

FEMINIST ARCHETYPE IN FICTION BY PAKISTANI WOMEN WRITERS

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Abstract

This paper attempts to ascertain the presence of feminist archetypes in the works of Pakistani women fiction writers. Women fiction writers of Pakistan were selected for this study on the criterion of at least two published books; either novel or collected short stories. Another criterion was publication of their works in reputed A category literary journals. For the current study, the archetypes are identified as per the forms of women consciousness. The forms of women consciousness are feminine, female and feminist. One archetype, i.e. the feminist archetype is explored out of the three forms of women consciousness. This study relies on qualitative data collected through theoretical sampling. Thematic analysis technique is applied for the analysis of collected data. For the philosophical and epistemological position of the study, 'Images of women school of criticism' is used. Images of women school of criticism explores the images of women as portrayed in literary works. Initially works by men were explored through the theoretical lens of Images of women school of criticism, as to how the male writers portray women in their writings. Later on, the works of fiction by women authors also came in the scope of this school of criticism. Data showed that feminist archetype is rarely present in the works of these women fiction writers, and most of the time if there is a feminist archetype, the context is of sexual freedom alone. Most of the archetypes found in fiction of Pakistan women writers are either female or feminine. However sometimes a transition from feminine to feminist is also visible.

Keyword: *Pakistani women writers, feminist archetype, Images of women, Pakistani fiction*

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INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this study is interpretation of archetype from the lens of forms of women consciousness (Keohane and Rosaldo, 1982), i.e. through a woman's viewpoint. Forms of women consciousness as discussed later include feminine, female and feminist consciousness. This study is concerned with the portrayal of feminist archetype in fiction by women writers. Merriam-Webster (2007) has defined gender as "the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex." When gender is reviewed as an archetype, it gathers the variations of customs, rituals, taboos and norms etc. and it brings forth the expected behavior pattern of a particular sexual or gender identity (Schermer, 2008). This pattern makes an individual perform or act in a specific way to dominate or to submit. This is evident in fiction by women writers, that at times the representative expressions of a particular gender are conscious and at times it is "unconscious and the roles, expectations and labels" (Salahuddin, 2015) are mostly retained in these works i.e. there is a powerful presence of feminine and female archetypes, and at times these constructs are challenged or deconstructed i.e. the feminist archetype is witnessed. Archetypes in fiction are thus analyzed according to these criteria.

Gilbert and Gubar (1979) wrote, "...the world of women writers is created in sin and extends a horizon of eternal damnation, for all women must destroy in order to create." When we explore the history of fiction in Indian Subcontinent, we see that names of women authors emerge very late (Azeem, 2010; Ashraf, 2003). Although traditionally, women's role as story teller is not disputed and has been prevalent around the globe (Dégh, 1989) since times unknown, but as far as proper writing and holding a pen is concerned, women were seen comparatively later in history of literature. There are also concerns that women authors were not properly recorded. Earlier writers around the globe and also in this region had to struggle hard to become visible. De Beauvoir (1984)

wrote, "If a caste is kept in a state of inferiority, no doubt it remains inferior; but liberty can break the circle."

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pakistani women writers have contributed significantly to Pakistani fiction. They have produced a variety of literary works and there are innumerable powerful archetypes of women in their writings. When we talk of archetypes, from Hindu mythology, *Sita* (Lal, & Gokhale, 2009) from *Ramayana* and *Heer* from *Heer Waris Shah* (Waqar, 2009) are two solid examples of archetypes from classic texts of Indian Subcontinent.

There are many examples from previous research which highlight archetypes in meaningful manner. One particular research by Stratton (1988) has shown female archetypes of African fiction in context of cultural barriers imposed by patriarchal systems and has brought forth the similarity in themes, metaphors and archetypes from women's fiction across cultures. Leal (1983), in the same pattern, wrote on female archetypes in Mexican literature. Also, Talbot (1987) explored female archetypes in Carmen Martín Gaité's *Entre Visillos*. Sieber (1999) states about the deconstruction of gender as archetype in *El Eterno Femenino* by Rosario Castellanos. Gilbert and Gubar (1980: ix) has written in *Madwoman in the Attic*; "...we were surprised by the coherence of theme and imagery that we encountered in the works of writers who were geographically, historically, and psychologically distant to each other." A close look at all these works shows that women from difference locations, diverse backgrounds, different language and dialects etc. somehow relate to each other and there is an invisible link between them. They were all weaving a strong female literary tradition. It was found through these works, as will be visible through analysis of different texts of present research, that there are archetypes of women who are enclosed in certain feminine spaces. These archetypes reflect women's lives as perceived and presented by Pakistani women

authors.

