment (245). The increase in the enrollment at the institution did not lead to a rise in the number of women professionals:

> Education for girls, unlike education for boys, was portrayed as contributing to cultural continuity, not breaking from it. Sharif values were perpetuated, the curtains of purdah were not torn down, but rather institutionalized with detailed rules of purdah observation; family ties were emphasized by running the institution as a family writ large. These policies were necessary in order to secure social acceptance without which the school would have failed. (248)

Rasheed Jahan and her sisters were educated at the institution, laboriously and lovingly founded by their parents. They doffed purdah when they left Aligarh for college. While she was at Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi, she organized literacy classes and free medical clinics to help poor women. It was her training in obstetrics and gynecology that brought her into contact with women, and the manner in which their bodies and minds were tormented by conservative and bigoted social norms (274), "In progressive families she became a symbol of the emancipated woman; in conservative homes an example of all the worst that can occur if a woman is educated, not kept in purdah and allowed to pursue a career" (Coppola and Zubair 170)[166].

[165] *The Qabus Nama,* Cited by Minault, p. 24
[166] Jalil (2014) p. 45

Since, all four writers, Sajjad Zahir, Rasheed Jahan, Ahmed Ali and Mahmud-uz-Zafar, who contributed to this 'incendiary' book belonged to upper middle class, were Western educated, familiar with English and Western literature, they were considered immoral, and the immorality was considered "the result of cultural and intellectual contact with Europe" (Gopal 16)[167].

Purdah, as pointed out by Rasheed Jahan[168], was observed by respectable ladies, not only from men but also from prostitutes, "We should observe parda from that vile creature" said a colleague of the narrator in the story, "That One" (119). In this story, the writer shows an encounter in a public dispensary between two women, one working as a teacher in a school and the other a prostitute suffering from syphilis. This encounter and other such encounters in her stories are a testament to the "chain of events set in motion by an imperceptible wave of modernity…", a modernity that does not completely liberate these women. Those in the dispensary consider this visitor abominable and even refuse to sit in the chair she sat on (Jalil 93). In the story, "Mute", Ahmadi Begum is proud of the fact that even their closest relatives had not set eyes on her daughter Siddiqa Begum, 'It is only the fortunate few who can cross the threshold of our home. We are proud of our name…" (149). She looks at the new trend of girls and boys meeting before marriage as an "illness" (151). Siddiqa Begum's upbringing was done in such a manner that "she remained a child and an unknowing one at that" (147). Rasheed Jahan, points out how frantic attempts were made to keep the women's quarters inviolate and unaffected by the changes taking place outside, "A new wave is said to be coursing through every nook and corner of Delhi; yet you will still find homes where no storms brew and no earthquakes tremor. The same old traditions, the same men's quarters in the outer part of the house where acrowd assembles each evening and the same confines of the women's seclusion" (146).

Rasheed Jahan's story, "A Visit to Delhi", captures the tragic irony of the visit to Delhi of Malka Begum, who was the first among her friends, to sit on a train and to have travelled to Delhi from Faridabad. It is a suffocating, uncomfortable and distressing journey but it does not culminate in exploring Delhi. The burqa clad Malka Begum is abandoned by her husband when

[167] Ibid, p. 40

[168] References to "A Visit to Delhi" are from *Parwaaz, Behind the Veil* from De Souza's *Purdah* and the other stories from Jalil, *A Rebel and Her Cause*, 2014.

he finds an acquaintance of his and the same burqa which is donned to protect a woman's modesty makes her seem alluring, mysterious and vulnerable to the men around her:

> And I, perched on the luggage, wrapped in a burqa, there I sat. First, this damned burqa then these cursed men. Men are anyway no good but when they see a woman sitting like this they just circle around her. There is no opportunity even to chew paan. One damn fellow coughs, another hurls a remark. And I…breathless with fear. (*Parwaaz* 1)

The myth that a burqa protects or provides a sense of security or announces the respectable status of those donning it is subtly undercut by Rasheed Jahan through Malka Begum's discomfort. A similar scene occurs in Chughtai's *The Crooked Line,* where Shaman sees men making lewd gestures at the burqa clad women on the platform, "Standing on the platform were many burka-clad figures playing football with the crippled intellects of these men. Close by was a bride, who, her veil lowered, was engaged in bombarding them" (233). There was a man holding a sex manual in his hand, knowing fully well that the women around him could see what he was looking at, "Using this strange and silent form of exchange, he was communicating secretly with the women in *burkas.* He was also receiving responses, some nervous, some filled with loathing, some extremely curious" (233).

M. Asaduddin argues that *The Crooked Line,* should be read in conjunction with Chughtai's autobiography and her short stories. One could also argue that the thematic similarity and the enormous influence of Rasheed Jahan on Chughtai is a testimony to the analytic usefulness of a close scrutiny of both in conjunction with each other. Ismat Chughtai, met Rasheed Jahan in Aligarh and was inspired by her honest, outspoken nature. They met at the Urdu Progressive Writers Association in Lucknow in 1936. She was also inspired by the thematic concerns of Rasheed Jahan's stories which exposed the subjugation of women to maintain the shibboleths of middle-class respectability (Minault *Secluded Scholars* 278). As argued by Coppola with reference to "A Visit to Delhi",

> The Indian husband's poor treatment of his wife and childbearing are two

> recurrent themes in a number of Rasheed Jahan's stories. It is also interesting to note that a woman doctor is often presented in later stories as the voice of reason and modernity in the midst of superstition, ignorance and poverty" ("The Angare Group" 60)[169].

Rasheed Jahan, shows how social and cultural conditioning does not even let a woman consider the possibility of being unveiled. When asked by someone to show her face, Malka Begum argues, "Did I go all the way to show my face to these wretches?"(2) After being left alone, shoved and pushed, she insists on being taken back to Faridabad from the station itself, "I have had enough of this 'visit to Delhi'. May no one ever go with you, not even to paradise. What a great trip you brought me on!" It is this visit to Delhi about which "women had come from far to listen" (2), thus indicating the cloistered nature of their lives. As argued by Jalil, the story shows "the complete lack of *sair-o-tafri* (leisure travel) in the lives of women" (*A Rebel* 36). The story is about an "abortive tour, a journey that ended before any sights could be seen" (Jalil, *A Literary History,* 137). It also indicates how "public spaces are masculinized" (Gopal)[170] and the veil is one of the instruments to attain that masculinization. The excessive form of purdah, that blocks a woman's vision and hinders her movements, precludes her from a complete utilization of that space and her place in it.

Rasheed Jahan's play, *Behind the Veil,* offers a glimpse into the lives of those behind the purdah by making the readers privy to a conversation between Muhammadi and Aftab. The purdah code also draws a veil over matters such as the female body, sex, marital rape, pregnancy, etc. and it is this veil that Rasheed Jahan lifts in her writings. We are told that these women belong to an orthodox, respectable Muslim population residing in Old Delhi. Muhammadi, a thirty- two- year old married woman, who had had a child every year, looks much older than her age. She is perpetually sick and "tired of life" (*Purdah* 463). She even had her teeth removed because her husband complained that her mouth smelt. She does not even have the liberty to feed her children, "Husband's orders. 'When God has given us money why should you be troubled?' he says. But it's his own pleasure he's thinking about. If the baby was with me, he'd be

[169] Cited by Jalil, *A Literary History,* 2014, p. 142
[170] Cited by Jalil, *A Literary History,* 138

inconvenienced. Doesn't matter whether it's day or night, he wants his wife. And not only his wife. He goes the rounds to other women too" (465).

She talks of the insatiable sexual appetite of her husband and how he would satiate his lust even when she was seriously ill, "These fellows don't care whether they go to heaven or hell when they die. They know what they want here. They don't care whether their wives, poor wretches, live or die. Men want their satisfaction" (466). It is not a simple world of victims and oppressors because even victims contribute/ participate in the cycle of oppression. Aftab bemoans the fact that her son married a Christian while she had contemplated marrying him to her brother's daughter, "I'd planned their marriage when they were children" (466). The trials and tribulations of her own marriage do not prevent Aftab from fixing the marriage of her son at a young age. Muhammadi's daughter, Sabira, when accused by her brother of reading, "trashy books", claims, "I was reading Maulvi Ashraf Ali Thanavi's *Bahishti Zewar"*(467). A realization and articulation of their own suffering does not lead to a rethinking or re-visioning of societal patterns. At the other extreme lies Aftab who suffers from loneliness because of her husband's lack of concern, "He comes home to say his prayers, sits with me a few minutes and goes off to the sitting room. God shouldn't make anyone so lonely. And all the hopes I had . . ." (468). The veil, through its divide between the public and the private, seeks to preserve the sanctity of the private and keep it as far as possible from the public eye. The belief in the sanctity of marriage, conjugal bliss, love for children are deemed essential for maintaining the societal order and harmony. Rasheed Jahan, courageously and sensitively defies purdah values to reveal the distressing situation of women and children who are treated like playthings by men in the family, who often use religion as a means to an end. Muhammadi's husband urged her to help him marry her niece, who he claimed to have fallen in love with, "He sits down and opens the Holy Quran and reads out verses telling me all that would happen to me in the next world if I didn't help him…The *shariat* allows a man four wives, so why wouldn't I marry again?" (470-471)The fear of a co-wife was so daunting, that she got herself operated twice:

> My womb and all my lower parts had fallen. I got it put right so that he could get the same pleasure again as he'd got from a newly-married wife. But when a woman has a baby every year how *can* she stay in good shape? It slipped down

> again. And then he went on at me and threatened me until he got me butchered again. And even then he wasn't satisfied. (471)

It is right after this horrendous revelation that the call for prayer from the mosque is heard and they realize that it was time for the *zuhr* prayer. The call for prayer does not offer any solace to these women, instead, it reminds the readers of the abuse of religion to torment women, and make them silently accept their suffering. A similar callousness is shown by Maulvi Atiqullah, who suffered from a sexually transmitted disease but wanted to marry a second time ostensibly for children. He asked his wife, Fatima to observe purdah from her maternal cousins, "First of all, those men are *namehram* for you and you must observe purdah from them. And secondly, I don't want you to appear before Aziz and Qadeer" ("Woman", *A Rebel* 218). Jalil sees Rasheed Jahan as an 'organic intellectual', whose social conscience and sensitivity propelled her to continue working all her life to efface the social, cultural and economic inequities (*A Rebel* 90).

