

## *Beyond the Threshold: Emancipation or Entrapment?*

### The Feminine Archetypes in Pakistani Women Fiction Writers

*Ambreen Salahuddin, Dr. Ahmed Usman*

---

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper discusses the concept of feminine archetypes with reference to the fiction produced by Pakistani women writers. The reality of spaces of women, as seen by patriarchy, is summed up in famous adages that state “it is a man’s world; woman’s place is in the home.” On the basis of “man’s world” and “woman’s place”, the paper focuses on home and the role of a woman therein. There are indeed several roles, but the focus in this paper will be on the role of a wife or ‘lady of the house’. What is expected of a wife usually sums up what is expected of a woman by the others. The expected role is that of the feminine archetype that has been focused on more and is portrayed mostly throughout literary texts. For this research, complete works of Pakistani women fiction writers, writing in six languages, have been studied. The number of writers is twenty-six.*

**Keywords:** threshold, feminine archetypes, women fiction, women spaces, Pakistan

## Introduction

Female literary culture has been a step-child of our general literary culture (Genovese 193). 16

The female literary culture in-itself, no doubt, has coherence in matters of its structure and its traditions. But the inherent pre-occupation of a self is a phenomenon that has a reality of its own. This preoccupation is not on a personal level only, it is a social fact and the whole group of women writers shares it. It comes in the sensibility, ideology and expression in any case. The difference lies in how sub-groups within this larger group of women relate to it, identify it and use it in a peculiar manner in their expression. On this basis, there are forms of consciousness as the feminine, female and feminist (Salahuddin 2015).

During this study, certain categories emerged while going through the archetypal representation of women by women writers. These categories are basically the spaces in which women have roles to play, interact with themselves and others and find space for themselves. These archetypes or the breaking of archetypes is analyzed through forms of women consciousness as well (Salahuddin, Zakar, & Usman 2016). The transition from feminine to feminist is seen in all these spaces and the assigned roles. Also, female consciousness is witnessed in these texts. Feminine consciousness is where a woman is described by the 'Other'. A similar example of feminine consciousness can be taken from an article by Sarkar (45), where she analysis the autobiography of a Bengali woman Rashsundari Debi.

She let us know how pretty she was by simply repeating what others had said about her. In fact, she even composed a little verse about her looks: 'Everyone called me a little golden doll.' Her neighbors used to comment on her attractiveness: 'Whoever marries her will be truly blessed.'

This feminine consciousness involves another level as well where a woman is seen and she is expected to be seen as dependent, psychologically, emotionally, physically and economically. Economic dependence is basically the main factor though in defining all other elements. As Barrett (214) says:

It is difficult to argue that the present structure of the family-household is anything other than oppressive for women. Feminists have consistently, and rightly, seen the family as a central site of women's oppression in contemporary society. The reasons for this lie both in the material structure of the household, by which women are by and large financially dependent on men, and in the ideology of the family, through which women are confined to a primary concern with domesticity and motherhood.

Female consciousness is a woman's awareness as the creator and nurturer of life. Feminist consciousness is the self-awareness of being a woman, the realization of the Being (Salahuddin, Zakar, & Usman 2016).

### **Feminist Theory**

The philosophical and epistemological position of this research is based on Feminist theory. The focus of Feminist theory is to re-evaluate and re-examine the Patriarchal world. It offers a critique of the dichotomy of the place of a woman in a masculine world. The focus of this critical theory is not merely offering a critique, rather presenting a solution in the form of transformation of existing norms and offering a radical change. Saarinen (1998) writes:

Feminist writers have described the projects involved in the development of a new, feminist world-view as ones of deconstruction and reconstruction (Harding & Hintikka ix-xi). These projects are interwoven and together they constitute a spiral process of knowledge production which begins over and over again and which gets progressively deeper (Eichler 9-18).

The relationship of males and females to the outer reality is somehow the main concern of Feminist theory. The outer reality is the construction of Patriarchy and is usually seen as the universal reality. So, the reality, though seen and perceived as human reality, is in fact a masculine reality. The feminine/female perspective is absent from the so-called human perspective. This is the challenge that has been taken up by the feminist theorists and they pledge to add women's standpoint to knowledge and meanings attached therein.