Women fiction writers of Pakistan have contributed to Pakistani literature in varied ways and made their creative selves visible in a forceful manner. The journey of making themselves recognized, these women writers have faced many barriers; physical and mental (Abbasi, 2010). When we talk about the genre of *daasntaan* or *qisaa* (legend or fable), many names emerge (Akber, 1962) which include works of Sughra Humayon Mirza, Fatima Begum, Zafar Jehan Begum, Jamila Begum, Muhammadi Begum, Nazar Sajjad Haider, Anis Fatima and Tayyaba Begum.

As transition from fable to novel happened, the first woman reported to have written a novel was Nazar Sajjad Haider who wrote *Aah e Mazloomaan* [sigh of the oppressed] in 1914 (Bakhsh, 2011). Other prominent novelists included Nazar Sajjad Haider, Raseed un Nisa Begum, Muhammadi Begum, Akbari Begum, Hijab Imtiaz Ali, Ismat Chughtai. (Bakhsh 2011). Then comes short stories and we have many notable names writing in their peculiar styles in those earlier days like Nazar Sajjad Haider, Rashid un Nisa Begum, Mrs. Abdul Qadir, Siddiqua Begum, Hajira Masroor, Khadija Mastoor, Hijab Imtiaz, Ismat Chughtai, Qurat ul Ain Haider etc. (Anjum, 1973; Akhtar, 1997; Akber, 1962). These women fiction writers have given a voice to women consciousness. They brought forth the untold stories of women and also for readers; they are contributing in shaping the collective consciousness (Naheed, 1993).

Many critical and evaluative write ups highlight women fiction writers' contribution. As far as earlier research is concerned, in one of the studies (Khalida Akber, 1962), the evolution and journey of women writers from the times of legends or *daastaan* writing to novel and short story writing has been traced. It is pointed out that earlier women writers focused more on the traditional aspects as regards to women and the change towards a diversity of topics and roles came gradually. This work, however, did not highlight the contribution of individual writers with focus. There was another

thesis by Anjum (1973), which highlighted fiction writers including, but not limited to, Nazar Sajjad Haider, Hajira masroor, Qurat ul Ain Haider, Khadija Mastoor, Hijab Imtiaz ali, Jameela Hashmi, Altaf Fatima and Fehmida Riaz. Another work (Bari, 1962), highlights different eras of novel writing and gives an evaluation of the plot and structure of the novels by earlier women writers. Contribution of women writers is highlighted but this contribution and its role in highlighting the growth of collective consciousness of the females of this region is not emphasized upon. There are many such works which emphasize on the individual works, collective contribution and life and contribution of women writers (Butt, 2002; Aali, 2009; Haider, 2010; Salam, 1983; Anwer, 1993; Niazi, 1989; Farrukhi, 2007; Butt, 1993; Zia, 2008; Mushtaq, 2012; Khokhar, 2000; Akhter, 2000; Khawar, 2013; Shami, 2006; Manzoor, 1996; Azmat, 1968; Farooq, 1995; Nasreen, 1995; Malik, 1993; Asghar, 2002; Lonsdale, 2004; Kausar, 2005; Bakhsh, 2011; Afaqi, 1973; Shehbaz, 1996; Hafeez, 2001; Tariq, 2011; Hafeez, 2001; Bhatti, 2009; Rafique, 1988; Talib, 2011; Jamil, 2007; Bashir, 2008; Hafeez, 2011; Junejo, 1984; Siddiqui, 1984; Saeed, 1995; Manoj, 2013; Rushdie, 1997; Cilano, 2009; Dhawan, 1996; Singh, 2012; Yaqoob & Hussain, 2012).