The honor code, as revealed by these writers applied differently to women from different classes. Dulari, in Sajjad Zahir's story of the same name, "handed over her body and her heart to Kazim" (*Angarey*, 13) and later, when his marriage was settled, ran away from the house and was forced to sell her body to survive, "While it was true that her reputation had been completely destroyed, it was not as significant a loss for a londi as it would have been for a respectable woman. She would be married off to one of the servants" (15).The juxtaposition of the "modest, chaste and unpolluted" (14) daughter of the house, Haseena, with Dulari is similar to the binary between Geeta and Lakshmi in *Inside the Haveli.* It is a reworking of the virtuous sister and sloppy, inconsiderate sister motif in Nazir Ahmad's (1831-1912) writings. Ahmad wrote the popular Urdu novel, *Mirat-ul-Uroos* about two sisters, Asghari (a model of wisdom, modesty and learning) and Akbari (epitome of lethargy and ignorance). As against Ahmad's works, the sympathy of Zahir lies with Dulari:

> The sight of an unchaste, insignificant creature being disgraced brought to them an exaggerated sense of their own superiority and merit. The vultures preying on the dead bodies of animals do not realize that the defenceless body into which they jab their foul beaks are, despite being dead, better than those like them who

are alive. (16)

In another story, “The Same Uproar, Once Again”, Zahir, in a tongue in cheek manner shows the manner in which the ‘respectable’ fall in love. Hamid sahib falls in love with his distant cousin, Sultana Begum, without exchanging more than a few words with her:

Dekhna bhi to unhe door se dekha karna

Sheva-e-ishq nahi husn ko ruswa karna

Gaze upon your love, but from afar

For disgracing the beloved is not the custom of love. (44)

The love of Hamid and Sultana was completely, “chaste” (45), it was only when she turned nineteen and her mother could not find a suitable match for her, was she married to Hamid. Set against this ‘love’ is a poor woman, going out at night slyly to meet her lover:

The pleasure of love, the anguish of death! Why are these mountains, their lofty peaks knocking the skies, still standing firm? The waves in the ocean, the ticking of the clock, the sound of water dripping drop by drop, silence-and the heartbeat. A moment of love! The sound of blood racing through blood vessels. The eyes carry on a conversation. They listen. (47-48)

The repressed sexual desires of the respectable are contrasted with the spontaneity and vitality of those who are poor.

“Masculinity” by Mahmud-uz-Zafar talks of the chasm between a man and his wife whom he never loved and whose life never intersected with his, “My wife lived in the narrow and dark lanes of tradition while I walked the broad and well-lit roads of the new age” (54). When she was ill, he felt, “obliged to treat her with love” (56). The writer poignantly reveals the discomfort they had in each other’s presence and the inability to communicate with each other:

What can I say? For me there is no difference between day and night, but why are

> you so quiet? You must have had many new experiences, you must have dealt with many important matters. Talk about all those things to me. The strange things there, all kinds of machines, different kinds of people, a new life! You often wrote to tell me how you were not able to find spare time to write to me about all these things, but, now, you are here with me. At least now you have the time. (58)

The crossing of boundaries by men and the continued entrenchment of women in the code of purdah created an unbridgeable gulf between the two. When people started doubting his sexual prowess, he made his wife return home after her recovery, to give, "foolproof evidence" (60) to his friends and family by impregnating his wife. When she was about to deliver, "Her restlessness, her writhing and her screams were the unmistakable proof of my virility" (61). The veil, thrown over the predicament of women like her and Muhammadi Begum is lifted by these writers, who hoped to employ literature as a tool of social and cultural awakening. She dies during childbirth but when the narrator is told that she died with a smile on her face, "My heart was set at peace then, somewhat" (61). The story wants to deny that 'peace' to the readers by jolting them out of their complacency.

Ahmed Ali argues how the veil is a patriarchal, misogynist strategy to deny women autonomy, dignity and financial independence. When a woman in "The Clouds Don't Come", realizes that she is just a means to an end and an instrument used by her husband to satisfy his lust, she wonders what she could do:

> We could have refused to tolerate such humiliation if we had our own money. We would have done whatever we wished. But we don't even have permission to earn money. All we can do is to rot behind the veil. Our lives are worse than that of those *londis*…We are entirely dependent on others like lamps, we have no control over when we are lighted and when we are snuffed out. (67-68)

While the women are dehumanized by a screen, men "hunt from behind this bearded screen" (68). She regrets that she was born a Muslim woman, because Hindu women, "At least they have freedom" (68). Religion exists only for the "gratification of men", who grow beards, consider themselves Muslims and use their religion to subjugate women. Rasheed Jahan, also underlines the significance of a woman's financial independence in her story, "Man and Woman". The story is an argument between a man and a woman who loved each other but have different approaches to the institution of marriage. The man expects his wife to look after the house and children while the woman adamantly refuses to leave her job, even if she receives a meagre salary,

> MAN: How does it make a difference who earns it-a man or a woman?
>
> WOMAN: Oh, of course it makes a big difference. You must have heard that old folk song: the male sparrow bought a grain of rice, the female bought a grain of daal and together they made khichdi. (162)

These stories were significant because they "liberated the Urdu story from its linguistic prison and thematic mannerism" (Paul[171] 278). For writers like Manto, Bedi and Chughtai, "rebellion or at least acute dissatisfaction, had become inevitable. Each had a fixed focus for his hatred or his love" (Jafferey[172], 203).

Ismat Chughtai

Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) was one of the most vocal and notorious Urdu writers of her time. She was a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement but was also critical of some of their ideas. In a manner similar to the writers of *Angarey,* Ismat Chughtai constantly exposed the tension between, "proclaimed public morality and private and personal urges" (Asaduddin, "Alone on Slippery Terrain" 81). The patriarchal mores did not allow a sincere and honest articulation of one's feelings and thoughts, thus forcing people to take recourse to hypocrisy and concealment. The class that she wrote about came from the landed aristocracy. Although they had received the benefits of a western liberal education, it did not significantly impact the patterns and rituals of the family (Asaduddin 78). Chughtai unravels the various layers and

[171] *Ismat:Her life, Her Times.* "The Urdu Short Story" Trans. Chandra Joshi
[172] Ibid. "Social Concerns in Ismat" Trans. Rana Sami

dimensions of a woman's psyche. *Terhi Lakeer,* like most of her writings draws upon her own experiences and recounts the vicissitudes of Shaman's life. Chughtai, "exposes the social cultural conflicts and the psychosexual determinants that govern the development of female consciousness" (Naqvi, 1995, vii). Naqvi draws a comparison between the first half of the novel where Chughtai describes Shaman's childhood and Simone de Beauvoir's, "The Formative Years: Childhood" in *The Second Sex,* which was published four years after the novel. There is an "imaginative blending of fact and fiction" (xiv) and her works can be seen as ethnographic in terms of their clever and scathing critique of social and cultural conditioning and its deep, psychological impact on both men and women (x). The novel shows, how even when purdah was not enforced formally, it was practiced, as boys and girls sat separately, "Since, they were all quite a distance away there was a sort of purdah between the two groups." This separation, in terms of a piece of cloth or space did not curb sexual desires or fantasies about the opposite sex, "But in their hearts the girls were thinking only of the boys." When Bilquis asks Shaman to meet Rashid, she refuses, saying, "What? I'm in purdah "(84). It is Rasheed who is blindfolded with a dupatta so that Shaman does not flout the conventions of purdah strictly. Chughtai sees this enforced division, unnatural and unhealthy as it arouses and frustrates desire:

> Rasheed was tall and lean, the *dupatta* covered his eyes and part of his nose, leaving in view only the lips which quivered delicately as he attempted to repress his smile. There was a jungle of thick hair on his head and locks of hair threatened to escape from under the *dupatta.* The top front button of his shirt was open, revealing his light brown neck and the veins that throbbed as he controlled his amusement. (84)

This scene is a curious inversion of the norms of purdah and the gaze, where it is a male body that becomes the object of the female gaze. Later, we are told that they play carom with Rashid's face covered. The very absurdity of his attempt at purdah reveals the lack of imagination/ will/ ability to imagine a different world where there is a free mingling of the sexes. The belief that purdah, by keeping men and women separate, curtails their interactions, is revealed to be an illusory belief by Chughtai in more ways than one. At various places in the novel, instead of

talking of an individual man or woman and the lip service they pay to purdah norms, she talks of men and women in general, by alluding to the erotic games of *sherwanis* and *burqas*, that become a metonym for the enforced separation of men and women or the interaction between men and women mediated by the burden of social customs. Her anger at the harsh treatment meted out to women through the custom of purdah was also directed at the women themselves. When at the Progressive Writers Conference held in Bhopal in 1949, women complained to her about the caricatured portrayal of women in a play, she said, "You deserve this punishment. Go sit behind the purdah a little more! And let people create your ghosts and scare each other…I have no sympathy for girls who do not know how to help themselves" (108)[173]. This also shows how Chughtai believed that purdah, reduces a woman to a part of a faceless, anonymous and homogenous group, depriving her of her individuality and her unique sense of selfhood:

> At every stall there's a crowd of black *sherwanis* and black *burqas.* The *sherwanis* don't have the nerve to stay away from the shadow of the *burqas;* if you're buying earrings, they're present, if you're sifting through bangles, they 're pushing through with their hands… In short, they're everywhere, hissing, the *koriyale.* As for the girls, they are bewildered and confused; if they complain they would be prohibited from coming, which means they're helpless. However, the world is hostile and desolate without the *koriyale.* What is left in the exhibition that is of interest if you reproach them and send them away? (88)

Even, in Chughtai's memoirs, she talks of how girls used to call the men, "kodiale", a poisonous snake, "It was a romantic word that represented the fear and romance hidden in the minds of many girls" (154). The distance between the sexes made them look attractive and mysterious to each other:

> Actually the purdah that stood between the sexes allowed for the imagination to weave romantic dreams that were now destroyed…

[173] *Ismat.* "From Bombay to Bhopal." Trans. Meenakshi Bharat

> However, one thing is certain-once the purdah is lifted, some base emotions that thrive simply on imagination and become the cause of much mental confusion get resolved. One stands face to face with reality. One does not look at another simply as a member of the other sex but as an ordinary human being. The possibility of blind love gets reduced and life can be built on surer foundations. (154-155)

According to Chughtai, purdah bred unhealthy desires because of curiosity and unfulfilled longings. A healthy, natural relationship between men and women could only be possible by removing this enforced separation of the sexes. She also portrays the traumatic experience of the shedding of the veil by someone who had become so accustomed to the veil that it became an extension of her body. Hameed, made his grandmother drop the purdah when he returned from England, "Poor Nani, on the other hand, trembled and quivered; in the beginning the water-carrier and the sweeper would cover their faces with their lungis when they came in, but now she, poor thing, veiled her face when a male outsider was in the house" (*The Crooked Line* 124). The romanticisation of the shedding of the veil and the liberation it entails is undercut by Chughtai, as the surreptitious code of purdah seeps into the core of one's being and leads to self censorship; creating a docile, submissive subject, thus, making the subject participate in her subjectivation:

> But when a bird's feathers have been clipped once, it remains imprisoned even when it's free, and the clipped feathers don't grow back in this life and even if they do reappear all out of shape and crooked. In addition, when you are burdened with your own protection you become short-sighted; where's the pleasure in telling silly lies and making excuses to yourself? …It was as though people were slowly shifting the burden of their shoulders to hers, liberated from someone else's prison, she was now becoming tangled in the chains of her own responsibilities. Her being was divided into two parts, one in the role of the

protector, the other the protected. (165-166)

There were times when Shaman regrets the passing away of purdah since, "A tiny glimpse ensures the onlooker's interest" and thus conceals the blemishes of the body. It was because of the veil that all the women in literature earlier were "either a beauty or a youthful maiden" (180). It was the removal of the veil that revealed all the ploys women employed to appear beautiful. She also talks of the different practice of purdah of the women of the Agarwals and Oswals. The young women always went out in large groups with their heads covered by a shawl held by their maids on either side of the group (*A Life in Words* 157). The manner of observing purdah varied with age, class and community. Genteel women, started wearing shawls like Hindu women, while women who belonged to the community of tailors and dyers did not have purdah. The older women placed the dupatta on the head and it hung over the back (168).