### Selection of Writers

The twenty-six writers selected for this study were not limited to any one language. Women writers writing fiction in six different languages i.e.18 Urdu (National language of the country), English (Official language of the country), Punjabi (Regional language), Sindhi (Regional language), Saraiki (Regional language) and Pushto (Regional language), were selected. Basic criteria for selection was that these acclaimed women fiction writers must be Pakistani women, published in “A” category literary magazines and must have a minimum of two published books. For the purpose of refining the research, snowball sampling was used and women fiction writers were approached. As list was developed after personal meetings with various writers and responses were recorded through email. The following writers were included in the study:

**Table: List of writers included in the study**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Writers</b>
<b>Urdu</b>	Afzal Tauseef Altaf Fatima Atiya Syed Bano Qudsia Farhat Perveen Fehmida Riaz Hajira Masroor Jameela Hashmi Khadija Mastoor Khalida Hussain Mumtaz Shireen Neelofar Iqbal Neelum Ahmed Basheer Perveen Atif Qurat ul Ain Haider Razia Fasih Ahmed Tahira Iqbal Zahida Hina
<b>Urdu and Punjabi</b>	Farkhanda Lodhi
<b>Punjabi</b>	Perveen Malik Riffat
<b>English</b>	Bapsi Sidhwa Kamila Shamsie
<b>Saraiki</b>	Musarrat Kalanchavi

<b>Sindhi</b>	Noor-ul-Huda Shah
<b>Pushto</b>	Zaitoon Bano

### **Home, Room and the Feminine Archetypes**

When we talk about woman's place, the notion of home is significant. It is seen that if a woman has no home; a roof of protection for her, she is bound to fail, collapse, or to become evil. When we talk about a room, Room of one's own by Woolf (1929) haunts the mind. It is actually not possible for a woman traditionally enjoy the luxuries of a home all to herself. But a room she may, even if it is shared. But a room as exclusively hers is a far-fetched thought. It is not a matter of a private room, but just the matter of some space of hers. Role of a wife and a mother are very significant in this regard. In this paper, the role of the wife will be focused upon as what is expected of a wife usually sums up what is expected of a woman by others. Excerpts from the literary texts of twenty-six women fiction writers of Pakistan will be used to see how they have painted the image of a wife and if they have kept it to the feminine consciousness (female consciousness is not discussed separately in this paper) only, or have they portrayed a woman in the role of a wife having feminist consciousness of her own as well.

The traditional role of a woman as the lady of the house or a wife is defined in a very good manner by women fiction writers of Pakistan. They have narrated the ingredients of this archetype in several characters. Many archetypes are presented in their works which are a true representation of this society. Along with that, they have tried to break the archetype as well. Hashmi's character Nirupama (Hashmi 59) is a typical housewife of this region: "Nirupama is a Hindustani woman for whom her husband is like her god, her home is her paradise and the outside world holds no truth." This is expected of a woman of this society. Riffat writes:

What do you know but a woman's worship is in the happiness and approval of her possessor. Let me first know if my worship is approved. I still have the fervor of worship in heart and yearning of prostration in my head... for my husband... (Riffat 20).

## Gender Ritualization and Individual Self

One important notion is that a woman is expected to forget her individual self and her personal characteristics. She must always appear as proper and fresh for a man. And also, it is better for a woman to act as expected as men find happiness in the fact that women keep themselves busy in petty things like shopping and dressing up. Fatima writes: “Should a woman stay as a lifeless statue of mud and her natural streak should not come near her. Why is it necessary for a woman to appear fresh as a flower, proper and delicate?” (Fatima 85) A woman is a Matryoshka doll for a man, as a character from one of Perveen’s stories is seen by her husband: “He took out the doll from the cupboards and took out every doll from inside it and displayed them on side-table. The newly wedded Sabahat’s image came before his eyes and he murmured, “Matryoshka” (Perveen 24).