Forms of Women Consciousness

It is seen in this paper, looking at the form of women consciousness, if the archetypes presented by women writers are feminist or not. Three forms of women consciousness are defined as feminine, female and feminist (Keohane and Rosaldo, 1982). Feminine consciousness (Keohane & Rosaldo 1982) is subjective consciousness. "It involves consciousness of ourselves as object of the attention of another." This form of awareness is that of the 'Other' in Simon de Beauvoir's term, woman as defined by "male gaze, construct and desire." (Rosaldo & Keohane, 1982: ix) The second form is "female consciousness". This is "... the deep rooted, age old experience of women in giving and preserving life, nurturing and sustaining." (Rosaldo & Keohane, 1982: x) The third

form is “feminist consciousness”. “This is the consciousness developed and defined as we reflect on women's experience, and on the asymmetries in power, opportunity and intuition that have universally marked the fortune of women.” (Rosaldo & Keohane, 1982: x). Feminist consciousness includes understanding of one's own self as individuals as well as women.

The transition from feminine to feminist is visible and evident in literary texts. Also, female consciousness is witnessed in literary texts by women writers as well (Salahuddin, 2016). The focus of this paper is however on the feminist archetype only.

Images of Women School of Criticism

For this article, literary text written by Pakistani women fiction writers is analyzed through the lens of images of women school of criticism. The archetypes presented by women writers are seen through this theoretical lens to find an image of woman that is authentic and is not a label constructed by society and coming from the outside. If there is pattern adopted from outside, it is inauthentic, banking on the Existential movement that runs in both literature and philosophy (Leccardi, 1996; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006).

Main focus of this school of criticism has always been to look at the texts written by male authors and to evaluate the ways women are represented in those texts. Josephine Donovan (1998) states, “Images of women approach dominated feminist literary studies in the 1970s and is central to the pedagogy of Women's Studies in literature.” The major focus of this feminist school is the critique of images of women presented in a stereotypical and passé manner in literature. This is a feminist way of reading a literary text. The focus is also that literature is chiefly male dominated and women are usually shown and represented in such roles and archetypes to keep this dominance supreme and so literary text ensure this dominance (Showalter, 1979; Millet, 1970).

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study. Analytical approach under qualitative research method is applied in this research. Images of women school of criticism is the theory to review and analyse archetypes. 'Images of women school of criticism' looks at female characters and archetypes in fiction.

In this paper, works written by Pakistani women writers, written after the creation of Pakistan are included. Works published as Pakistanis are included. These criteria are further refined by including only those writers who have two books published which can either be collections of shorts stories or novels and are published by reputed editors in 'A' category literary magazines. The writers from English language include Bapsi Sidhwa and Kamila Shamsie. Writers included in this study who write in Urdu, the national language of Pakistan include Mumtaz Shireen, Altaf Fatima, Qurat ul Ain Haider, Afzal Tauseef, Atiya Syed, Jameela Hashmi, Bano Qudsia, Farhat Perveen, Farkhanda Lodhi, Fehmida Riaz, Hajira Masroor, Khadija Mastoor, Khalida Hussain, Neelum Ahmed Basheer, Neelofar Iqbal, Perveen Atif, Razia Faseeh Ahmed, Tahira Iqbal and Zahida Hina. Perveen Malik, Farkhanda Lodhi, Riffat and Musarrat Kalanchavi are included from Punjabi writers and Noor-ul-Huda Shah and Zaitoon Bano are included from Sindhi and Pushto languages. The sampling technique for selection of excerpts from fiction is theoretical sampling and analysis is done through thematic network analysis.

Findings

It can be seen in the works of women writers that there are imprints of traditions, customs and age-old taboos of this region i.e. the Indian sub-continent along with the misinterpreted and wrongly represented religious teachings. This has turned the attitude and persona of women of this region crippled to a major degree. It is also visible that the principles of freedom and independence are

represented all along in literature by women writers but the truly independent self is found in the writings of a selected few. One of the interesting findings is that the symbolic representation of feminist archetype is portrayed by free bodily movements such as dancing, swimming and running. The liberty of physical movement is a major constraint for women of this country and thus these writers used the acts of free bodily movements as symbols of women's freedom.

When we look at women writers, many works by women writers, whether senior or contemporary, are focused on the theme of women's sexual harassment or violence. Some of the writers writing around these themes include Neelum Ahmed Basheer, Tahira Iqbal, Noor-ul-Huda Shah etc.

