



A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Attar of Roses By Tahira Naqvi

Abdul Rauf alias Wazir Ali Shah¹

¹Department of English Language and Literature, The Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, Pakistan,
Email: syedabdulraufalishah110@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to conduct a feminist stylistic analysis of “Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan by Tahira Naqvi” (Naqvi, 1997), having the motive to uncover stereotypical roles, sexist language and gender roles using the three-level analysis model proposed by Mills (1995). This research will provide us with a deep insight into the common ideology regarding the second sex by analyzing the narrative from a feminist stylistic perspective and uncovering the hidden nuances that shape the modern literary views. This qualitative study analyses words, phrases, sentences and discourses that express gender in the chosen short story. It is believed that the Female gender throughout history has been treated oppressively and viewed as inferior to contemporary, remaining a subject of discrimination on an institutional and personal level. The study findings describe that the representation of women remains passive and fragile throughout the whole narration of the short story, being dominated by men or dependent on men. Furthermore, the research can hint at upcoming dominating trends in the region's literary tradition.

Keywords: Feminist Stylistics, Short fiction, Tahira Naqvi

Introduction

For a long time, society has been solely dominated by men. In fact, “women's entire history has been written by men” (Beauvoir, 2012, 181), and the female gender has been regarded as oppressed and alienated from mainstream attention. Feminism is a result of several significant changes that occurred over time, a result of cognitive realizations that emerged due to constant discrimination between genders, consisting of several factors, including social exclusion, legal inequalities, and subordination. In the late 18th century, the idea of female rights took a huge turn, and several improvements took place to advocate for female rights, liberty, and freedom. Despite all of these movements, still, around the globe, the picture of the female is not represented vividly.

In order to look out for significant nuances in the existing and upcoming literature, feminist stylistic inquiry remained crucial for development. To meet that, a stylistician, Sara Mills, gave a model for carrying out feminist stylistic analysis of any literary text to uncover the existing biases and discrimination that exist in society by analyzing the author's work directly. According to her, “feminist stylistic analysis is concerned not only to describe sexism in a text, but also to analyse the way that point of view, agency, metaphor, or transitivity are unexpectedly closely related to matters of gender, to discover whether women's writing practices can be described, and so on” (Mills, 1995, 1).

*Corresponding Author: syedabdulraufalishah110@gmail.com

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Stylistics is simply defined as the study of styles (Mode, 2015, 13), with each author belonging to their different period, circumstances, and possessing one's method of writing. A unique set of techniques distinguishes their work from other contemporaries. This particular quality of writing that distinguishes one from peers is called style, and each author has their style. We can say that it allows the “author to engrave his fingerprint to the piece of writing” (Wazir Ali Shah, 2024) Thus emerged a new discipline of linguistics that solely focused on the interpretation and study of literary texts, called stylistics, combining linguistics and literary criticism while incorporating elements of phonology, morphology, prosody and different domains of language studies. How language choices create meaning and emotional effect in texts, from Shakespeare to modern novels, stylisticians analyze literary texts and try to interpret how narratives carry the emotive flow between texts.

The selected text from the collection of short stories by Tahira Naqvi named *Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan*, contains a profound and vivid depiction of the female gender according to the era it was published. While defining religious norms and societal expectation, it explains the potential of females that was tormented due to the imposed patriarchy affecting both genders, male and female alike. The title of the story itself is a metaphor that depicts the imposed patriarchal code for female decency and behavior while Tahira Naqvi has depicted her perception, which gave us meaningful insights in helping us understand the root ideology and beliefs regarding female gender roles and other nuances through her writing and biases regarding the sub-continental context. The publication of this collection took place during the post-colonial feminist era also called post independent feminist writing in the sub-continent written during a significant dimension in history it contains various aspects that needed further scrutiny to uncover the nuances that were followed during 90's, furthermore this piece of text was published a decade later Zia a period known for its patriarchal discourse, practices and radical Islamization.