Even then, a woman who is the wife now, becomes somewhat uninteresting after a while. The relation becomes stale and a man utters: “When someone knows that it is same old lentils cooked at home, why not eat meat from outside?” (Mastoor 215) And “then he crawls out of his skin like a snake and she stares at an empty line on the bed” (Basheer 72). This situation has been powerfully narrated by Fehmida Riaz: “They remembered that their husbands have gotten tired of them for years and have slept turned towards the other side. And it was such an annoyance and a cursed situation that no song could be written on it” (Riaz 90). In one of the Pushto short stories, the symbol of a fan is used. There was one fan, which was delicate and which Sherik used to fan his mistress with. There was another fan, which was hard and usually used for fanning fire. This is used by Sherik to beat his wife (Bano 1959).

Sometimes women are aware of the situation they are in and yet they accept it for the constraints that they have. Question is, everything about the clichéd roles and liberating one’s self out of them is true, but where would women go? It is right to this extent as society look down upon such women and label them as women who left their homes to be alone and flirt with other men. The excerpt given below is showing a similar character, who is symbolized by a circus lioness.

She looked intently at her husband for once and her burning look reminding me of the lioness from the circus.

I saw this closely once. The lioness sitting on a small stool, looked up with flaming eyes, at the signal of ring master, in such a way that I shook but in the very next moment she jumped through the burning ring of flames (Perveen 188).

Women are seen as objects in a diversity of ways. Kamila Shamsie writes while telling a tale about one of the grandmothers who leapt after watching a lizard, “thus showing her face to men who were neither eunuchs nor close relatives” (Shamsie 17). Now this was the way a small, trivial happening by a woman was and is seen. Masroor writes: “Woman, horse and land, are either blessed or cursed” (Masroor 25) and in another place, a male character in a story by the same author states, “Such a low caste is this woman... if she had brains; she could have been a man” (Masroor 423). But these roles are such that “Good women do this for their homes” (Masroor 125) and “Hey sister-in-law! Pious women’s voices should not be heard outside of home” (Masroor 128).

The symbols associated with weddings and married life are used to strongly represent the true archetype of a traditional woman. Mastoor writes: “Her world had actually become vacant like these empty suitcases of dowry. Few fancy fabrics took her to journey of another world... shrieked in a painful tone on the beat of dhol: ‘Why you married me in a foreign city’” (Mastoor 111). Hashmi (113) also writes:

Layer after layers of clothes for dowry, fabrics made from my mother’s hands, fabric set by grandmother's hands, like the women these clothes have been safely put away like women. And because of the busy lives, never got a chance to open and wear these clothes.

These excerpts show the time women give to this activity of making the dowry of daughters and granddaughters.

Women writers have written extensively about the complexity of the relation of intimacy. Fehmida Riaz, in her own style, writes at one place, as one of her characters who was suppressed by her husband all through their relation, happened to have an intimate moment with another man and realized for the first time that she could be herself without being labeled.

O Kalvantay! Is this the way a man kisses? Ashfaq never did so! But why would he! Eastern men do not kiss their wives. Lo! It is just wastage of time!

22

Mark, who was now neither a White man nor of any other color, but he was not Pakistani, nor Indian, who would say at her boldness in surprise: "O where did you learn such prostitute-like acts?" (Riaz 74).

In such extreme scenarios, women become psychologically and emotionally upset. In a story of Atiya Syed, the wife is constantly stressed about the other woman and then hallucinated about her being in her bedroom all the time: "My God!! What was I watching... she was going ahead, but her feet were turned backwards... in a moment her being vanished in darkness" (Syed 59). Naveeda (Tauseef 2007) committed suicide along with two kids in a story entitled Naveeda by Tauseef. She writes, "Here young women die slowly, no one asks. They die suddenly, even then nobody is bothered" (Tauseef 51). This is a comment on the whole woman-situation of this region. Death is inevitable, but life is a living hell for that majority who is being suppressed and exploited.

Though it is not such a situation overall in our society that all women writers paint images of suppressed and exploited women however the situations are realistic. Tahira Iqbal symbolizes them using with witches who live in deserted places. She also used the archetypes of Zulikha and Aziz of Egypt, "When you are present in yourself, let me know. You look like a witch's abode like this. When Aziz of Egypt went near Zulaikha, she became a witch. Zulaikha used to become a witch in the sense that empty, deserted beings are abodes of witches" (Iqbal 84). A woman must always be there, present, and available. She cannot have her moments and moods. Qudsia writes: "Woman is a thing of exhibition. She stays alive till her showy part stays" (Qudsia 446).