It was the men in the family who urged women to drop the veil. Some of the women were rebels but most were obedient daughters or wives and the act of dropping purdah was more a negotiation with family members and less of a defiant act, "The decision to leave purdah involved a lot of intra-family diplomacy" (Minault, "Coming Out" 94). Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz[174], pointed out in her memoirs, that the women of the family left purdah in the 1920s, when her father became the Education Member in the Viceroy's cabinet:

> (In Calcutta) Father asked us to discard the veil and we went out to the New Market without *burqas* for the first time in our lives. Shafi was used to spending his life with his women-folk, and he did not like the idea of attending and arranging mixed functions without his wife and mother. Moreover, he had been carefully watching the progress of Hindu women and felt for some time that Muslim women must give up *purda*, and take their place in the building of the nation. (59)

[174] *Father and Daughter: A Political Autobigraphy.* Cited by Minault, p. 94

The approval of the husband or father also helped in winning the approval of the rest of the family members. Begum Shaista Ikramullah[175], was one such "dutiful daughter", who was married to a member of the Indian Civil Service and she first came out of purdah at a garden party organized by a government official:

> I did not enjoy my first experience of being out of *purdah* at all. I felt embarassed at being looked at by hundreds of men (while) decked up all in my best, and my enjoyment of the party was further spoiled by my having to spend the entire evening trying to avoid being seen by my uncle who very strongly disapproved of my coming out of purdah. (73)

Azim Beg Chughtai, Ismat Chughtai's brother, who was against purdah, once brought his friend Khwaja Muhammad Ishaq in front of his unveiled wife. He was severely reprimanded by his family for forcing his wife to discard the veil, "Dulhan Bhabhi's brothers had got wind of it and declared that if their sister was forced to break purdah and made to dance in the marketplace they would decapitate both their sister and her husband" (*A Life in Words* 51). The first time Chughtai wore a burqa, she felt humiliated and debased, so much so that she wanted to kill herself. At the suggestion of Azim, her brother, she hid her burqa in the beddings and when they reached the Jodhpur station, the servants were asked to fold them. A frantic search was made to look for her burqa but to no avail, "I was made to wear a shawl and I got to the platform like a triumphant victor…The shawl would slip off my shoulders frequently and I would be deluged with whacks" (52). She, portrays through her characters the intertwining of the oppressor and the oppressed. Noori's marriage makes Shaman feel that it is not her who will be enslaved, it will be her husband who will submit to the authority and womanly wiles of his wife, "They demanded payments for their bodies instead of getting payment from hundreds they got it from one man…A woman is like the ruler who fools his subjects by pretending to be their servant. Her ploys are so clever and dangerous; instead of being ashamed of her femininity she sees in it something sublime"(*The Crooked Line* 182-183).

[175] *From Purdah to Parliament,* Cited by Minault, p. 101

In a manner similar to Kandiyoti, she shows, through characters like Bari Apa, how the lack of empowering alternatives makes some women, "develop a flawed and second class mode of empowerment within the confines of their limitations and begin to oppress other women" (Naqvi ix). Chughtai, says about Bari Apa, "But the act of stifling her own desires, was imbuing her with greater power to dominate. She had annihilated her own femininity for the sake of her father's honour, but Shaman was not the least bit grateful" (35).

As pointed out by Kamala Das[176], "Till recent times, women lacked the social and intellectual authority to write seriously. There were certain prescribed norms for a woman's writing." She says later, "The prescribed themes for women's writings were God and domestic bliss. Nothing else. The body, physicality was to be ignored" (156). Chughtai is the first significant writer in Urdu to talk uninhibitedly about female sexuality in its myriad aspects but there is also a binary system of sexuality in her writings, wherein the raw, untamed vitality and sexuality of the lower strata of the society is contrasted with the silence, erasure and repression due to middle-class and upper middle-class respectability[177]. Kumkum Sangari[178] argues, "This particular construction of sexual desire, as that which is contained or repressed by middle class morality, in fact presumes a desire that is always there ready to be un-/ discovered as a form of primal energy thus facilitating a conflation of sexuality and unconscious" (81-82). The purdah code is based on the assumption of the sexual vulnerability of women and the threat men pose to that honor. Through "The Quilt", Chughtai shows how even women like Begum Jaan could be perpetrators of abuse. In the absence of Rabbu, the narrator was turned into a "clay doll" (20) to satiate Begum Jaan's itch, "Amma always disliked my playing with boys. Now tell me, were they man-eaters that they would eat up her darling? …She was a believer in strict segregation for women. But Begum Jaan here was more terrifying than all the loafers of the world" (21).

Purdah, is a measure of prestige and respectability, so much so that Bi Amma takes pride in the fact that "God forbid that my daughters exchange glances with anyone! No one has ever seen as much as her pallu…" ("The Wedding Suit" 30). Kubra's younger sister is encouraged to chat and joke with Rahat to determine his interest in marrying Kubra. The violence and sexual abuse of the girl goes unseen by the mother, " 'Just look at my bangles, Bi Amma! 'Rahat has

[176] Cited by R.K Gupta, p. 5
[177] Asaduddin, *Lifting the Veil*, p. xxii
[178] "Figures for the Unconscious" Cited by Asaduddin, *Lifting the Veil* p. xxii

smashed them?' Bi Amma chirped joyfully" (34). In another story, a character wonders, if one kept the eggs of respectability and chastity warm, "would a peacock hatch out of them?" (168). The story, "Vocation" is about the narrator's assumption that her neighbor was a courtesan because of her dyed hair, tight clothes and the sound of loud guffaws that came from her house. It is later revealed to her that she was from a reputed family and was Sheikh Abdullah's wife. She says that "We women smell courtesans from a distance and want to erect protective walls against their onslaught" (159). Purdah entails limiting interaction of 'respectable' women with strange men and disreputable women. Chughtai was often accused of "an unnatural psychological preoccupation with sex" (Ahmad 222-223) or losing her "balance" in a story like "Lihaaf" by giving undue focus to physical action (Bukhari 185).[179] The focus on the female body and the way in which it is constrained is Chughtai's vociferous attack on the hypocritical codes of a society that fears the consequences of the visibility of the female body.

Chughtai also portrays the suffocating, stifling existence of a purdah clad woman in her memoirs. When her family reached Sambhar, they were shoved into a chariot with curtains which was surrounded by Rajputs, "If the curtains moved a little they would immediately straighten them" (*A Life in Words* 106). The romantic, exotic tales of Miss Hijab Ismail had no impact on her, "The stench of the salt lakes, crumbly walls, leaking roofs, heavy nails-this was our world. There was no way out, not even for death" (109). According to her it was this smothering life that probably made women commit sati. She was conscious of the immense love and affection that her mother had for all her sons and daughters, "She thought she was protecting me from the morally corrupt environment of the boarding house. Intellectually, she was a child; I was older than her" (110). Her rebellion was directed not against her parents but the values they upheld. She also alludes to the particularly miserable plight of Muslim women trapped in loveless, violent marriages because of being subjected to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. Many like Hashmat, Chughtai's cousin sister, contemplated turning into a Hindu or Christian in order to get a divorce and start their lives afresh (74). We are told that when the British were consolidating their hold over the country and framing laws, the Indian ulema did not include khula, which gives a woman the right to annul her marriage and initiate divorce (90). Chughtai, through the portrayal of Muslim middle-class families, outlined an "anti-teleological

[179] *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times.* Aziz Ahmad, *Taraqqi Pasand Adab*, Cited by Sadique, "Ismat Chughtai's Art of Fiction." "Something about Ismat Chughtai" Patrus Bukhari. Trans. Usha Nagpal.

understanding of the Indian women's movement and sketches out implications of a genealogical account focusing on legislation affecting Muslim women" (Batra 28). Genealogy, as argued by Foucault, is not a study of origins or a belief in a linear teleology of advancement and progress, "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity" (Foucault 140, 142).[180] According to Gandhi and Shah's[181] theorization about the three phases of the Indian women's movement; the first phase, from late nineteenth century to 1920s, was dominated by the concern for women's education, abolition of sati and child marriage, and reforms in divorce laws; the second wave (1920-1947) was concerned with the demand for adult franchise and the third wave strove towards employing socialist and secularist ideals to deal with economic and sexual violence against women. Batra, asks, what if a concern of the first wave, such as women's right to divorce assume monumental significance at some other historical juncture? It thus causes a rupture in the "teleology of progress espoused by historical accounts of social movements" (30). A close scrutiny of Chughtai's *The Heart Breaks Free* and her memoirs in the light of the Shah Bano and Imrana case reveal that there are "equivalences between Ismat Chughtai's fictional narratives written over four decades ago and the social terrain of the postcolonial present" (30-31). *The Heart Breaks Free,* is about Qudsia, who had been married ten years but immediately after the marriage, her husband left for England and later returned with an English wife:

> This is why Aunt Qudsia endlessly chanted verses from the Quran, spent long hours in worship and prayer, and when all of this proved fruitless, suffered from attacks in which her jaw locked and foam gathered at her mouth. Unfortunate woman, what else could she do? (5)

We are told that she was one among several women, whose husbands returned with English wives. The honorable woman, in most of these works, is often contrasted with a woman who is vocal and unhesitant about the expression of her sexual desires. For instance, Qudsia is juxtaposed with Bua, who considers herself Ghazi Mian's beloved. Ghazi Mian, who was martyred four hundreds ago, had devotees from various religious denominations gather at his

[180] Cited by Batra, p. 28
[181] Discussed by Batra, p. 29.

shrine to offer their prayers, “She’s from a good family and look how she wanders all over the place without restraint, her parda forgotten. She’s possessed, you know; everyone drowned in the Ghagra stream, but she remained afloat for three days as if there was something holding her up” (8). As against other women, who harbor fears and anxieties as soon as they reach puberty because they are made to believe they are “a fragile, unbaked clay pitcher that must encounter stones at every step” (15), Bua, was a “solid rock”. After having lost her entire family, everything she held dear, she lost all her fears. The divide between honorable and dishonorable is so pervasive that a young, precocious girl is often taught by negative example and made to religiously and jealously guard her honor:

> Amma had always warned us that girls from good families don’t stand with their hands on their hips, only nautchis do that. While you’re growing up there’s a time when your hands become a nuisance, you don’t know what to do with them. So, driven by fear that I might become a nautchi if I weren’t careful, I would sometimes place both hands over my head. (16)

Those, who led sequestered lives resented the liberty enjoyed by Bua:

> When birds who are caged gaze at the flight of those soaring freely in the skies, they are bound to dash their heads against the wooden bars of their cages. And unable to find escape, they conspire with their captors. Isn’t it true that domesticated fowls or birds with clipped wings are used by hunters to ensnare their own kind? (31)

The Bua, who was jaunty and paid no heed to gender norms, was given laxatives which completely damaged her digestive system. She was stripped of her strength, spirit and vitality and “developed the ability to tell the difference between what was proper and what was not” (41). Shabir, who loved Qudsia ardently could not legitimately make her his because, “the Khul’s Bill, which gave Muslim women the right to divorce hadn’t been passed” (24). After

Bua's death, Qudsia eloped with Shabir, but the belief that it was an illegitimate union, unsanctioned by the sharia haunted her for the rest of her life. Qudsia breaks free but her heart and mind continue to be shackled by the burden of her upbringing, as Chughtai says in *The Wild One,* "What a terrible thing this honor is, the more you serve it, the more difficult it becomes. A pox on it!" (153). Naqvi argues, how despite the scathing criticism of societal mores, we do not find an easy narrative of victimhood in Chughtai's fiction and she does this without belittling or trivializing the suffering of her characters. The narrative reaches a point where the division between victim and oppressor gets blurred (viii).