The *Attar of Roses* (Naqvi, 1997) is the story of Saeed, a middle-aged school teacher living in Lahore. His monotonous life is suddenly disrupted after encountering an anonymous veiled woman at a nearby bookstall. Mesmerized by the first appearances of her beauty through her uncovered hands, eyes, feet and deluded by her fragrance that resembles attar of roses, he becomes lunatically obsessed. Story further covers his internal turmoil conflicts and lack of daily responsibilities including being distant from his wife Razia leaving him with nothing but despair and futile pursuit of the woman throughout the streets of city Lahore moreover his constant pursuit turns into despair leading him to purchase the symbol of her allure for his wife black sandals, bangles and a vial of attar of roses which concludes as an unspoken gesture of displaced longing.

Through the story, Tahira Naqvi captures the residual anxieties of post-radical Islamization Pakistan that contained a patriarchal control over the visibility of females collide with the unfulfilled male desires, internal conflicts and turmoil. The central thematic concerns in the story she portrayed were Vieling, Objectification and gendered alienation and literary feminist dissent that emerged in reaction to the repressed period.

Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review is to gain some understanding of the topic with the help of pre-existing work and research published by different scholars across the globe. It serves the purpose of diversifying our thoughts while enabling us to look into the analysis from various angles.

A study by Khan et al., (2025, 787-796) was based on a feminist analysis of Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed her*. The study advocates the courage of Pakistani writers over the past two decades that have challenged gender hierarchies and confronted patriarchal dominance embedded in cultural, political and social institutions. The author has reminded us how early Pakistani literature was predominantly patriarchal and female characters were pushed to passive roles. However, different writers, including Kamila Shamsie, Faiqa Mansab and Sablyn Javeri have tried to shift this particular trend and narrative by inducing feminist concerns that include the female ambition, resistance and the negotiation of power in the male-centric spaces. The author mentions that the chosen work depicts and addresses gendered power struggles that can be faced within a patriarchal political regime. Furthermore, the framework here is based on three branches of feminism: Radical feminism, postmodern feminism and post-colonial feminism. A feminist literary analysis used a thematic approach as an interpretive paradigm in this research. A study showed various gendered codes that the author had tried to debunk. The study proves that novel has done an excellent work at revealing the contradictory expectations and demands that accompany moreover the powerful critique of the patriarchy in the novel was to depict marriage as the institution based not on companionship but over control and the female character's life is shaped by the societal expectations of post-married life showing how the traditional gender roles are forced on even most powerful women as well. The conclusion remarks that the novel remains successful at raising significant questions regarding the limits of female solidarity as it defines complex inequalities of gender, class political power.

Another prominent study was conducted by a group of notable scholars (Qayyum et al., 2024, 77-89) who conducted an explorative study that uncovers sexist language and stereotypical roles from the chosen pieces of fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa and Mohsin Hamid. This study was conducted using three level analysis model proposed by Mills (1995) the study demonstrated that despite the Hamid portrays non-traditional gender roles through the character of Nadia equipped with rationale but the Sidhwa depicted stereotyping through the characters of Zareen and Cyrus in her novel, the study uncovers that the works of Sidhwa has more elements that are concerned with female sexism than Hamid. (Tarigan et al., 2023, 119-130) The study conducted by this team uncovers a sophisticated presence of traditional gender roles and the objectification of women. The implication of metaphorical words such as Barbie, Ken, bitch and more uncovers a bias of gender and social beauty standards that are uneven and out of acceptance their research proves that the text is a significant critique of classic gender biases in a unique way while uncovering complexities and societal expectations equipping the speaker with a rhythm to stand firm against uneven standards and an enthusiastic fight for self-love. (AWAD, 2023, 1091-1103) analysis was carried out on Ahad Soueif's short story collection *Aisha*, a milestone work describing patriarchal norms of Arab culture. The study proved that Soueif's portrayed Arab women weak and obedient throughout his whole work on discourse level women remain weak due to being pushed under cultural norms and the convention of theocratic society while on contrary males enjoyed power and control causing them avoid roles of direct power furthermore the author is praised for the use of implication that creates an effect of assertion while keeping the text relevant, authentic and effective.