When we talk of feminist consciousness in the real sense of the word, we see that liberating and thinking women can be found in writings of Atiya Syed and we can see that her characters are found as decision-makers and indulging in actions which they choose themselves for themselves. Her depiction of feminist consciousness is of a human nature rather than portrayal of women as sex-objects. When we look at the novels of Kamila Shamsie, we find very independent and strong minded feminist women as main characters who have a presence of their own. It is very normal, existential presence. These characters have strength, self-assurance and power of decision making. Also, in the works of Fehmida Riaz, such women can be found, though the sexual harassment part is seen as focused more. In Khalida Hussain's works, we see a woman as a thinking being, a person who has brains and sensibility, but for some reason, this woman almost always collapses and becomes docile and accepts the final verdict. Talking of liberated characters, Kallo (Qudsiya, 2004), a character in a short story by the similar name, was a liberated character. She is a dark-complexioned girl as her nick name Kallo depicts which means black. She likes a very handsome boy who calls her by this name. He himself realized that

he loves her but could not express. But when Kallo was being married, he wanted to stop her. But Kallo was not such a girl who would change her decision or melt down. Apart from that one particular example, there are no other truly empowered characters in Bano Qudsia's writings immersed in Sufism and mysticism (Salahuddin, 2020a).

Farkhanda Lodhi has strength in depicting female consciousness which can be found in the works of Zaitoon Bano, Perveen Malik, Noor-ul-Huda Shah, Riffat and Musarrat Kalanchavi as well. Bapsi Sidhwa's archetypes are balanced in her works as she has presented the feminine as Putli in *Crow Eaters* (Sidhwa, 2006), the female through the character of Ayah from *Ice-candy man* (Sidhwa, 2006), and feminist in Carol in *The Bride* (Sidhwa, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Women authors show liberated women through certain acts. Through a thorough reading of these works, it is seen that women authors show women and girls in the act of dancing, running or swimming when they are shown liberated or independent. It is certainly a fact that women's bodily movements are always restricted in our social context. So whenever there is a liberated woman, it is expected that she should be able to break this barrier of bodily restraint. As far as these bodily expressions are concerned, women are kept restricted and there is a simple question in all women's mind that where can they run. Space in houses is limited and running on roads, parks, mountains or at the beach is never taken as an option. The percentage of women who actually go for running or jogging outside their homes, on roads, parks or special walking tracks, is very small in Pakistan. Quratulain Haider (2008) writes: "'Like Maharani Parbati danced'... 'I will become a Ballerina.'" Her characters are also liberated characters. Though she has been charged with the allegation that she has mostly written about one class, i.e. the elite class, it is possible to find a number of

thinking women in her writings.

Atiya Syed has presented images of liberated women. Her stories show women who can travel around the world alone, who can run on roads and who can dance on the tomb of Maulana Rumi. She writes; "Yes... we are... the dancing Dervish, otherwise we would have married like traditional girls long ago... would be talking about grocery rates instead of Byron and Keats, would be removing cobwebs from home." (Syed, 2013: 156) In this text, she has compared a woman who is independent and possess free-thinking and a woman who is the contrary in the context of this society. Dance is an activity which is not expected of a good woman, mainly in public places: "The wheel of present was embodied in them like a circling like a top... and they were like dervishes at Rumi's tomb, dancing in circles" (Syed, 2013: 157). In another of her stories, the woman who could breathe and feel free is dancing like a ballerina: "She was dancing beautifully like a ballerina. She lifted her leg up sometimes and balanced her body and sometimes she circled like a top. At times she was a swan swimming in a lake and also an eagle dancing in the air" (Syed, 2001: 19).

The bodily expression of freedom also involves crossing the threshold. This exercising of will by a woman, i.e. leaving her abode without asking for permission and making her own decisions carries significance in the context of this society. Fehmida Riaz wrote a short story *Woh chali gai* [She rode away] (Riaz, 2002) and this title is inspired by D. H. Lawrence's short story *The woman who rode away* (Lawrence, 1928/ 1977). She has mentioned this in her short story as well. This title has significance and horror as regards to the idea of a woman who is going away for herself and others. "She was thinking about that story for two days... that woman... who left. Just left without thinking... Her being caught... that cave... the symbol of a woman's whole being..." (Riaz, 2002: 86). Fehmida Riaz narrates the predicament of such women too, it is always drenched in their blood: "And the rising axe... a torturous, drenched in blood