There is a characteristic kind of "tension between public and private realities" that one witnesses in women's writing (Tharu and Lalita xvii)[182] and it is this conflict between the inner and outer, home and the world that those writing about purdah address in their writings. The 'condition of women' novel saw its emergence in Urdu in the 1870s with the works of Nazir Ahmad and Rashidul Khairi. While fictional narratives were being written, biographical and autobiographical accounts emerged much later. The condition of women, especially the issue of purdah, education etc. was the subject of debate and discussion in women's journals such as *Tahzib un Niswan, Khatoon* and *Ismat.* These discussions questioned the "post-enlightenment assumptions of visibility and voice in the public realm as the only definitive markers of subjecthood" (Asaduddin, *A Life in Words* xiii).

Agency, in Chughtai's work is "a negotiation with structures often subterranean and subversive, rather than visible and frontal" (Asaduddin xix). In her memoirs, she talks of Mangu, the daughter of their coachman, who gave a sound thrashing to her brutal mother-in-law because, in the words of the exorcists, she was "possessed by spirits…She did what she needed to do, demonstrating that a woman may be weak but does not have to be stupid" (12). Being possessed, gave her the liberty to retaliate to the suppressive ways of her mother-in-law. In, "In the Name of Those Married Women", she says, "Purdah had already been imposed on me, but my tongue was an unsheathed sword. No one could restrain it" (*Lifting the Veil* 258). Chughtai's mother made fruitless attempts to teach her feminine wiles, because:

> A woman is a tiny part of this world and man has made her the object of his own

[182] Cited by Asaduddin, *Ismat Chughtai,* p. xi

> love and hatred. Depending on his whims, he worships her or rejects her. To make a place for herself in the world a woman has to resort to feminine wiles. Patience, prudence, wisdom and social graces-these will make a man dependent on a woman. (*A Life in Words* 9)

It is her tenacity that distinguishes her from her heroines. When asked by her aunt if she had any shame, she emphatically replies, "He who has shame loses the game!" (83). She had the ability to brave the disapproval of her family and the society at large. When she arrived at Jawrah station without a burqa, her uncle, Sarfaraz, "turned his face away and left the spot" (94). She decided to be the "sole navigator of my own lifeboat" (112) and threatened to convert to Christianity, if her parents refused to allow her to study (115). There is remarkable honesty in her memoirs, so much so that she admits to her inexplicable contempt and hatred for her roommate, Rasool Fatima, whom she abandoned when she was writhing in pain, "I had killed her. To this day, I have not told anyone that I am a murderer" (129). It is this lack of hesitation that is lacking in her accounts of her romantic/ sexual encounters which she mentions cursorily, "I have always been fond of Jugnu. If we had got married then I would have ended up being a devoted wife. I like tall men, and he was the tallest in the family…Uff! How would Jugnu react if he stumbles upon these words" (104). She later wonders, "Why, oh why, do I digress and hedge when I begin to write about Zia?" (207). She tells him that since childhood, she had been taught that sex or conversation about sex was filthy, and educated, financially independent women are more prone to go astray (209). As pointed out by M. Asaduddin, she does not talk in detail about her married life in her memoirs (xi). Chughtai's narratives often work "like the lihaf which reveals by concealment" (Gorakhpuri 231)[183] through suggestive hints which a perceptive reader is expected to understand.

Towards the end of "In the Name of Those Married Women", she wonders who the ideal Indian woman is. Is she an epitome of purity, sacrifice, devotion and self effacement like Sita, Savitri or Mira or is she getting stifled under the lihaf? In her stories instead of setting up false ideals for women to emulate, she portrays the complexity of women's lives who have been

[183] *Ismat.* "Some Comments Compiled by Shams-ul-Haq Usmani." Trans. Madhu Prasad

socialized to think and behave like Sita and Savitri but who are also discovering and trying to straighten the crooked lines on which they traversed their life's journey. Purdah, for her encapsulates the entire web of maneuvers and strategies employed by an orthodox, gendered society to maintain or preserve the status quo. It is a piece of cloth but it is much more than that and it is education that she sees as an instrument to make women the agents of their lives. Her characters, even when educated, are haunted by the ghosts of a purdah existence, standing on the threshold, enticed by the promises of the world outside and the nostalgic yearning for the world they had once inhabited.

Krishna Sobti's *Mitro Marjani*

Sobti is the first Hindi writer to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award for her work, *Zindaginama.* One of the fiercest writers of the Hindi literary world, she used language in a distinctive and novel way to depict the dreads and dreams of women. She also wrote about how Partition, led to the partition of fashion as well, as she was reprimanded by her aunt for wearing a *gharara,* which was seen as "Muslim fashion." Sobti's *Mitro Marjani* which created a furore when it was first published in 1966, is a viscerally honest narrative about a married woman's unfulfilled sexual desires.

There is a "complex ethical and religious discursive web around female body" (Rekha 178) to prevent it from overstepping the limits defined by others, and to direct it in the service of a normative, patriarchal society. A woman is encouraged to emulate examples of exemplary women, "invariably located within specific spatial configurations" (172). These categories are internalized and made to appear natural through the all-pervasive surveillance of women's actions and a transgression of these spatial enclosures is defined as sin, from within a framework of morality (173). Mitro is constantly reprimanded for not being a docile, demure wife and daughter-in-law. Dhanvanti tells her, "Sumitravanti, if he is stubborn, why don't you drop your gaze? Looking at a man in the eye does not behove us women, bahu" (11). Later, her father-in-law asks his son, Sardarilal, to "tell bahu to cover her head!" (15). An age when the barriers between men and women are broken is seen as an age of darkness, "When eyes are drained of shame and remorse, what is family honour, what propriety and what social standing?" (16) A woman is constantly threatened with the consequences of crossing the threshold, "Devrani, for daughters and daughters-in-law, the rules of the home and hearth are the farthest limits. If they

cross these, knowingly or unknowingly…" (20). Space and gender and the manner in which they constitute each other is the focus of many of Sobti's writings, "Sensitivity to mediated aspect of spatial enclosures as tangible aspect of women's reality informs, constitutes and patterns the narrative worldview of Sobti's women centric writings" (Rekha 167).

The critical attention on women's writings tends to emphasize more on the temporal dimension by focusing on the sequence of events or the journey of the protagonist instead of the spatial dimension. This focus reduces the "aesthetic-activist scope" of women's writings. Space is often seen as inert or dead as opposed to time which is associated with movement and progress (163). What we see in Sobti is a nuanced portrayal of the complex nature of spatiality. Malshri Lal's inner, outer and threshold are not completely distinct or impermeable entities, instead, they are more fluid in Sobti's oeuvre (168). The attention to space instead of time, also enables a more illuminating analysis of the female body, the spaces it inhabits and the maneuvering within/of/around these spaces. The analysis of these "interrelated aspects of gendered spatiality-socio-geographical and bodily or embodied" (167) also opens up domains for critical scrutiny which move beyond the paradigm of oppression and liberation. Instead of looking at the female body and patriarchy in terms of the narrative of victimhood, Thapan[184] proposes the importance of women's bodies, "[F]or understanding unequal gender relations; it is the site of violence, exclusion and abuse; it also has its celebratory aspects which are revealed in imagery through artistic or aesthetic modes, or in the consciousness of women; it is the site also for agency which allows for the possibilities of negotiation, intervention, contestation and transformation" (3).

A body has cultural and symbolic significance that differs across cultures and it is through the experiences of the lived body that a person's sense of identity is constituted, "Both values and practice are therefore crucial to a person's embodiment" (2)[185] Sobti invests language with a "body-centric vocabulary" that celebrates and gives expression to the various pressures and pleasures of the female body (179). Rejecting the shame and inhibitions that a woman is made to imbibe, Mitro flings aside her clothes and not only admires her own body but draws the attention of others towards it. She asks Suhag, "Tell me the truth Jethani, does any woman have breasts like these?" (18) Mitro's language which is laced with references to the body and its

[184] Introduction to *Embodiment*, 1997. Cited by Rekha (2009), p. 168.
[185] Thapan, Cited by Rekha, p. 168

desires makes her an unconventional heroine, “Your brother-in-law does not understand my fever. At most, it is once a week or fortnight. And this body of mine has such thirst that I flail like a fish” (19). When she is put in the dock in the family courtyard for her unacceptable behavior she admits that she toyed with people but had not sold herself to prostitution, “Shall I let this golden body of mine burn to ashes minute by minute?” (38) This court scene, “deconstructs the simple binaries of meaning that have been created around sexuality by the male discourse” (Rekha 179). When she is compared with Putli Jaan, a dancing girl, because of her charms and affectations, she “was thrilled at this honour” (51). The sexual innuendoes of the men in the bazaar reinstate her faith in her sexuality which is constantly thwarted by her husband (Chanana 170). Cixous encouraged women to write their selves into writing, an act that would liberate them from the societal structures which have confiscated their bodies and their pleasures and where they are always held guilty for something (880). She talks of an unnamed woman who gave her a description of her experiments with her body, “each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful.” Cixous hoped that she would write about this “unique empire” (876) so that other women could find the courage to, “write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse”(886). It is Sobti, most of all, who writes a woman’s body into the narrative through the unabashed delight Mitro takes in her body and the power that her body has over others.

Mitro’s playful admonition to her sister-in-law to cover her face, lest her husband fall for her shows the carnivalesque approach to the principles of veiling and seclusion. A woman’s journey is represented through spatial shifts in Sobti’s writings. When she moves from one space to the other it also results in a change or “readjustment in her emotional-experiential scape.” The movement between spaces is not a simple, unmediated movement since “wherever she goes, she carries these spaces with her” (Rekha 176-77). Balo’s envy at her daughter’s joy of being a wife privileges the erotic over the maternal. Mitro teases her, “O Bibo, why compete with me? You taste new flavours everyday. But poor Mitro has only this lone idler, day in day out” (105). Through Balo, Sobti shows the sexual crisis of a middle-aged woman, thus giving precedence to the erotic over the maternal, as Balo is jealous of her daughter’s intimacy with her husband while she languishes alone, having lost her youth and her admirers (Chanana 171). Mitro dresses up in

a coquettish way and urges Sardarilal, her husband to imagine that she was Lali Bai of Sangrur. After intoxicating him, she is pressed by her mother "to come along and fight a tiger" (108). The man who used to once desire Balo will now satiate his desires with Mitro. Her mother's despair at being deserted by all her admirers jolted Mitro into a recognition of "gaping mouths of vacant doors looming in the dark" (111) and her mother appears to her as "a bloodthirsty witch" standing in a cremation ground (112). She rushes to her husband's room but this return, which displeased many, is a reworking or reconfiguration of the private space. Mitro asks Sardarilal, "My brave horseman, tell me how far did you ride last night? And where did you stop?" (113) Sobti, not only creates a heroine who defies the purdah code, she also sheds the veil adopted by many writers/narrators while describing the domestic sphere. Through the manner in which Mitro propels the private into the public, Sobti narrates the pains and pleasures of female sexuality without resorting to the binary of upper class/respectable vs. lower class/promiscuous. Mitro, thus attempts a redefinition of the interplay of space and gender, as "She inverts the physical/geographical boundaries of sexual desire/ containment (i.e, its spatial closeting within the confines of the bedroom) by bringing it in the open/public space (the courtyard of the house)" (173). As argued by Rekha, a woman is expected to find meaning and identity within the domestic space but Sobti reveals the different "permutation and combination of spatial configuration available to women, even within this space." The eventual return to her husband is seen by some as conservative and as unable to take to a logical conclusion the possibilities opened up by a character like Mitro. In response to that Sobti stated, "Feminists have criticized the book just for that. But I feel that she would need to be educated first, to be more discriminating. To me she seems to show remarkable sense in the context of her circumstances. I have no reasons to be unhappy with the choice she makes ultimately"[186]. Mitro rejects the binaries created by patriarchy but does not challenge the legitimacy of family as a unit. She merely tries to redefine and reconfigure the familial space (174).