Ibrahim (2020, 77-96) proved that on word level mostly the positive linguistic terminologies were reserved for men leaving women behind, the linguistic sexism was also dominant due to the main female character of the story was passive and submissive the women were referred by their appearances on discourse terms and their dependence to men even more than that they were assigned

the stereotypical jobs the paper proves that the Mills linguistic sexism was not only existent but dominant in the selected text.

Ashimbuli & Woldemariam (2024, 106-113) examined the use of lexis in the language that represented women with the purpose to look how the gender issues are discussed on the level of discourse in the selected poems-the result of the study gave an insight of victimization of women by most of the poets either sexual assault, domestic violence or discrimination. Lumanlan (2025, 367-378) proposed that women face more struggles by being treated as not only inferior to men but often being misunderstood in a patriarchal-dominated society, causing mental fatigue and psychological suffering until they finally force their way out. Khalik et al., (2024, 344-352) further confirmed male dominance and female marginalization using the feminist model by Mills, though the study has confirmed that some voices are raised, but on a large scale, females remain influenced. (Hashmi & Asif, 2023, 858-866) this study added a new perspective of hypocrisy and female card as well as depicted in the chosen text it not only gave us a perspective of male-oriented suppression but a female driven manipulation as well that results in further escalations moreover this study challenges the traditional oppressive tone but still we got to know the male gender has selective submission for his desired female though it gave the narrative a new turn but conventional norms were still imposed on female in terms of marriage and societal norms this study is a hope of change and a signal to move forward that a conventional and dominant change can happen if we keep awareness in place.

Theoretical framework

The current study aims to identify gender roles in the chosen short story of Tahira Naqvi using a model that Sara Mills presented. The method is derived from her book *Feminist Stylistics* (Mills, 1995), which is based on a Word, Phrase and Discourse level analysis.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research is applied to analyze Tahira Naqvi's "The Attar of Roses" Mills, 1995) model. The study will analyze the text on three linguistic levels to uncover gender roles and representation, whether it is biased or remains justifiable furthermore, power dynamics are also analyzed through the language in the text. Word level will interpret whether the word choices are apt to address gender related stigma.

Analysis and Discussion

The study is a 'Feminist Stylistics' reading of 'The Attar of Roses' by Tahira Naqvi. The proposed short story is taken from a collection of short stories, 'Attar of Roses and other Stories of Pakistan'. Tahira Naqvi is a feminist fiction writer from Pakistan and a voice to various women marginalized and oppressed, especially in the sub-continent. The chosen work is written with a precise attention to detail to the feminist manifesto and patriarchal dominance. Naqvi now lives in the United States but does not mimic Western style in her works; she intentionally uses cultural lexicons and induces a type of code-mixing that further enhances the effect of the text and narrative that it carries within.

Word Level Analysis

The itinerary level of analysis will analyze words and vocabulary items through a lens equipped with a feminist stylistics model.

Table 1: Masculine and Feminine Words Used in The Text

Masculine	Occurrences	Feminine	Occurrence
Saeed	<i>Saeed couldn't remember when he had last observed his wife so closely.</i>	Woman	<i>To his right was a woman clad in a black burka</i>
Schoolmaster	<i>He was an educated schoolmaster who attempted every day to instill in his students the moral and ethical values of his society.</i>	Razia	<i>His wife, Razia, appeared to be startled.</i>
Father	<i>Implied role - His children would be waiting eagerly for the mangoes he bought every day</i>	Wife	<i>His wife, Razia, appeared to be startled</i>
Man	<i>Like a man under a spell, made stupid by some power he did not know</i>	Women	<i>Some women standing no more than a few inches from him grumbled</i>
Boy	<i>fruit-seller's assistant, a young boy</i>		
Students	<i>Contextually Masculine -The boys, who were no longer boys but young men with untidy stubble</i>		
Shabir	<i>It was Shabir, smiling boldly, who retorted.</i>		
Navid	<i>Navid spoke thoughtfully, nervously rubbing the back of his neck.</i>		
Masud	<i>It was Masud this time, a man-child who had been in love.</i>		
Fruit-Seller's Assistant	<i>the fruit-seller's assistant, a young boy</i>		
Peddler	<i>A peddler with a clanking, narrow steel trunk</i>		
Pastry Wallah	<i>the pastry-wallah's voice</i>		