completion... of a woman? of femininity? Share of femininity? Those who go away... she thinks with a freezing breath" (Riaz, 2002: 86). She poses a question about the set pattern of the state of these women. She contests that the most prominent and celebrated authors of the world have written about the plight of women in a similar fashion. She questions the symbolic representation of women and asks about the absence of such symbols of men. The symbols of manhood are not represented as the symbols of women are used. There is a difference in manner of representation. She writes about symbols of men that for them; "tower, sword, spears, arrows etc. were used, but their end was not so torturous or bad. It was rarely written that a tower fell, or was leaned. Or the sword was broken to pieces or became rusty" (Riaz, 2002: 87).

In Fehmida Riaz's works, a woman is shown as a thinking, intelligent being at times. This woman is aware of herself and her exploitation. She knows how the world looks at her and how she should tackle the world. There are not many writers who actually wrote about a liberated and a free woman.

In the similar fashion, there are strong, liberated, wise women and women who are high-achievers as characters in the novels of Kamila Shamsie. One character, Aasmaani from *Broken Verses* (Shamsie, 2005) was on pursuit to find about her lost mother and her friend who was a famous poet and Alice from *A god in every stone*, was on an excavation trip with archaeologists (Shamsie, 2008). Aalia (Shamsie, 2000) from *Salt and Saffron* was on a quest of her own though she was burdened with elitist stature. Raheen from *Kartography* (2002) was separated from her friend Karim and she kept the contact alive by taking interest in Karim's hobby of Kartography where he mapped his own life. When we review her works, the main characters are women except for one of her novels titled as *In the City by the Sea* (1998) where the protagonist is a boy named Hasan. The locale of nearly all her novels is Pakistan and mainly the metropolitan city, Karachi and three of her novels are set

in the background of Martial Law. The female characters in Shamsie's novels are liberated. They have rational minds and are thinking beings. They have their own lives and their decisions are in their own hands. Her major female characters are seen as escaping conventional roles: "So I tried my first major performance: I convinced myself, I wanted to be a wife and daughter-in-law and high-society hostess. It was my worst performance ever." (Shamsie, 2005, 61) When Aliya from *Salt and saffron* realizes the background of Khaleel as not so elite as hers, she thought, "I wanted to shout out. I've deconstructed it, analyzed it, and I have refused to take on the attitude of my relatives with their centuries of inbred snobbery. Why can't my heart be as evolved as my mind?" (Shamsie, 2000, 32-33). After reflecting, she says: "Just because a thing has always been so, it does not always have to be so." (Shamsie, 2000, 193). She decided to go ahead and marry the person who was from a different class.

There are two women in the novel *The Bride* (Sidhwa, 2006) who are trying to find their way. The very first section of the novel has a conversation between father and son about the son's wedding to a girl who is being given in marriage to him in exchange of finishing the tribal feud. Sidhwa has painted a picture of a neighborhood of lower-class or middle-class home: "Entering their dwellings was like stepping into gigantic wombs; the fecund, fetid world of mothers and babies" (Sidhwa, 2006: 252). Women keep themselves covered outside their homes, but "inside the *zenana* they removed their *burqas* and revealed their finery; the older women displayed the generosity and worth of their husbands, and the unmarried girls the beauty of their forms and the cunning of their fingers in fashioning embroidery." (Sidhwa, 2006: 277) Zaitoon was raised in this environment and once she was wedded and goes to the far-off tribal area of Pakistan, she realized the horrors of that life. While on her way to the tribal area, she met Carol and "Carol, a child of the bright Californian sun and surf, could no more understand the beguiling twilight world of veils and women's quarters than Zaitoon could comprehend her independent life in America." (Sidhwa, 2006:

345) Both women were very different as regards to their nationality, language, culture and traditions, as Carol was a foreigner and was married to an officer of armed forces. Carol and Zaitoon felt a bond amongst themselves which surely seems like the bond of sisterhood (Salahuddin, 2020). Sidhwa writes; "In the instant their eyes met, the green and black of their irises fused in an age-old communion—an understanding they shared of their vulnerabilities as women" (Sidhwa, 2006: 312). Carol was free at heart, and her husband was a jealous person. "I'm ashamed of you! Displaying your honky-tonk pedigree! You laugh too loudly" (Sidhwa, 2006: 292). Carol believed and was inspired by Iqbal's poetry and his concept of *khudi*, "You know, the girl who ran away? I think she forced her destiny, exercised her *"khudi"*. I am sure she'll make it..." (Sidhwa, 2006: 382) Carol eventually decided to go back to California and Farrukh found Zaitoon, who had run away, and he decided to marry him with another person and to help her leave that area.