Yashpal's "The Curtain"

"The Curtain" by Yashpal, narrates how a piece of cloth that hangs at the threshold separates not only the inside from the outside, or women from men, but also acts as a visible marker of the respectable status of those behind it. The Chaudhuris had to rent a house, in a not

[186] Cited by Chanana, p. 171

so respectable neighborhood because of the drastic change in the financial situation of the third generation of the family. Peerbuksh, with a salary of twelve rupees a month was still proud, since, "his was the only house that had the distinction of having a curtain across its door…No one had seen the women of the house ever stepping into the lane" (476). The curtain was a symbol of their 'sharif'/ respectable status and when it was on the verge of falling apart, "feminine hands from behind the curtain would put it together" (477). It also serves as an instrument to keep up appearances, as the tattered clothes of the women could be hidden behind the curtain. The Pathan who had lent money to Peerbuksh mocked this pretense of respectability despite being a pauper and removed the curtain in his rage, "As the curtain fell on the ground Chaudhuri felt that his life had snapped with it. His legs shook and he collapsed on the ground." The curtain was the only thing that stood between a desire for continuity with the past and the burdens of the present and future. After the Pathan leaves, Peerbuksh did not have the heart to put back the curtain, "Perhaps it was no longer necessary" (480). The story is a poignant account of the near impossibility of maintaining purdah, because of one's material conditions. What makes it even more tragic is the still existent desire/ need/ compulsion to uphold the purdah. While the other stories indicate how education and rise in consciousness of men and women because of reform movements and the struggle for independence, had begun to make people question and reject purdah values, "The Curtain" shows the formidable nature of these values.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932)

Hossain is regarded as Bengal's earliest and fiercest feminist. She founded the Sakhawat Memorial School for Girls and personally persuaded families to send their daughters to school. She defines purdah as a covering of the body instead of a confinement to the four walls of the house, as those who step out of the house, appropriately covered, observe purdah, as against those who appear in a "half naked state to their servants, even though they are within the seclusion of their homes" ("The Burqa" 21). She offered a defense of purdah by arguing that a woman belonging to a good family will not draw attention to herself. When asked by European ladies to give up purdah, she wonders if it is possible to do that, "Can one really give up seclusion? According to these people, purdah means simply remaining indoors. If only they acknowledged that they were unable to escape from their own need for privacy (which is the true meaning of purdah!) then, they would not speak in this way" (22). She wonders why the practice

of purdah is seen as reprehensible when all 'civilized' societies practice some form of purdah in their need for privacy. She did not see any conflict between the system of purdah and progress, since separate institutions for women could be established. She offers a caustic critique of the ways of defining progress and advancement, "What is this thing called progress, may I ask? Does it only exist outside purdah? If that is so, we should take it that uneducated fisher women, the [low caste] Chamars and the Doms have attained much higher levels of progress than we have!" (20) If burqa is seen as a burden, the hats worn by English women are even more burdensome, according to her. She laments the fact that the practice has become too severe and "artificial" (24) in our country, as unmarried girls are made to observe purdah even from other women; and people who are *ghayer mazhab* i.e of a different faith. In her sketch, "Living in Seclusion", she talks of how a burqa clad woman arouses fear, curiosity, suspicion and derision. She recounts the experience of a Muslim woman who went to Darjeeling where she noticed how people were looking at a dwarf at Ghoom station, but when they saw her, they started looking at her. She concludes the sketch with, "People on the streets would silence their crying childen by pointing to the burqa-clad women and say, 'Be quiet! Look, Mecca and Medina are passing by. There!See those witches covered from head to toe? That's Mecca and Medina!' (35)

In *Sultana's Dream,* she offers us a glimpse into a world which does not do away with gendered hierarchies but merely inverts them. Sultana, when beckoned by a woman whom she took for her friend, Sara, was apprehensive about stepping out of the house at night. She realized that it was safe to go since, "The men servants outside were fast asleep just then, and I could have a pleasant walk with sister Sara." Sultana, feels shame and anxiety about walking in the streets at night and is called, "mannish" since she is "shy and timid like men" (3). Her companion tells her that she is in Ladyland which was "free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here" (4). It is a world where men are confined to the zenana since they cannot be trusted out of the house. While the gender hierarchy is subverted in terms of space, the gendered division of labour is not. The zenana members of Ladyland are not capable of sewing and embroidery "as a man has not patience enough to pass thread through a needlehole even!" (6) Ladyland was once not very different from Sultana's world, since, before the ascension of the queen, women were kept in strict purdah. The queen passed a decree that all women should be educated and early marriage was banned. The scientific progress of Ladyland was also due to the endeavors of women who cooked using solar heat and also created a balloon which drew water

from the atmosphere while regulating rain and storms. When Sultana asks, "Are you not allowed to see any men, except your own relations?" Sara answers, "No one except sacred relations" (13), but the very nature of 'sacred' functions differently in Ladyland as a distant cousin is also considered, 'sacred relations.' The coercion behind the practice of purdah is exposed in the narrative when the origin of the custom of men's seclusion is explained. When Ladyland was attacked by a neighboring country and all attempts to save the country failed, it was the Principal of the women's university who strategically negotiated with the men. She offered to save the country from slavery and dishonor, on the condition that the men will be confined to the zenana. She directed the sun's rays towards the enemy on the battlefield and accomplished what the male soldiers could not. This account is an ironic comment on the use of the idea of honour of the nation/community that is often drawn upon to justify the constraints imposed on women. Gender is the only marker of identity in Hossain's feminist utopia and the intersection of gender with class, caste, religion etc. is conspicuous by its absence. The flattening of all kinds of differences except those of gender, while talking about the constraints imposed on women is a facile attempt to grapple with the complexities of purdah:

> We do not covet other people's land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the precious gems, which nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy nature's gifts as much as we can" (14).

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Tagore was one of the central figures of the Bengal Renaissance. A pioneering literary figure, he started writing at an early age and became a household name as a poet, essayist, playwright and artist by the turn of the century. Nineteenth century Bengal, like the rest of the nation was marked by several transformations "among the bhadralok…as well as between them and the British rulers." The changes in the patterns and rhythms of middle-class society were a consequence of the transformations in land relations, the move to urban spaces, education etc. There was also "a new normative discourse on the family that was produced in nineteenth and

early twentieth century Bengal" (Bose[187] 118). This discourse harped on the family as a private domain which was different from that of work and the wide network of kinship relations which were inseparable from the earlier notion of family. The changes that happened in the structure and organization of the family should be seen in the context of the encounter between two cultures, wherein the mores and values of the colonizer were not completely adopted nor were the indigenous traditions completely abandoned (Karlekar 131). In the late nineteenth century, there were some nationalists who contended that the only manner in which colonial rule could be confronted and challenged was by reviving Hindu social institutions, which they believed had remained unchanged since the beginning of time. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya imagined the motherland as a Hindu Goddess paving the way for many others like him who drew upon the ideology of motherhood (Sarkar 37). Conservative thinkers put forth various arguments in favor of sustaining and nurturing age-old practices and institutions. They believed that the fact that these institutions had survived the test of time by wading unscathed through conquests, wars and colonial domination was a testimony to their value. They also argued that some of these practices and customs were outlined in texts which had been identified even by the colonizers as great (40). The search for a unique, distinctive identity and its symbol led to the deification of the motherland and an overemphasis on the notion of nurturance and motherhood, "As the stable centre of a fragile colonial society, she provides constant solace to the humiliated son, on occasion her heroism acts as an inspiration to lift up the downtrodden spirit of the son. But she is also a divine ideal. In her divine form, she is the destructive Shakti, ready to destroy the demon of evil" (Bagchi 66). Sister Nivedita[188] differentiated between the Western and Eastern notion of motherhood and argued how it is in the East that "the thought of the mother has been realized in its completeness." She is not only a loving, suffering nurturer; she is also a manifestation of the destructive Shakti:

> In the east, the accepted symbol is of a woman nude, with flowing hair, so dark a blue that she seems in color to be black; four handed-two hands in the act of blessing and two holding a knife and bleeding head respectively, garlanded with

[187] Cited by Karlekar, 2000, p. 128
[188] Cited by Bagchi, p. 68

skulls and dancing, with protruding tongue, on the prostrate figure of a man all white with ashes. (20)

It is characters like Gora *(Gora)* and Sandip (*The Home and the World)* ,who spout this ideal of the motherland, whose versions of nationalism are rejected by Tagore. The inability of many reformers and nationalists to understand Indian womanhood was exposed in the conceptualization of women as an abstract idea, a Goddess that signified the nation, "She signifies the land itself, ensconced upon a thousand petalled lotus in the soul's garden, at the heart of the entire nation Bharatvarsha. We are her servants. The country's plight is her dishonor; it is because we are indifferent to her humiliation that our virility is put to shame" (*Gora* 350).

Sandip regards the change in the consciousness of people, especially women, a consequence of not only the nationalist struggle but also a "Westward storm that has snatched away the veil of right and wrong from the face of the motherland, will raise the bridal veil off Bimala's face-there is no disregard for her in that nakedness." This intertwining of geography and femininity is strongly reminiscent of the preoccupation with the veil, and the extreme urge to unveil the woman in colonial discourse. Reducing the nation and its enigmas to its women is a narrative common to both Orientalist and anti-colonial discourse. Bimala believed that her country was a woman like her who was secure and placid in her own home, until she heard voices from outside, "She had left her home and forgotten her duties. All she had was endless passion; fired by that passion she walked on, heedless of the road. I too was a traveller on the same tryst. I too had lost my home and my way" (99). The desire for conjugal bliss is closely tied up with the struggle to fashion a new nation "That's because the world is out of joint and to set it right requires the kind of reorientation which will also transform the most personal of relationships" (Paranjape 116).