Hussain presents a very sharp image of the constant struggle of women. She symbolizes her with the image of Prophet Sulaiman, when he stood holding his stick and died, but didn't fall. It was after ages that his stick was eaten by termites that the jinns working in his palace realized he was dead. In the same manner, a woman works all the time and no one realizes it in the life time of that woman, or in lifetime of all women.

She had no hold on jinn and humans, seas, winds, animals and birds. Even then standing for a long time, with the

help of stick, she supervised the building of strange castles. Standing for centuries. Now that stick is being eaten by termites. The time is near that this stick will drop; being dissolved and she herself will also drop. Then all will know about her death. The construction work of the castle will stop. Incomplete... worthless... futile (Hussain 311).

There are many small examples in these stories and novels, which gives an insight into how trivial matters define the roles of men and women in society. A man writes a letter to a woman telling her that finding a house is a strange experience, "Maybe you have not gone through this because finding a house is work of a man, not a woman (Hussain, 2008: 238). Another example may be seen from a novel of Bapsi Sidhwa: "But later when she noticed Yasmin precede her husband down the steps and into the carriage, she took her aside to chide her unseemly conduct" (Sidhwa 143).

Quratulain Haider, in her novel *Aag ka Darya [River of Fire]* has used the technique of stream of consciousness. The novel is spread over centuries and the character of a girl kept on reemerging in each era with the names Champak, Champa, Champa Baai, Champa Ahmed (Haider 2013). All these characters have different lifestyles and thoughts. All these women present in different times were independent women and thinking beings. Champa Ahmed views the whole human predicament and the scenario of sub-continent's partition very intelligently, viewing the way people are all the same in all such wars and events,

I am an ordinary, average girl." Champa kept saying. "had I been a special person of God, Meera, Mukta Baai, Saint Safia... wounds would have been visible on my body, my dress would have been red with my sacred blood. My hands would have been nailed. There would have been a circle of light around my head. Potions of poison and petard of snake were sent to me, but I am just Champa Ahmed (Haider 463).

### **Outcomes of Acceptance and Resistance: Mahpara Jaan and Shehishah Bano**

There are two very strong characters from two short stories by Hajra Masroor and Zahida Hina. Both are symbols of a woman's sacrifice. One

is Mahpara Jaan from a story titled as Aaqbat [End of life] (1991). She was not even seen as resisting her plight throughout the story. As far as Shehinshah Bano is concerned, from the story titled as Zameen aag ki, aasmaan aag ka [Fiery earth, fiery sky] by Zahida Hina (2004), she did<sup>24</sup> resist and react, but had to surrender in the end. Mahpara Jaan was a prostitute and the story is set at the time where she is a great-grandmother now. The great-grandfather is sick and bedridden. She was from the world of dance and music, but changed herself to such extent and was careful to this level that she could not even listen to music and sit on a swing, lest people will think of her as still a 'bad' woman. When she went to see great-grandfather as he felt he was going to die and wanted to tell her something, this is how the conversation went as she told him:

I left the world for you... wealth... fame... say... say what is in your heart... tell...' Nomi was listening to the breaking, crying voice of great-grandmother. Now she was holding great-grandfather's face in her hands. Glass bangles were tinkling by themselves in her shaking arms. 'Ask Jameel to buy my shroud. Don't buy it with your money. My life after death should not be scarred Mahpara Jaan... Mahpara Jaaaaan...' (Masroor 51).

He simply tells her not to buy his Kafan [shroud] from her money, as still after a lifetime of companionship and her staying loyal, honest and pure did not change how she was looked at. And hearing this, she fell and died, while the sick old man slept under the influence of his sedatives.

The second character is of Shehinshah Bano. She lived in sub-continent in times before partition. She grew up reading legends for her friends. They knew that hiding from elderly women and "listening to legend of Amir Hamza and Talism Hoshroba from Shahinshah Bano, is a treat. These are the legends which men wrote for men. Their taste is different. Girls are forbidden to read or listen to them" (Hina 170).

