

# Woman in Male Imagination: A Study of Mirror Metaphors in Shamoil Ahmad's "The Dressing Table"

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## I. Mirror Metaphor and Oppression

Oppressive systems like patriarchy and colonialism work on the production and dissemination of oppressive images. The subject in these systems is imagined and represented in particular ways to get complete control of it. To understand this better, one has to first look into theories on art/acts of representation. The mimetic universe of painting and poetry created through imitation (by men), as debated by Aristotle and Plato engenders the tradition of these theories. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar raise serious questions that challenge this tradition of representation, defined and controlled by men. They write in *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

Defining poetry as a mirror held up to nature, the mimetic aesthetic that begins with Aristotle and descends through Sidney, Shakespeare, and Johnson implies that the poet, like the lesser God, has made or engendered an alternative, mirror universe in which he seems to enclose or trap shadows of reality. (5)

The book traces and contemplates the fact that the act of representation has always been complicit with patriarchy. The further implication of these representations is that they do not remain limited to the aesthetic world rather they become culture; both in its literal sense as well as in its political sense – representations benefiting the oppressive systems are sustained and perpetuated. This 'mirror universe' that the two feminists have used in defining the patriarchal imagination has been a constant metaphor, especially in defining the female. In simple terms what the two feminists argue is that the reflection or the image being produced in this 'mirror universe' has been distorted, modified, and appropriated by the male imagination rather than giving an objective reality. The male imaginary through art and literature has been adhering to the ideas and philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, further

propagated and followed by the male writers and philosophers through the centuries. What is more interesting is that female novelists pioneering the female venture in the world of literature in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century have, consciously or unconsciously, followed the same representation. As Gilbert and Gubar trace the history of female literary traditions, they are bound to acknowledge the ample occurrence of women manifested in “images of enclosure and escape” throughout the novels written by females. (xi). What they mean is that a woman is either imagined as meek and weak ‘enclosed’ by the presence of men or she is cast out as untameable, wild, shrewdly, or rather wickedly ‘escaping’ the male world. The binary established between women ‘enclosed’ or ‘escaping’ has discarded other possible representations of women and the binary is further strengthened in literature and arts by the use of the mirror as a metaphor. To discuss this, Gilbert and Gubar have given the example of the famous 18<sup>th</sup>-century German legend of “Little Snow White” where the mirror works as the ‘patriarchal voice’ that the wicked step-mother seeks acceptance in patriarchy; where the story also reinforces the binary of “the one a sort of angel, the other an undeniable witch” (36)

The exchange between the art and reality, the influence of one on another, has been immense and each controls the other in particular aspects. These images of women produced by male writers have shaped the material existence of women and in reverse have solidified these images in the literary domain. What we get to unravel through art is the psychic reality of patriarchy, along with the equally important literary and cultural representation of females in a world imagined and molded by male minds. The mirror as a metaphor for the male imagination of women, therefore, serves as the best to study and decode the male imaginary.

In this paper I have chosen to analyse the Urdu story “Singhardaan” by Shomail Ahmad (1999), translated by M Asaduddin as “Dressing Table.” “Singhardaan” exemplifies the employment of mirrors in a similar discourse. It presents the psychic paranoia of Brijmohan, the protagonist who has stolen a dressing table from a Muslim prostitute Naseem Jaan, during communal riots. He loses his peace of mind when he sees/imagines the women of his house (his wife and three daughters) obsessing with the mirror of the dressing table and eventually adopting the ways of the prostitute. The story leaves scope for the reader’s interpretation of whether this is an illusion or happening in reality, however, since the story has been narrated from Brijmohan’s perspective it is in all likelihood, his exaggerated imagination. As the story proceeds, it seems Brijmohan is losing his sanity and has started accepting himself first as a pimp or procurer for the women of his house, then as a male prostitute.