Gora (1910) begins with an encounter between Binoy and Sucharita, who, despite being a woman was not confined to the antahpur, like other women in the novel, because she belonged to a Brahmo family. The lack of shame and hesitation and the "calm strength" (3) of her eyes befuddled Binoy, "with the girl's eyes fixed on his face, he could not complete his sentence" (13). The urge to see her struck him as inappropriate and dishonorable despite his education, "Binoy had read many English novels, but how could he relinquish the beliefs of a genteel

Bengali family? That it was dishonorable for the woman and degrading for him to seek her out so eagerly, was a notion that no argument could drive from his mind" (20-21). Envious at the attention bestowed by Sucharita on Gora and Binoy, Haran urged Poreshbabu to not allow everyone access to his house. Poreshbabu pointed out that the attempt to restrict gentlemen of certain dispositions from entering his home and preventing the free mingling of the sexes was an extension of the antahpur into the larger society, something that he considered reprehensible. Sucharita, Lalita and Anandmoyi articulate their critique of the arbitrary divisions of the society and how the adherence to abstract thought and reasoning could be stifling to the human spirit. Sucharita asked Binoy, "Then why not let men and women carve up the world into private and public spaces, once and for all? . . . Perhaps it's because men have access into private areas that they fail in their public duties" (76). She criticizes Binoy and Gora for their condescension towards rural women and their reliance on superstitions. She argues how the practice of seclusion confines the horizons of women, limiting not only their interaction but their ability to expand the limits of their knowledge, "On the one hand you stunt their mental growth like this, but on the other, when they send for the ojha, you don't spare them either. Those for whom a couple of families constitute the whole world can never become complete human beings" (132). Lalita, Sucharita's sister, refused to participate in the performance arranged for the magistrate, when she realized that Gora had been unjustly punished and imprisoned by him. Anandmoyi was chastised by her community for her unorthodox ways. Her own son refused to eat with her because she had a Christian maid, "From the day she had adopted Gora she had made herself independent of the ways of the world and the views of other people. Since then, indeed, she had adopted ways that invited public blame" (234).

It is the interaction with Sucharita that makes Binoy recognize that his and Gora's vision of Bharatvarsha was incomplete, since it did not include women. As against Binoy, Gora is a voice of social orthodoxy and conservatism:

> Just as day and night are the two halves of time, so are men and women the two halves of human society. In normal social situations, woman remains invisible like the night, all her actions concealed and private. We exclude the night from our work-time. But that doesn't halt any of the night's profound operations…

> Man and woman represent two aspects of social power, man is power manifest, but the magnitude of his strength does not lie in its visibility; women's power remains unexpressed, and to try constantly to express this secret power is to propel society towards swift bankruptcy by expending all its stored up capital. (111-112)

Gora believed that it was the commingling with women from a Brahmo family and common people that incapacitated him by drawing him into a whirlpool and making him lose touch with his dreams for the nation.

Home and the World, is a novel about boundaries and thresholds which also played a paramount role in Tagore's life. In his autobiography, he touches upon the significance of boundaries in his life as a child when he recounts how one of the servants once drew a chalk boundary and waxed eloquent about the dangers outside (Ganguly vi). Bimala, who was dark-skinned like her mother prayed to God that she "be blessed with the gift of chastity" (1). It was because of her husband, Nikhil, that Miss Gilby was appointed to tutor her. Despite having a 'modern' outlook, Nikhil could not completely defy the laws of social conformity, "It was not possible for me to meet him freely in the mornings or at any odd hour of the day. I knew exactly when he would come in so we would never meet casually, for no rhyme or reason" (4). Nikhil wanted Bimala to not confine herself to the domestic/ private space, "I would like you to be mine in the world out there. We need to settle accounts in that space" (11). He believed that Bimala was oblivious of her aspirations, desires and opinions. She, despite her husband's repeated attempts, chose to stay in the inner quarters, for the sake of his grandmother. She would have accepted Bimala's coming out of purdah, since the household had been moulded by Nikhil in many ways, "I have read in books that we are all birds in a cage; I could not speak for others, but my cage was so full that I wouldn't find such fullness out there amidst the world. At least that is how I felt at the time" (12).

Tagore shows how the "tempestuous new age" and its wave of Swadeshi propelled women from the private into the public space. He says how when the bridegroom's party is at the door, women often go up to the terrace to catch a glimpse of the procession, "scarcely caring to

cover their face." In a similar fashion with "the arrival of the groom of the entire country, how could the women stay busy with their household chores?" (14) Both Swadeshi and Sandip, who had become its face and voice, are described in terms of an excess, "overflowing its banks, threatening to sweep everything away." It was he, who made Bimala momentarily forget purdah, through the spell that he cast with his words, "The slight obstruction of the screen seemed unbearable to me. I don't remember when, quite unaware of my action, I parted the screen a little, thrust out my face and gazed steadily at him" (19). When his gaze rested on her, she "was no longer the daughter-in-law of this aristocratic household: I was the sole representative of all the women in Bengal and he was its hero" (20). Both Tagore and Futehally narrate the journey from naivete to self knowledge through a journey from inner to the outer, private to the public. It is the lack of a free and uninhibited interaction between men and women which makes women like Bimala and Zohra susceptible to men like Sandip and Siraj. After seeing the ecstasy aroused in Bimala by Sandip, Nikhil wondered if the love that he had received from Bimala, "stem from the deep well of her heart or was it driven by social pressures…" (31). He also realized that the differences in their nature which did not cause a chasm appeared starker in the public realm.

Space, its divisions, classifications, markings and navigation is one of the central concerns of the novel. Nikhil desired to see Bimala, "blossoming with knowledge, strength and love amidst the world" (32), Sandip's covetousness made him hanker for everything, especially things he was denied, "If you raise walls around that which you want, I'll have to break in to get what I want" (38). He resented that "the group of metaphor-people stand guard at the door to the feast that's laid out for us on this earth" (39). With the arrival of Sandip, the drawing room of Nikhil's home was transformed into "an ambiguous space" which was neither here nor there and provided a possibility of encounters between outsiders like Sandip and Amulya and insiders like Bimala (45). Bimala, who was the daughter-in-law of an aristocratic household was like "a star in the sky, beyond an outsider's reach. There were no trodden paths here" (48).

There is, both, a denunciation of the practice of purdah and a fear or an anxiety about the wild,unfathomable and uncontrollable nature of female sexuality, "Perhaps this is a woman's nature. When our heart is involved in one arena, we lose all our senses of other spaces. This is why we are devastating; we cause havoc through our innate nature and not through logic" (44).Through Bimala's despair and sense of isolation, Tagore argues in favor of a gradual

transition from the home to the world, "Is freedom tangible? It's empty. Like the fish, I had always swum in the waters of love. All of a sudden if I am held up to the sky and told, here is your freedom, I cannot survive" (145). Tagore rejects the hegemonic deployment of the notion of motherhood to further the cause of the nation but the values of humaneness, tolerance, an all-embracing love that constitute his version of nationalism are embodied in Anandmoyi and Bimala, both, maternal figures of compassion and generosity. In his writings, one can see the conflict between the desire for liberation of women from the narrow confines of the antahpur and a fear of what that liberation entailed. The home was perceived as "a bulwark against disruptive social change, as a source of order and morality, a counter-balance to the individualistic and commercial pressures buffeting modern life" (Mintz 67, Brown[189]). Women were perceived as the moral guardians of their families, companions of their husbands and self abnegating mothers, shaping the minds and sensibilities of posterity.

Conclusion

The emphasis on women's education in the nineteenth and twentieth century also led to an increased focus on the predicament of women in the antahpur/zenana. The Victorian model of domesticity was one of the most significant influences on the framing of the women's question in India. Education, for women was intended to promote cultural continuity and preservation of traditional values. Rasheed Jahan, Ahmed Ali, Mahmud-uz-Zafar and Sajjad Zahir, the writers of *Angarey,* took their readers behind the veil to show the price paid by women to keep the façade of respectability and prestige. Rasheed Jahan and Ismat Chughtai are vocal about the impact on women's bodies and psyches of the strictures of purdah. Chughtai addresses the erotic curiosity created by purdah which goes against its ostensible aim. Yashpal engages with the desperate need to create an aura of sharafat through the confinement of women, despite the changed financial circumstances. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain redefines purdah to mean a need for privacy and delinks progress and women's emancipation from the need to unveil. Both Sobti and Tagore narrate women's journeys through an emphasis on space and boundaries. Sobti, through a body-centric vocabulary writes Mitro's body into the narrative as against other writers discussed in this chapter. In most narratives, we witness a binary sexual economy in which sexual desire and

[189] Cited by Karlekar, 2000, p. 129

vitality of lower class is juxtaposed with the sanitized bodily experience of the upper middle class women.

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Conclusion

The physical, aesthetic and semiotic functions of clothing reveal how it is not just a concrete reality, it is also a part of a conceptual framework (Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*). The social body determines our modes of perception of the physical body and also conditions our embodiment and ways of inhabiting space. The debate on the veil reveals how clothing is considered essential for the maintenance of the micro social order. Instead of looking at purdah as an Islamic institution, it would be analytically fruitful to look at it through the prism of the ideology of honour and shame, which is a characteristic of primary societies where love and regard for others takes precedence over oneself (Bourdieu "The Sentiment of Honour"). It is the fear of women's vulnerability and the threat caused by them to the solidarity of the kin group which is seen as another reason behind the institution of the practice of veiling (Vatuk). One of the functions performed by the veil is the differentiation of women into 'respectable' and dishonorable on the basis of their sexual activities. The interests of a patriarchal society are served by a complex web of power, "patrimonial bureaucracy" (Lerner *Creation of Patriarchy*) through this division of women into various categories. Class formation requires visible markers to distinguish between different classes but the institutionalization of class differences is also marked by gender. Although, it is associated with the antahpur/ domestic/ private realm, there could also be an extension of purdah ideology to the public sphere (Engels *Beyond Purdah*) which could be seen in the attitude of nineteenth and twentieth century reformers to the question of women's freedom. The formalization of Islamic law took place with the rise of the Iraq based Abbasid state in the 8th century. The social and political climate of the time determined the concretization of Islamic morality. Arabian norms were made to align with those of the rest of West Asia and the Mediterranean. Purdah is an extreme form of sexual control based on the belief that women are sexually vulnerable and prone to error. The form and practice of purdah, differs from culture to culture and within the life span of the same woman but it is almost always predicated on the ideology of honour and shame.

To understand the denotative and connotative dimension of space, it is important to look at it from a distance and from within, by looking at the change in the performance of rituals and the relationship between space and the person inhabiting it (Tiwari *Space, Body, Ritual*). Rama

Mehta, Hosain and Gayatri Devi, explore the relationship between space and how it is inhabited and maneuvered with by their protagonists, thus laying bare the denotative and connotative dimensions of space. There is an epistemological problem in the way space is conceptualized, since an attempt is made to understand the link between abstract space and a social subject thus desocializing space and despatializing the social (Lefebvre *The Production of Space*). The very attempt by man to order space is social behavior which gives rise to social and cultural identities. Society doesn't merely exist in space, it takes a spatial form in two senses, it arranges people in space (ordering relations between them by laying down guidelines about propriety and modes of interaction) and arranges space in a certain way. Thus, architecture provides the material conditions for our patterns of movement and interaction and also functions as a generator of social relations (Hillier and Hanson *The Social Logic of Space*). Rama Mehta, in *The Western Educated Hindu Woman* and *Inside the Haveli* talks of how purdah was a feminine code of modesty for the social and economic elite of the country and women who belonged to this class were made to look at their bodies as sacred and pure, while those who associated with men were seen as loose or frivolous. The doctrine of purdah, applied to both men and women as Ajay (Geeta's husband) could not meet Geeta during the day, without these visits being mocked or frowned upon. While to an outsider the life of a veiled woman is that of "hermetically sealed respectability" (Minault), Mehta shows how life in the zenana encapsulates a complex web of interactions, socialization, rituals and gestures. Gayatri Devi shows how women in the zenana are never lacking companionship and their lives were much fuller than imagined by outsiders. Using the analytical tool of the threshold, suggested by Malashri Lal, one can argue that Geeta and Mehta are situated at the threshold. Geeta's journey from Bombay to Udaipur pushes her into the domestic realm but her "ways of operating" (Certeau) set her apart from the other women in the haveli. This Law not only helps us to look at the gendering of space in the narrative, it is also operative in the act of narration. Geeta, through the classes started for the women of the havelis transforms the space of the haveli into a haven of knowledge. Similarly, Gayatri Devi, used education as an instrument to improve the lot of purdah clad women. For both Geeta and Gayatri Devi, their outsider turned insider status enabled them to understand and empathize with purdah clad women whose motivations they understood. The theorization about the microphysics of power is woefully silent on the acts of resistance offered by people who refused to be reduced to the normative script. Lakshmi, Geeta's maid believed in having a child

every year to avoid the drudgery of household chores. The spatial, ethical and visual dimensions of *izzat* are reflected differently in the lives of women from different classes but the potency of the idea to govern the lives of women is also revealed through the parallels and juxtapositions between Geeta and Lakshmi. Similarly, in Hosain's novel, Nandi was not as shackled in terms of mobility as Laila but the defiance of norms of honor are punished with severities. The narratives focus on the upper middle class women's tactful negotiation with purdah and cursorily mention the overt challenges to the dominant script by lower class women.