In one of the stories by Farkhanda Lodhi (1990), there is a character named Maggie who was an independent and liberated character. She did not accept exploitation by a man and to be driven by his jealous nature. He was even jealous of a necklace she wore all the time, and he thought that it had a picture of some old lover. "Maggie opened the box of locket and emptied it on Amin's hand. It was a block of soil and some leaves of grass." (Lodhi, 1990: 167) This was a memory of her land for her and so she decided to go back. Kalanchavi writes: "These liberated girls are the bone of contention" (Kalanchavi, 2005: 49). The reason is that men and patriarchy usually view independent women as spoiling other women. Hina writes: "What is the worth of us girls. We are like the fertilizer for family system" (Hina, 2011: 211). Women usually accept being defined by the other and only liberty can break such notions. There is a strong liberated girl in a short story by Zahida Hina. She is a young girl who witnesses the horrors of war; "Me and small? Sister I saw my beloved sister and brother die before my eyes. I have lost

my palm. I reached here from Kabul travelling sometimes on camel, sometimes donkey and at times truck. I starved." And "You say that I am small. You are small as you are just sitting here. I am as old as the three peaks of the mountain Mur." (Hina, 2011: 207) In a short story by Musarrat Kalanchavi, there is a female character who gets married and leaves her profession of prostitution. When she comes to know that her husband has affairs with other women too, she said to her driver: "I will go to my *kotha* [abode of a prostitute] now. It is better to become a prostitute rather than staying as the wife of a sellable commodity; male prostitute" (Kalanchavi, 2005: 101).

CONCLUSION

The feminine consciousness and female consciousness can be found in the writings in abundance but there is a lack of feminist consciousness. There is a considerable number of women writers who think that feminist consciousness and liberty only mean sexual freedom and all the concepts of freedom revolve around it. It is undoubtedly true that women are victimized and face sexual exploitation and sexual harassment, but this is a segment of the whole act which constitutes of exploitation at all levels of human reality; crossing the threshold (Salahuddin, Zakar & Usman, 2016), inaccessibility and no access to real opportunities. Whenever the female authors want to show the liberated woman or 'the feminist', they show them as dancing, running or swimming. This is a fact that women's bodily expressions are always restricted. Whenever there is a liberated woman, she should be able to break this barrier of bodily expression. The authors who depict a true feminist archetype are Quratulain Haider, Fehmida Riaz, Atiya Syed and Kamila Shamsie. We can see a human presence in their feminist archetypes; strong, independent, confident and making their own decisions. Kalida Hussain has also presented archetypes of women who are free souls in thought and are shown making decisions, though her women succumb to traditional submissive roles in the end. Tahira Iqbal, Neelum Ahmed Basheer, and Noor-ul-Huda Shah have

written extensively on oppression on women and there are few characters in their works who are emancipated, but mostly this emancipation circles around sexual freedom alone. To some extent, this is true of Fehmida Riaz's characters as well. As stated in findings, Bano Qudsia has only one character, Kallo (2004), in her works that can be called as a feminist archetype and apart from this character, there are mostly feminine archetypes (Salahuddin & Usman, 2017) in her works. Bapsi Sidwa also has one character in form of Carol in *The Bride* (2006). It can be said that few good examples of feminist archetype; self-conscious and intelligent women, can be seen in women in a variety of novels and shorts stories like, but not limited to, *The Bride* (Sidhwa, 2006), *Le Saans bhi Aahista* [Even breath slowly] (Basheer, 1996), *Salt and Saffron* (Shamsie, 2000), *Raja Gidh* [Vulture King] (Qudsia, 1981), *Kallo* [Black Girl] (Qudsia, 2004), *Parbati* (Lodhi, 1996) and *Aangan* [Courtyard] (Mastoor, 2008).

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