To study the implications of metaphors on the human psyche it becomes imperative that we take post-Richardian views on metaphor. In the traditional approach initiated by Aristotle, metaphor was only taken as “something special and exceptional use in the language, a deviation from its normal mode

of working” (Richards 90). On the contrary, I. A. Richards rejected this limitation and elevated the status of metaphor claiming “...whereas fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts.” (94) M.H. Abrahms while defining I.A. Richards’ stand on metaphors writes, “He also asserted metaphor cannot be viewed simply as a rhetorical or poetical departure from ordinary usage, in that it permeates all language and affects the ways we perceive the world.” (155)

Richards introduces his terminology to explain the function of a metaphor which he called ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ describing them as: “... the tenor- the underlying idea or principal subject which vehicle or figure means.” (97) Talking in terms of I.A.Richards’ vocabulary in the story, the object-mirror which is used to see one’s reflection is the ‘vehicle’ and the idea that mirror reveals something hidden or internal becomes the ‘tenor’. Here, this ‘something’ is the psychic reality of patriarchal society and individuals. To explain it further, the literal mirror becomes the metaphorical mirror that shows the reflection of man’s psychology. In the story, Brijmohan is watching the images or reflections of his wife and daughters through a mirror whereas metaphorically what he is confronting is his psychic fixation over the established binary of good and bad women.’

Urdu poetry is replete with instances providing aa.ina (mirror) as a metaphor- revealer of the truth; revealing what’s hidden in the human mind or heart or what one intends to overlook because of shame or guilt, however, there is no culmination into paranoia. Aa.ina is often referred to present self-criticism. A couplet by Khumar Barabankavi exemplifies this:

*dūstroñ par agar tabsira kījīye*  
*sāmne aa.ina rakh liyā kījīye*  
 Should you wish to censure others  
 Place the mirror before yourself first

Here, one is advised to look into the mirror, not for the physical reflection but to probe one’s conscience or actions before criticizing others. In this couplet, the mirror becomes a metaphorical yardstick which can be compared to the dressing table mirror in the story under discussion - the dressing table keeps reminding Brijmohan of his crime and guilt. There are more examples of self-praise in Urdu poetry that fixate the use of mirror in the romantic context, elevating the female beauty. The following couplet by Firaq Gorakhpuri goes like this:

*zarā visāl ke ba.ad aa.ina to dekh ai dost*  
*tire jamāl kī doshīzgi nikhar aa.ī*  
 Friend! look into the mirror after your union  
 Watch the maidenhood of your beauty blossom

The couplet suggests the elevation in beauty occurred following the meeting with the beloved and which can be realized through the mirror. This shows that the metaphors are culture specific and Urdu poetry explores the

mirror as a metaphor in association to specific domains. There are not many instances in Urdu literature where the mirror turns into a ghost haunting one's consciousness or where it becomes the cause of madness. The scarcity of such examples in Urdu literature compels the inclusion of western theoretical and critical models that will expand the scope of this paper.

The story discussed in the paper starts with the one-liner ironical aphorism: "Even prostitutes were not spared during the riots" (39), thereby commenting on the classification of women, based on roles assigned to them in a patriarchal society. In the story, Ahmad explores the serious implications of the male preoccupation with women, their roles and their images. These images are, although, his creation, he projects his appreciation and fears through them too. Brijmohan is a part of the patriarchal narrative that has been fixating on the binary of women over centuries. The binary between 'the tamed subject and 'the bestial other' compels Brijmohan to either dominate or get paranoid by women completely. In a similar discourse binary of 'good' and 'fallen' women exists, where he would either appreciate them or condemn them. The other binary between the woman either as a 'monster' or 'angel of the house' further makes the rigid juxtaposition grimmer and more problematic. What he confronts ultimately in the story is the overlapping of these binaries, resulting in his losing his sanity and touch with reality. These binaries and images, although taken from the western discourse, are universal and equally relevant to Eastern societies and hence find their occurrence in Urdu fiction as well. Stories like "Lajwanti" by Rajinder Singh Bedi delve deeper and employ a binary typically Indian or Oriental in nature." Lajwanti" is a story about the post-partition repatriation of abducted women. Lajwanti, who had to stay in Pakistan with a Muslim man now returns to her husband Sundarlal but is never accepted wholeheartedly by him. After her return from Pakistan, she who was called Lajo or Lajwanti, as the woman of the house is no longer addressed like this. Instead, her husband starts calling her "Devi" which is a Hindi word for Goddess. The binary between Goddess and wife proves to be an impasse here. Baqar Mehdi comments, "The conjugal relationship between husband and wife was broken for ever. She was worshipped as a Goddess but not given the same position she enjoyed before abduction. That is, she is no more a woman.... In a way, her acceptance in her own home becomes a total rejection of her womanhood." (31)