A focus only on oppression does not tell the complete story (Lerner), hence, it is important to revisit the domestic space to identify the "meaning making activities" performed by women in this space. Preservation is as crucial a part of human existence as the act of creating or fashioning things. Women, not only preserve, they imbue objects and spaces with meaning (Young *Throwing Like a Girl*). Later, we are told that Geeta began to love the veil which allowed her to think, while others talked. The novel ends with her becoming the mistress of the haveli and entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the mores and customs of the haveli. As argued by Rekha, Indian women's writing has a proclivity for narrating women's quest for selfhood through spatial shifts. *Inside the Haveli,* locates Geeta inside the haveli at the end but there is a hint of the transformation of the space of the haveli because of Geeta's ways of inhabiting that space. The Certeauean framework about the differences between strategies and tactics is deeply illuminating to understand the transformation of the space of the haveli engineered by Geeta. He argues how clothes, bodily markers etc. realize the language of the social body and narrate the order of society. The normative discourse derives its power by becoming a story which is grafted on to something real/corporeal, that speaks in its name. This incarnation of societal laws turns it into a sign and leads to the creation or perpetuation of other signs. Lakshmi's crossing of the threshold and her deplorable conditions after that, indicates the lack of empowering alternatives for women. These narratives that are delicately poised between fiction and autobiography show how the threshold is a politically charged space. It is at the threshold that the protagonist remains. It is a politically charged space where the woman receives messages of conformity and tradition from the interior space and promises of freedom and liberation from outside. Burton talks of how "influential architectural idioms can be of the practice of remembering" in case of partition narratives. The corridors and contours of the ancestral house, Ashiana are as much a character in *Sunlight on a Broken Column,* as the other

characters. *Sunlight on a Broken Column,* narrates Baba Jan's death through the spatial shift of his daughter, Abida. As against the permeable space of the living room, the zenana closed upon itself. The constant deployment of the architectural trope could be seen in the way the nation was imagined as a home that had been defiled by the arrival of the foreigners. Conditioned by the norms of the purdah code, Laila looks at her love for Ameer as a "nakedness", a sin which had to be hidden from others. Most of the significant moments in the narrative are indicated through spatial shifts, primarily in the lives of women. The idea of home as belonging to a spatial and temporal imaginary, as outlined by Guha and many others is challenged by Burton as women often have a troubled relationship with space/home. Laila's ability to glean the past from Ashiana and her cynicism about its ability to revive her makes her a "unique modern heroine" (Burton). Mehta, Hosain and Gayatri Devi show a unique understanding and empathy with the lived experiences of secluded women but Hosain's Laila, as against Geeta and Gayatri Devi bids farewell to the ancestral home towards the end of her fictional journey.

The polyphony of voices about purdah, indicate the tangible and intangible nature of the purdah code. Cornelia Sorabji's expressed sympathy for purdah clad women was couched in a language and tone, strongly reminiscent of the platitudes and perspective of Orientalist discourse. The easy generalizations, exteriority of the narrative voice and erasure of the voices of purdah women characterize Sorabji's perspective on the veil. Salman Rushdie's writing, both mirrors the narrative techniques of Orientalist discourse and also self consciously and playfully critiques and parodies them. The multiple references to Robert Burton and the number 1001 indicate the strategic nature of this parody. These references contest the authority of Orientalist accounts and also reveal the "citationary nature of Orientalism" (Yegenlogu *Colonial Fantasies*). The desire for the body is the desire to make the body convey a meaning and make it a part of the narrative fabric as the "lust for love, lust for power and lust for knowledge" are intertwined. The story of Pygmalion and Galatia, which Brooks considers the allegory of the narratives that interest him is the story of how the desire of Pygmalion for Galatea animates the body, and how this body marked and imprinted by desire can enter narrative. Through a constant reference to the veiled woman and a self-conscious mirroring of Orientalist narrative techniques, Rushdie's writings reveal the link between scopophilic and epistemological desires, as engaged with, by Brooks. The veiled body of the Oriental woman is seen as harboring the secrets and mysteries of the

Orient. It is the desire to unveil her and through her, the Orient that is characteristic of Orientalist narratives.

Rushdie argues that repression is a "seamless garment" and one kind of repression breeds all other kinds of repression. The Orientalist, sided with the tyrant and the patriarch because of their fascination with the picturesque, but Rushdie gives a voice to those at the periphery. In *Shame,* the narrator dwells on the polysemic nature of the word 'shame', "between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn." It is within the framework of shame and its link with violence that Sufiya Zinobia is placed. Rushdie reimagines the story of Beauty and the Beast in the story of Omar Khayyam and Sufiya to see what would happen if the beast lurked within Beauty. Through this, Rushdie rejects the dichotomous structure of Orientalist discourse by achieving a synthesis of the binaries. The ambivalence in Orientalist discourse which sees women as "erotic victims and scheming witches" (Kabbani *Imperial Fictions*) is reflected in Rushdie's writings as well. The assumption of the victimhood of veiled women is constantly rejected by Rushdie. The reference to the perforated sheet in *Midnight's Children* is framed by a reference to a painting of Diana, the goddess of hunting. It becomes a synecdoche of a woman's sense of shame. Aadam Aziz wanted his wife to shed the veil but she had internalized the purdah ideology and adamantly retires into a veil of silence. Through Jamila Singer, he shows how the veil, contrary to its purpose eroticizes the body by inciting curiosity and desire in the onlookers. The division of space on the basis of gender reveals the conflation of the actual and the possible and a sexualized perception of the universe (Zizek). By talking of the indistinguishable nature of the Shakil sisters and the sequestration of Rani Harappa in *Shame,* Rushdie shows how the veil leads to a depersonalization. The indistinguishable Shakeel sisters, while confined to the domestic space, imagined the contours of men's bodies, explored each other's bodies and used the dumb waiter to have access to the world outside, without offering any glimpse of themselves. In one of the shawls, Rani Harappa shows herself as made up of the materials of the house, thus indicating the complete erasure of the veiled woman who is relegated to the domestic space. The veil is described not only as a piece of cloth but a whole set of cultural and social values, such as the principle of *takallouf* (elaborate codes of courtesy and formality), which didn't allow them to voice their feelings. Another dimension of purdah is engaged with in *The Satanic Verses,* when an exiled Imam who dreamt of returning to his

homeland, turns his house into a purdah covered, self contained space, to not allow outside influences to sully him.

It is through the lens of gender that Rushdie looks at the history of Islam, for instance, the story of Ibrahim and Hagar and the cult of goddesses in Jahilia before the emergence of Islam is explored through the focus on women. The veil, which is expected to conceal the modesty of a woman can also conceal objects of destruction. Rushdie refers to not just the arsenal hidden behind the veil but the "arsenal of her body." (Tavleen in *The Satanic Verses)* The connotative meaning of the veil as something illicit or erotic is shifted to the denotative register by Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* when Gibreel dreams of a brothel in Jahilia called *hijab*. The clients of the brothel fantasized about the Prophet's wives. The categories of 'home' and 'harem' which were used differently by multiple agents are spatial constructions that "metaphorically and metonymically" construct home and away or empire and nation using female bodies. Since the English aesthetic of beauty revolved around clarity, for writers like Burke and Ruskin, physiognomy was the sign of spiritual and moral qualities and the attempt to conceal was perceived as a sign of immorality and vice (Grewal *Home and Harem*). It is the lure of the hidden that purdah culture perpetuates and Rushdie employs as a narrative strategy. His narrative technique often employs the metaphor of veiling to conceal and reveal, offering tantalizing glimpses to his readers. The readers are thus complicit in this structure of voyeurism that demands a visibility of the object of desire and invisibility of the subject. Rushdie's oeuvre has both male and female voyeurs. Omar Khayyam (*Shame)* is a voyeur, living vicariously through others. Omar's mothers are examples of "voyeurism by proxy." One of the most seminal issues in Rushdie's writings is the concern with the politics of representation. Salman in *The Satanic Verses,* who changes the meaning of the verses recited by the Prophet, is a thinly veiled version of Rushdie. As against the self assured, self righteous, objective voice of Orientalists like Lane, Rushdie's magic realist narratives are mediated, flawed and constantly blur the distinction between fiction and reality, foregrounding the question of representation. Another narrative technique which lays bare Rushdie's focus on representation is the use of cinematic techniques. The epistemological concern with the ways of perception and the ideology that constructs or dismantles the world is the central concern of his work. He challenges binaries with his narrative strategies, one of them being his "historically authenticated references" (Finey). As arsgued by Parmeswaran, writers like Rushdie, Rama Mehta, Attia Hosain condone purdah but also look at

it with nostalgia. Rushdie draws an analogy between Bilquis being stripped of her clothes and an immigrant being stripped of history in *Shame.* There is a desire for continuity between past, present and future and a desperate need to belong.

The veil has often been used as an instrument to symbolize various ideas. The debate about Qasim Amin's arguments became a "precursor and prototype" of the debate about the veil in other countries such as Turkey and France. Western feminists confront patriarchal challenges in a creative way, whereas with reference to Muslim women, the insistence is on the "innate" misogyny of Islam. It was the unholy alliance of colonialism and feminism in the nineteenth century which led to the issues of women and culture to be linked. The opposition to colonial arguments about the veil, opposed the terms set in the first place by colonialist discourse instead of coming up with new paradigms (Ahmed). Freedom, in this strange alliance between colonial and feminist discourse was conceptualized in spatial terms. Indian women, because they donned the purdah were bound, while English women who did not have voting rights were seen as liberated. Fanon, through his analysis of the French domination of Algeria argues how the history of colonization and the treatment of women as spoils of war creates many "fertile gaps", because of which a European's fantasy of raping a native woman is preceded by the act of unveiling her. In a similar fashion, neocolonial discourses such as the U.S discourse on Afghan women perpetrate both physical and epistemic violence (Ayotte and Husain). Through a brief commentary on the Turkish and later French ban on the veil, the chapter talks of the veil as a malleable signifier that has signified different things in different historical, spatial and temporal contexts. In Ataturk's Turkey, the rejection of the veil was a rejection of its Ottoman past and an attempt to embrace modernity, in France the ban on the veil was proposed to demarcate religion and the state. Since, the secularization of the state has not led to a secularization of the society, citizens should be allowed to use a religious language in the public sphere, provided they translate the "potential truth contents" in a universally comprehensible language (Habermas). It is this work of translation that is accomplished by feminists who espouse the cause of women from within the framework of religion. They argue in favor of textual polysemy and argue against, interpretive reductionism (the idea that the Qur'an has only one set of meanings) and interpretive relativism (any reading, no matter how misogynistic is tenable) (Barlas). For instance, both Barlas and Wadud, make a case for the hijab verse as necessary to protect women in seventh century Arabia by marking the sexual unavailability of the women of the Prophet's

household. There are some like An-Na'im, who advocate a return to the foundational text of Islam, i.e. the Qur'an, instead of hadith and shariah, which are commentaries on the life and sayings of the Prophet.