Here Hina present the contrast in what is expected of women of the house in real life, and what men want to see and experience about women outside the house. The legends men wrote and read told of women who are "riding horses in battlefields, with sword, with spears, with magic, with charm, they conquer men" (Hina 171). And when Shehinshah Bano gets married, she is forbidden to read, write or think. She could not go when her mother died in the other city as her husband Dulare Mian was not home to give permission. When her father died, she was numb as she could not meet

him in his sickness, but Dulare said that how can she not go and let her uncles and cousins take all her father's property. He married another and one day, he divorced her and threw her out of home. She was an old woman with grand children now. A long life of sacrifices similar to those of Mahpara Jaan, but unlike Mahpara, she tried to fight. According to Indian law, her husband must pay for her expenses even after divorce but according to Islamic laws, it was not so. She pursued the case to have her right yet she was dragged to the point where it became a fight of non-believers and Muslims. They came in big numbers to her house and her granddaughter shrieked: "They will tear us into pieces grandmother." This voice had the fear of honor more than her life. This was not her granddaughter's scream, but the scream of eternal woman. Woman... the plunder of every invading army..." (Hina 186). She decided then to stop her fight and asked for inkpad for thumb impression. Her son asked: "Mother why are you putting thumb impression? Sign it.' 'Signing suits women of non-believers. Our women should put thumb impression only.' She said and put blackened thumb on paper" (Hina 187). That night all women from the legends she read in childhood visited her: "Scheherazade, Dunyazad, Malka Zailam Zabardast, Noorjehan Bano, Gulbadan Bano, puppets of soil were dissolving in flowing fire" (Hina 189) and she died.

### **Women Writers and their Portrayal of Feminine Archetypes**

In Urdu writers, Quratulain Haider stands apart as the most prominent and powerful novelist of our times. If we look at the female characters in her works, they are mostly liberated, educated and confident women. Bano Qudsia is the writer who is read the most. Her most prominent work is her novel *Raja Gidh* [vulture king] which presents her philosophical insights on lawful and the unlawful. Seemi, the main character of this novel is a strong archetype, which is quite known among the readers of literature. Though it is a character of a liberated woman, who is free to choose and decide for herself, nonetheless, she did not stand out to achieve a total sensibility of emancipation and gradually annihilates into nothingness. Kallu is one character in Qudsia's stories that is a liberated character through and through. Apart from these two characters, the rest of the female characters of Qudsia are mostly strong representations of the feminine archetype of this region. In the works of Hajra Masroor, Khadija Mastoor and Altaf Fatima the archetypes are mostly the suppressed women of this society. Aaliya from Mastoor's novel *Aangan* [courtyard] is an exception though.

Khalida Hussain's works have the highest percentage of symbolic writing. Her female archetype is a free soul in thought, educated and with a thinking mind, yet restrained and helpless most of the time in the end. When we talk about liberated and thinking heroines, Atiya Syed has<sup>26</sup> presented more images of a liberated woman in her works. Her female characters will be found making their decisions and choices by themselves and dance and run whenever they want. She has focused more on liberty and freedom of women as humans rather than an object who is only exploited sexually. Mumtaz Shireen's works depict the female consciousness very strongly. Same can be said of Farkhanda Lodhi as her heroine Parbati is a strong female archetype. She is known for her progressive approach towards writing. Perveen Atif is also progressive writer but her works have a typical archetypal presentation of women through and through. Neelum Ahmed Basheer's character Noor Bano is a strong archetype and she is known for taking up issues related to women exploitation and she treats them in a very blunt manner. Tahira Iqbal is also a prominent writer among the contemporaries and she indulges in writing in local dialect and about her locality. Her writing style is crisp and her archetypes are strong traditional characters.