Brijmohan embodies insecurities in the male psyche; the fear that his wife and daughters can act like prostitutes exposes the dualistic treatment which prostitutes receive from patriarchy. The pleasure from them is desired but only outside the boundaries of home. For a man, his home is his domain of power, his place of jurisdiction where he decides all notions of morality, virtue, and conduct. In his home, where he is the reigning authority, Brijmohan confronts the images of prostitution because of the effect of Naseem Jaan's mirror and gets troubled. These images compel him to impose the binary of 'bestial other' on his wife and daughters. His troubled state of

mind shows his fixation on the images of patriarchal morality- the tamed subject- in which he would never want to see the women of his home behaving otherwise. To Brijmohan, the changes were shocking and reminiscent of the customs of prostitutes:

Brijmohan noticed that each member of the family was changing subtly. His wife now swung her hips as she walked and used missi powder to tint her teeth. His daughters began to wear payals on their ankles and spent a lot of time dressing up in newer ways. They began to put on lipstick, paint their eyes with kohl, apply a tika on their foreheads, and draw moles on their cheeks. (Ahmad 41)

Changes in women haunt men. The changes in anatomy or in the display of physicality are frowned upon and used to make assumptions. As Brijmohan is reluctant to accept such changes in his wife and daughters, we can trace a similar example in short story "Lajwanti". Bedi poignantly pricks our consciousness in the scene where Sundarlal, on receiving Lajwanti, is lost in reveries, making assumptions. Bedi subtly points out the bodily features which are taken to be covert hints for a woman being mentally complacent and sexually active. The plumpness and fairness that Lajwanti has acquired while living in Pakistan are enough to make Sundarlal set his imagination rolling. The ideas associated with different features of women's body only add to the rigidity of binaries and strengthening the narrative.

Binaries are established epistemologically and culturally. The long history of image production through literature, paintings, legends, folktales, regional tales, narratives through rumours, etc. has fed Brijmohan's imagination. He accepts the traditional images and gives his consent for the reinforcement of the established binary. Creating an image is like creating art or writing literature which, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, freezes the living subject. They argue: "A final paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity is the fact that in the same way the writer both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them by depriving them of autonomy, (that is the power of the independent speech) even as he gives them life." (14).

Brijmohan, like this artist, defines or rather consolidates the stereotypes of a woman, and while imposing them on his wife and daughters, eliminates any scope for them to have other versions of themselves. Gilbert and Gubar argue that for a (male) writer 'pen' is the metaphor for literary paternity by which he imagines, originates, and generates the female creatures, in the same way for Brijmohan it is the mirror that works as a metaphor for household paternity. It is through mirror only that he realizes, acknowledges, and further strengthens the duality of the patriarchal psyche.

For the man of the house like Brijmohan, his wife and daughters must conform to the role of 'angel' of the house. If she is not content with being the angel of the house, patriarchy will push her to the other extreme of being a 'monster'. Snow White and the stepmother too fit in the same binary. Brijmohan stretches his imagination from Naseem Jaan to his wife and

daughters following the same pattern. For patriarchy, this 'monster' is a threat. It unsettles the order of the house which is patriarchal. It also confronts and challenges the preserver of this order: the man in the house. The recognition of the man of the house as the authority sustains patriarchy. Brijmohan acknowledges the presence of this ghost/apparition or psychic monster when he sees Naseem Jaan smiling in the mirror and telling him "I am important in the house now" (42). By this time in the story, Brijmohan, seems to be taking Naseem Jaan not as a woman but a monstrous apparition: "Brijmohan was stunned. It looked like Naseem Jaan had entered his home locked up in the mirror and would soon get out and spread into every nook and corner of the house." (42)

Further in the story, Brijmohan's role as a father figure is no longer absolute. He acknowledges the subversion of his fatherhood as Gilbert and Gubar confirm that "a man cannot verify his fatherhood by either sense or reason, after all; that his child is he is in a sense a tale he tells himself. "(5) The loss of power he experiences is the confrontation of the female image denying him as her patron. The images of his daughters he sees in the mirror denigrate his self-esteem as a father or patriarch. His fatherhood is shaken; not only in the emotional sense but in terms of authority. The 'tale' he has told himself to consolidate his fatherhood is interrupted and has lost its linearity. As the story goes:

They (daughters) didn't seem to care that he was in the room. He changed his position on the bed so that his reflection could be seen in the mirror. But either they didn't notice it or chose to ignore him. Badi (elder) continued to apply the lotion while the other two stood beside her making faces in the mirror. As Brijmohan stared he felt as though he had no importance in the house anymore. (42)