Mehmood's delineation of the difference between negative and positive freedom indicates that autonomy, is a "procedural principle" not an ontological one, thus making even illiberal actions tolerable, according to our current understanding of autonomy, if they are an exertion of an independent, autonomous will. She tries to delink the project of self-realization from an autonomous will through a poststructuralist critique of a coherent subject. Taking cue from Foucault, she talks of power as producing certain kinds of desires and the subject as always inscribed in power relations. This kind of understanding of power and subjectivity expands our existing notion of agency. It is not mere resistance but a "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable." The four fold model proposed by Foucault to understand ethics (substance of ethics, modes of subjectivation, techniques of the self, the self that one aspires to be) is drawn upon by Mehmood to talk of rituals, such as going to the mosque or wearing a veil as an attempt to cultivate piety in one's entire sense of being, instead of it being just a matter of customary observances or appearances. These "spiritual exercises" (Hadot) which could be physical or discursive could lead to transformations in the subject. Mehmood argues how desire to be pious and modest in this kind of a model is not antecedent to moral actions (such as wearing a veil) but a consequence of it.

Iqbalunissa Hussain and Zeenuth Futehally reveal the sordid conditions of secluded women by showing the denial of the opportunity for education and the possibility to realize their creative, artistic and romantic dreams. They also show the cyclical nature of patriarchy that makes women the upholders of patriarchal values. Viswapriya Iyengar's "The Library Girl" by showing the congruence of divine and patriarchal authority and the instrumental role of religion in secluding women, narrates the dehumanization and depersonalization of a woman clad in a burqa. The juxtaposition of images of slaughter and sacrifice with the act of wearing the burqa indicates Iyengar's attitude to the veil. In her interviews, Dharker, talked of her fascination with the images of purdah clad woman and how she used purdah as an idea to talk about borders. In "Purdah II" the sound of azan, is a "coin of comfort" in a strange land. The poem paints portraits of women tied by the "purdah of the mind." In "Purdah I" she sees purdah as safety since it allows her to hide the shame of her body. The anonymity and lack of fixity of purdah allows the

poetic persona the possibility to go beyond her assigned self. The use of varied pronouns in her poetry shows the "multiplication and fragmentation of the female subject" (Chand). Her protagonists are what Rajan calls, "victim-agents." She also addresses the complexity of choice by talking of "small perversities" in one of her poems? Can it be celebrated as an act of resistance? Can it be considered freedom? The temptation to see any and every act of unveiling as 'liberation' is what Mehmood cautions against.

Angarey, a collection of stories by Sajjad Zahir, Mahmud-uz-Zafar, Ahmed Ali and Rasheed Jahan explores the preoccupation with honour and conventions of purdah by looking at the way it operates differently for different classes and creates a gulf between men and women. Rasheed Jahan was trained in obstetrics and gynecology which sensitized her to the suffering of women, an understanding that is reflected in her short stories such as "Mute", "That One", "A Visit to Delhi" and many more. Jahan, minutely observed the limitations imposed by purdah because of the trials and tribulations of her parents, Sheikh Abdullah and Begum Wahid Jahan when they wanted to establish a school for girls. She and her sisters abandoned purdah when they went to college. It was her training in obstetrics and gynecology that acquainted her with the suffering of women. In her story, "That One" she shows how women observed purdah not only from men but also from prostitutes. In "Mute" Ahmadi Begum is proud that not even her closest relatives had set eyes on her daughter. "A Visit to Delhi" dispels the myth that a burqa protects a woman from unsolicited attention since this tragic comic tale shows how Malka Begum was subject to the penetrating male gaze at the railway station after being abandoned by her husband. A similar scene occurs in Chughtai's *The Crooked Line,* wherein Shaman noticed how burqa clad women at the platform were being gazed at in a lewd/lascivious way. "A Visit to Delhi" shows how women are deprived of "*sair-o-tafri* (leisure travel)" (Jalil). The manner in which the veil is discussed in Jahan and Chughtai indicates how "public spaces are masculinized" (Gopal). Rasheed Jahan's play, *Behind the Veil,* lifts the veil over matters such as sex, marital rape, pregnancy etc. by making us overhear a conversation between Muhammadi Begum and Aftab. The veil, by strictly demarcating the public and private also upholds the belief in the sanctity of the private sphere, a site of conjugal bliss and affectionate care of children. By revealing how women are victims of the insatiable sexual appetites of their violent, indifferent husbands, Jahan strips that veil. The influence of the Victorian model of domesticity could be seen in the motivation behind promotion of women's education by reformers-to make them better wives and

mothers. A reading of Chughtai's *The Crooked Line,* selected short stories and memoirs shows how the landed aristocracy despite its education could not completely detach itself from the moorings of tradition and conservative values. Chughtai, shows how the enforcement of purdah, contrary to its purpose, arouses and frustrates desire. By alluding to the erotic games of *sherwanis* and *burqas,* she metonymically describes the interaction between men and women, burdened by the code of purdah and enforced separation of the sexes. Purdah leads to "base emotions that thrive simply on imagination." She also addresses how traumatic the experience of shedding the veil can be for someone who was accustomed to it. Even the act of shedding the veil could not make a monumental difference since the surreptitious code of purdah penetrates one's being, conditioning the way one thinks and behaves. She showed how the manner of wearing the veil differed with respect to class, age and community as the Agarwals and Oswals veiled differently from Muslim women. The chapter also refers back to the redefinition of agency by Saba Mehmood, by looking at the instances of dropping the veil in Chughtai's own life and in some of her writings. Minault argues how the decision to drop the veil involved a lot of "intra-family diplomacy" and some of those who shed the veil were not rebellious women, instead they were "dutiful daughters." The injunction about veiling is ostensibly to protect women from unwanted attention but through "The Quilt" Chughtai shows how women could also abuse other women. An analysis of *The Heart Breaks Free* and her memoirs in conjunction with the Shah Bano and Imrana case reveals a similarity between the age when she was writing and the post-colonial present, thus causing a rupture in a teleological understanding of women's struggles.

The tension between "public and private realities" (Tharu and Lalita) in women's writing is explored through the polyphony of voices and also the erasure of certain experiences in Chughtai's writings. Space and gender and the manner in which they are constituted and constitutive of one another is one of the central concerns of Krishna Sobti's writings. Mitro flings aside her clothes and draws the attention of others to her body. The sexual innuendoes of the men in the bazaar, the comparison with Putli Jaan thrill her, instead of putting her to shame (Chanana). Balo's envy at her daughter's intimacy with her husband shows the sexual crisis of a middle-aged woman, thus privileging the erotic over the maternal. Mitro's eventual return to the domestic space is also a drastic reconfiguration of that space by making room for a frank admission of female sexual desire. Cixous encourages women to write their bodies into writing

and invent a language that will cut across all kinds of barriers and constraints, something that Sobti does through the "body-centric vocabulary" (Rekha) of Mitro and her unabashed delight in bodily pleasures.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was also "a new normative discourse on the family" (Bose) which emphasized on family as a private domain separated from the world and from the extended network of kinship (Karlekar). Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain redefines purdah to mean the need for privacy and paints an upside down world in *Sultana's Dream* where the women are unveiled and the men are secluded. The portrayal of women of a Brahmo household in *Gora* and the spatial, psychical journey of Bimala from the antahpur to the world in *The Home and the World* reveal the impact of changes in land relations, education, move to urban spaces and new discourse on the family and the nation. The constant analogy between land and women is strongly reminiscent of the colonial urge to unveil the mysteries of the Orient by unveiling the native women. Sucharita, being a woman belonging to a Brahmo household was not confined to the antahpur. Her lack of hesitation in her interaction with men unsettled Binoy who had internalized the separation of the sexes. Sucharita, Lalita and Anandmoyi, reject the arbitrary divisions of the society and are turned into outcasts for their rejection of social mores. Gora believed that it was his growing intimacy with women from a Brahmo household that had made him go astray from his aspirations for the nation. *The Home and the World* is a novel about boundaries and thresholds. Nikhil wanted his wife to step out of the antahpur, she on the contrary thought that her "cage was so full" that she did not feel the need to leave her familiar space for the bewildering world outside. Both Tagore and Futehally narrate the journey from ignorance to knowledge spatially as it was the lack of interaction between men and women which made women like Bimala and Zohra susceptible to Sandip and Siraj. Space and its divisions and negotiations are some of the seminal concerns of these novels. Tagore rejects the use of motherhood to imagine the nation but his idea of patriotism which entails tolerance, love, humanness is embodied in maternal figures like Bimala and Anandmoyi. The home was perceived as "a bulwark against disruptive social change, as a source of order and morality, a counter-balance to the individualistic and commercial pressures buffeting modern life" (Mintz, 1983, 67, Brown, 1993).

There is a binary sexual economy in the writings about purdah wherein the wild, spontaneous and uninhibited expression of sexual desire of women of the lower strata of society

is juxtaposed with the silence, erasure and repression of upper middle class women due to the preoccupation with their prestige and respectability. The interior space, as argued by Malashri Lal provides the "positional tools of the narrative." The protagonists in some of these narratives such as *Inside the Haveli, Purdah and Polygamy, Zohra* are located at the threshold, torn between messages of conformity/ tradition and promises of modernity. All these writers explore and engage with the various denotations and connotations of purdah such as the seclusion of the zenana/antahpur, a piece of cloth (ghunghat, burqa), respectable status, harem and a symbol of cultural identity. Although there are nuanced differences between these writers but often the male writers' (Rabindranath Tagore, Yashpal, Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zahir, Mahmud-uz-Zafar, Salman Rushdie) engagement with purdah is done from within the larger framework of culture, conjugal relations, education, financial independence and liberation of women. The women writers (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Rasheed Jahan, Cornelia Sorabji, Ismat Chughtai, Iqbalunissa Hussain, Zeenuth Futehally, Rama Mehta, Attia Hosain, Krishna Sobti, Gayatri Devi, Vishwapriya Iyengar and Imtiaz Dharker) focus on the embodied nature of veiling practices and the veiled body's negotiation with space, clothing and sexual desire through a focus on the lived experiences of women. Through a detailed focus on architectural details and spatialization of gendered practices, these women writers lend an intensity, immediacy and visceral sense of embodiment to their narratives about the veil and the veiled. Instead of confining the veil to the rubric of oppression and liberation these writers engage with the varied ways of exercising choice and agency even while ostensibly following the dominant script. As proposed by Thapan, instead of looking at women as perpetual victims, a study of female bodies would reveal how they could be sites of violence but also have their celebratory aspects and function as a site of agency for contestation, negotiation etc.

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