### **Conclusion**

The question is why an archetype persists to exist in the society. The answer is not in the awareness and consciousness-raising of females alone. Though it is true that one major issue with the upbringing of females of this society is the fact that they are trained from the very beginning that they have to have a man in their lives; otherwise theirs will be a miserable existence. They have to be married and for that purpose they should always be prepared once they are in a marriageable age. There are always people around to observe them and they may be 'picked' by someone; the boy himself or mother, sisters and aunts of the boy. Their plight is always never to choose and be thankful about it. It is not up to them to make choices for their lives. On the basis of this training, the majority of girls are never ready to be independent and are not sure of themselves. The only thing meaningful in a girl's life is the presence of a man. Fiction writers have represented many such archetypes in their works. For example, one character often seen in Bano Qudsia's work is a woman who dies for love, instead of standing up and being independent. Piya (218-229), Maina (127-145) and Zari (207-247) are three major examples from her works.

The archetypes women writers have created can be categorized as per the forms of women consciousness. It has been seen how women writers of

this region are the voice of the female lot. They have highlighted the prominent women from mythology, religion, history and folk traditions in notable manner in their works. The works themselves have an understanding of the notions of feminine, female and feminist consciousness, consciously as far as the feminists like Fehmida Riaz and Atiya Syed are concerned and unconsciously in other writers.

### References

- Bano, Z. *Maat Baangari [glass pieces]*. Peshawar: Idara-e-Asha'at Sarhad, 1959. Print. 28
- Barrett, M. *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*. London: New Left Books, 1980. Print.
- Basheer, N.A. *Gulabon Wali Gali [Street of roses]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1996. Print.
- Fatima, A. *Woh Jisay Chaha Gya. [One who was loved]*. Karachi: Scheharzade, 1969. Print.
- Fox-Genovese, E. "The New Female Literary Culture." *The Antioch Review*, 38.2 (1980) 193-217. Web. 18 Nov 2015.
- Haider, Q. *Aag Ka Darya [River Of Fire]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2013. Print.
- Hashmi, J. *Talash-e-Baharaan [Search For Spring]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003. Print.
- Hina, Z. *Titliyaan Dhoondne Wali [the girl searching for butterflies]*. Lahore: Alhamd Publications, 2004. Print.
- Hina, Z. *Rah Mein Ajal Hae [death is in the way]*. Lahore: Al-hamd, 2008. Print.
- Hussain, K. *Majmooa e Khalida Hussain [Collected works of Khalida Hussain]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008. Print.
- Iqbal, T. *Ganji bar*. Islamabad: Dost Publications, 2008. Print.
- Masroor, H. *Majmooa e Hajra Masroor [Collected works of Hajra Masroor]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991. Print.
- Mastoor, K. *Majmooa e Khadija Mastoor [Collected works of Khadija Mastoor]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2008. Print.
- Perveen, F. *Munjamid [Frozen]*. Lahore: Asaateer, 2000. Print.
- Perveen, F. *Kaanch Ki Chataan [Rock of glass]*. Lahore: Jehangir Books. 2008. Print.
- Qudsia, B. *Aatish zer-e-pa [Fire under feet]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2004. Print.
- Qudsia, B. *Chahar Chaman [Four Gardens]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2004. Print.
- Qudsia, B. *Amar Bail [Air creeper]*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2009. Print.
- Riaz, F. *Hum Log [We people]*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.
- Riffat. *Ik Opri Kuri [A Strange Girl]*. Lahore: Saarang Publications, 1986. Print.

- Saarinen, A. "Feminist Research: In Search Of A New Paradigm?" *Acta Sociologica*, 31. 1 (1988) 35-50. Sage Publications. Web. 16 Feb 2015.
- Salahuddin, A. *Women's Lives and Images: Traditional Symbolism in Pakistan Fiction* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan, 2015. Print.
- Salahuddin, A., Zakar, M. Z., & Usman, A. Threshold: A Spatial and Ideological Barrier in South Asian Fiction-A Case study of Pakistani Women Fiction Writers. *South Asian Studies*, 31.1 (2016) 175-185. Print.
- Sarkar, T. "A Book of her Own. A Life of Her Own: Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Woman." *History Workshop* (No. 36, pp. 35-65). Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.
- Shamsie, K. *Salt and Saffron*. Karachi: Oxford University, 2000. Print.
- Sidhwa, B. *The Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus*. Lahore: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Tauseef, A. *Zameen Par Laut Aane Ka Din [day to return to earth]*. Lahore: Multimedia affairs, 2007. Print.
- Woolf, V. *A Room of One's Own*. England: Hogarth Press, 1929. Print.