His repulsion for a prostitute is conspicuous in the language he used for Naseem Jaan when she pleaded with him to leave the dressing table: "Get lost, you whore!" (Ahmad 40). Brijmohan undeniably loathes the woman and her body if she works against his sense of morality. He confirms his psychic repulsion for these women by using physical strength as well as by means of language that is offensive and threatening to the female body. He hits and threatens Naseem Jaan when she grabs his feet and pleads: "Brijmohan pulled his leg free and kicked her hard. Naseem Jaan doubled up in pain. The buttons on her blouse burst open exposing her breasts. Brijmohan flashed his knife. "Shall I chop them off?'" (41). Ahmad brings the subtle triad between the psychic, linguistic and physical violence confirming that the images don't operate only in the abstract rather they shape the material reality of women. The patriarchal metaphors, therefore, not only function in the mental domain rather they push men to perceive these metaphors experientially. Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, while mentioning phenomenological critics such as Gaston Bachelard, Simon De Beauvoir, and J. Hillis Miller, show that it is possible "to describe both the experience that generates

metaphor and metaphor that creates the experience” (xiii) that becomes important here to trace the role of metaphors in shaping the reality.

Men’s psyche functions on the orderliness; the distinction of roles, and binaries. Order, reason, and linearity are what patriarchy stand for and the disordered, unreasonable, and non-linear images of his daughters and wife confound Brijmohan to the core. The overlapping of binaries has shaken his sense of order and reason and he gradually succumbs to his paranoia. He feels helpless before this transformation and fails to see the women of his house distinctly either as familial women or prostitutes. The paranoia stems from his incomprehensibility; destroys his position as a father and at one point in time, he goes to the other extreme of imagining himself a pimp. Ahmad is reluctant to mention such a word and leaves the sentence incomplete: “For a moment, amid these playful girls, he felt as though he wasn’t their father but.... (42). Ahmad uses ellipses where the narrative becomes sensitive and uncomfortable hinting on the patriarchal insecurities and reluctance to say something unspeakable.

## II. Mirror Metaphor and Liberation

This section tries to extend the scope of the mirror metaphor. One of the major contentions of the previous section is that the fixity of binaries produced by the mirror metaphor subverts women; they are subjugated as either of the two in each binary - tamed subject or bestial other, an angel of the house or the monster, morally good or fallen, etc. The present section anticipates liberation within the same discourse. This is certainly neither absolute liberation nor it is suggested that women in these positions are functioning without harm to themselves. It is only to find a minute crack, a flaw in patriarchal strategy that intends to subvert women. Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge in the preface of *The Madwoman in the Attic* that women writers were bound to employ the same images coming from the long tradition of, as Gertrude Stein calls it, ‘patriarchal poetry(xi), but there was always an underlying and covert contradiction the text refutes itself’(xi). Gilbert and Gubar write: “Just as stories notoriously have a habit of “getting away” from their authors, human beings since Eden have had a habit of defying authority, both divine and literary.”(16) The juxtaposition of Naseem Jaan and Brijmohan’s wife confirms the employment of the binaries and ‘male images of female’ by Shamoil Ahmad but the contrapuntal reading of the story also hints at something which is deceiving the patriarchal hold, turning the power structure upside down and revealing what’s to be hidden. Gilbert and Gubar hail about this weak spot and celebrate that “no human creature can be completely silenced by a text or by an image.” (16). The duo give hope that there is also ‘the other side of the mirror’ and the power of metaphor has its limitations. (16)

In other words, the mirror as a patriarchal metaphor not only subverts but also gives the female a sense of ownership of her body. While she has been positioned as the bestial other/ fallen woman/ monster, the females

subjected to these enjoy autonomy as well. One of the clear conclusions that can be deduced from the story is that Brijmohan loses his authority over his ‘tamed subjects’.

Mirror as a metaphor is providing the female a liberating space to explore her physicality; the bodily, the desirous self that experiences itself. The woman existing, exhibiting, and operating on her own is the biggest victory over patriarchy. The mirror as a metaphor is changing the psychic reality not only for Brijmohan but his wife and daughters too. What he sees in his wife and daughters and interprets as the transformation towards prostitution can be interpreted as the exploration of the female celebration of her body too. It can be interpreted as such because nowhere in the story these women accept Brijmohan’s interpretation. A mirror is providing these women a visual and psychic space that was not there hitherto, therefore the women could not explore their sexuality. What they are doing after Brijmohan placed this mirror can be interpreted as their realization and celebration of their sexuality too. Although the story is conceived as a monologue, deliberately focussing on Brijmohan’s mental state there lies beneath it, female transgression also. Being paranoid, he exaggerates his imagination, while for these women it might be merely an exploration for their physical and sexual selves. The mirror as a metaphor which had restricted women’s identities to fixed binaries is turning out to be a source of transcendence as well. There are couplets in Urdu poetry incorporating the mirror to idolize female beauty and adulthood like this one by Saghar Siddiqui:

*be-sākhta bikharga.ī jalvoñ kī kā.enāt  
ā.īna TuuT kar tirī añgDā.ī ban gayā*

The world of your charms scattered abruptly

The shattered mirror reflected the somnolent stretch of limbs

The couplet exaggerates female beauty to the extent of shattering a mirror by its effect. The Urdu sarapa, which literally means “from head-to-toe”, explores female beauty. The poet describes the physical appearance of the beloved in all its gloriousness. Poets often exceed themselves to display and celebrate female sexuality in a way the sarapa enables the poet to create a commendatory, picturesque image of the beloved. In “The Dressing Table” Brijmohan observes the women of his family and their images and experiences paranoia and shame instead.

The fears that Brijmohan is exposed to and which threaten his patriarchal authority are the outcome of the ‘other side of the mirror.’ This ‘other side of the mirror’ manifests the space that transcends the two binaries. Here, in this space, these women in the story are domesticated but they are also unapologetically exploring their bodily and desirous selves, which is an act of defiance; an act not concomitant with Brijmohan’s conventional morality. This is done by the women in order to reject the rigid binaries, as to be projected in binaries is to be killed into becoming static and passive objects. It is an act of refusal not to be taken as static images or as dead.



Despite being represented, imagined, and fixated by patriarchy it is to show agency in terms of what Gilbert and Gubar call “inconstancy” which is the “refusal to be “killed” by an author/owner.” (16).

Brijmohan witnesses this inconstancy in his wife and daughters through the changes they manifested. It opened up other dimensions of identity for them. Other than a conformist self, all of them projected their ‘inconstancy’ in terms of how they walked, looked in the mirror, the ornaments they started wearing, the cosmetics they were applying, etc. In a sense these were simple acts of living but all these acts were also shattering the rigidities imposed upon these women. It can be noted in the story that instead of getting fixated, Brijmohan’s wife and daughters are evading his patriarchal imagination. They are creating instead, new identities which are dynamic and fluid and which refute any specific labelling too. It is projecting their inconstancy against their fixed association with binaries, created by the patriarchal metaphors like a mirror. Creation of new identities is, more than anything, an intellectual act. Liberation begins in the mind and the abstract where the first attempt is to break the narrative of fixed roles. Another Urdu short story “Targheeb” (“Temptation”) by Kanwar Sain projects the unbearable situation of women, enduring generational poverty and domestic exploitation. Sain shows mothers who are caught up with regretting the past and apprehensions of the future. These conditions are compulsive for them making them disillusioned with traditional roles. In one of the instances Kanta’s mother rejects the high idealism of being a wife and mother and regrets her situation: “I wish I had been his mistress and not formally married to him. That would have spared me the bother of looking after his children. The rogue didn’t allow his mistress to conceive even once and here I was....” (Sain 70). Even though a mental act like this- which is only a ‘wish’, doesn’t bring any real change, nonetheless, prepares her daughter to fight and survive against the ruthless living conditions. The “inconstancy” likewise begins in the rejection for the singularity and stringency of roles.

Gilbert and Gubar further write:

From a female perspective, however, such “inconstancy” can only be encouraging, for implying duplicity- it suggests that women themselves have the power to create themselves as characters, even perhaps the power to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her climb out. (16)

The wife and daughters of Brijmohan are helping themselves climb out of Brijmohan’s psychic entrapment. They are evading all the fixities and ownership by inventing ‘duplicity’. More than being definable stereotypes they are creating new individual ‘characters’ that are confusing for patriarchal orderliness and sanity. Neither the writer through narration nor Brijmohan as a character attempts to define them completely, confirming their ‘inconstancy’.

The inconstancy runs parallel to some other concepts too, strengthening the credibility of the whole argument. It has features common with Mikhael Bakhtin's concept of a carnival. Carnival or carnivalesque identifies with the subversion of the powerful by locating it in the domain where it is mocked. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin traces the instances of carnivalesque in the works of the French writer Rabelais. Pramod K. Nayar explains carnival as consisting "laughter, the bodily, parody, the ugly, the grotesque and the so-called 'low'". (23)

'Laughing' is offensive to authority; it breaks the orderliness, undermines control, and distracts seriousness. Order, control, and seriousness conjugate in affirming the authoritative position of all oppressive systems and this explains why all despotic regimes in the world were so obsessed with discipline. Patriarchy too forbids laughter and Brijmohan is offended by his daughters' laughter. How laughter offends patriarchy and patriarchs can also be understood by a Chinese story Helene Cixous narrates in her essay "Castration and Decapitation". The story goes like this – a king orders his general General Sun Tse who was reputed to be a great strategist and trainer, to make his 180 wives soldiers. He started teaching them to march with beats but every time the general orders to perform in rhythm one of the wives laughs. The general kills one of the wives and all the wives start following the beats (42). Ahmad's story gives the instances of laughing too where Brijmohan feels neglected and threatened. One of the instances where the daughters are engaged in such conversation goes like this:

"Didi, give me the lotion?"

"What do you want it for?"

"Didi, I will use it in the bathroom...."Choti replied

"Get lost,"Manjhli pinched Chhoti's cheeks and all three began to laugh.

Brijmohan's heart began to beat with alarm. His daughters have changed completely....." (Ahmad 42)

Naseem Jaan's monstrous laughter that he confronts in the mirror of the dressing table is another instance in the story where he feels defeated. The communalism and misogyny that he exhibited while attacking a Muslim prostitute are subverted by this monstrous laughter. His confidence is shaken by this mere laughter: "Brijmohan was now afraid of the dressing table. Naseem Jaan laughed in it-she laughed when Badi tinkled her bangles, she laughed when Chhoti jingled her payals. And now Brijmohan...." (Ahmad 42)

The other criterion of carnivalesque is the occurrence of 'ugly', 'bodily', and 'grotesque'. Ahmad's narrative is remarkable in this aspect. He presents what can be called the most uncomfortable narrative not only for Brijmohan as a character but for the audience too. There is an instance in the story where Brijmohan's sense of authority is challenged by the use of grotesque. Ahmad narrates:

One day when Brijmohan was in the room, Badi(elder) came and parked herself in front of the dressing table. She looked at herself from the right and left and then began to loosen her bra. She lifted her left arm and touched the hair in her armpit with the fingers of her other hand. Then she took out some lotion from the drawer of the dressing table and began to apply it to her underarm. Brijmohan was in a terrible state. (41)

The women in the story are dealing with grotesque aspects of their bodies. Their frank and the playful acceptance of the crudeness of their female bodies are the markers of their celebration of the grotesque. They are no longer asking: "Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who's fairest of us all?" The binaries here are broken and the woman is no longer seeking acceptance from the patriarchal voice for which the mirror stands. It is through the mirror metaphor only that she finds and celebrates the ugly and the grotesque. Therefore, it won't be wrong to claim that it is through the mirror metaphor she has found her inconstancy and liberation too.

These instances show how the female body and sexuality find their escape from the clutches of men and patriarchy. Rather, they are celebrated by these daughters in women's domains. Teasing, touching, and laughter provide a secure space for the exploration of the 'bodily'. There are also hints at homosexual pleasures in the household. It unveils the possibility of private spaces unseen by men where homosexuality thrives and where women would indulge freely in playful sexuality.

It is also important to note here that this inconstancy in literature is only possible if writers are either merging the binaries so that they get blurry or by applying what is called the "Woolfian act of killing both the angels and monster." (Gilbert and Gubar 17). This is referred to Gilbert and Gubar's suggestion to female writers that they must break 'patriarchal poetics' and go through first of all "an understanding of the nature and origin of these (angels and monster) images." (17). Considering the argument that male writers have a habit of employing these extreme images of women, it is commendable to note that Ahmad doesn't do this injustice; Ahmad unlike the majority of male writers from the western part of the world, tries to expose the binaries without attempting consolidating them He has narrated the story from the perspective of a man who is losing his sanity and the reality gets delusive for him, only to leave the reader suspicious of his ideas. Ahmad subtly points out Brijmohan's prejudices and his fixation on stereotypes making it clear to the reader that he is not in his complete senses to determine if his wife is turning into a prostitute or his insecurities have been triggered. Ahmad is killing both the angel and monster as the wife and daughters are neither the docile and easily oppressed women, nor they are turning into the prostitutes Brijmohan imagines. There is no reliability in Brijmohan's visions.

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