The comparison of the female body and its possession is yet another thing. Thus, "it is not simply the process of fragmentation, which seems to be gendered, but the objects that are compared to the body parts are also different" (Mills, 1995). Below are mentions from selected texts that reflect such lexical choices.

Masculine Body Parts/Features (Possessive Phrases)

- *his back* - "Sweat ran down his back in little streams" (Line 16)
- *his heart* - "his heart hammering in his chest" (Line 45)
- *his face* - "He wiped his face with a soiled handkerchief" (Line 8)
- *his head* - "There was a fire in his head he couldn't extinguish" (Line 63)
- *his forehead* - "Brushing back moist strands of hair from his forehead" (Line 67)
- *his neck* - "he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and neck with it" (Line 88)

Feminine Body Parts/Features (Possessive Phrases)

For the Mysterious Woman

- *her hands* - "his gaze fell upon her hands" (Line 27); "he saw the hands, pale and lovely" (Line 100)
- *her wrist* - "the little he saw of her wrist was encased in black glass bangles" (Line 28)
- *her feet* - "he saw her feet" (Line 32)
- *her eyes* - "he thought he caught a glimpse of her eyes for only a second" (Line 93)
- *her form* - "as his eyes followed her slim form down to where the burka ended" (Line 31)
- *her arm* - "every time she moved her arm" (Line 29); "she took some money from a purse that hung on her arm" (Line 46)
- *her veil* - "She had lifted a corner of her veil" (Line 44); "she adjusted her veil with the other" (Line 49)
- *her nose* - "taking it close to her nose to sniff it" (Line 92)

For Razia

- *her face* - "Sweat poured from her face and neck" (Line 68)
- *her neck* - "Sweat poured from her face and neck" (Line 68)
- *her hair* - "tiny wisps of wet hair clung to her forehead" (Line 68); "pulled back her hair" (Line 68)
- *her eyes* - "her eyes drooped" (Line 68); "dark rings around her eyes" (Line 70)
- *her mouth* - "Her mouth was sullen" (Line 69); "fine lines crowded the area at the sides of her mouth like tiny cobwebs" (Line 70)
- *her upper lip* - "tiny beads of perspiration on her upper lip" (Line 69)
- *her fingers* - "Her fingers, thin and knotted" (Line 97)
- *her breasts* - "He had forgotten what her breasts looked like" (Line 72)
- *her thighs* - "He had forgotten what her breasts looked like, or her thighs" (Line 72)
- *her belly* - "He had forgotten what her breasts looked like, or her thighs, or the roundness of her belly" (Line 72)

Generic Pronouns

According to Mills "Gender-specific pronouns are often used in a sexist way to refer to people working in stereotypically male and female professions" (Mills, 1995, 66). Naqvi has followed the same classic approach to criticize the traditional norms but restrainedly. In the story, the male-specific pronoun remains dominant; the narrator uses "he/him" significantly many times more often than "she/her" this significant asymmetry in the text is clearly noticeable.

The generic pronoun is a non-gender-specific pronoun that does not embed an essence of favor towards a particular gender. Moreover, in literary texts "the generic pronoun is still understood to refer to males" (Mills, 1995) so it is critical to separate both existing terms from the text.

- **they** - "their dark, naked bodies glistening with moisture as they jump up and down impetuously" (Line 74) (referring to children)

- **them** - "everyone hastening to the refuge of darkened rooms and ice water, anxiously seeking reprieve from the glazed, torrid afternoon heat" (Line 15) (referring to people).
- "The children, exhausted from the long morning in school, their energy drained from them like a river sapped from its bed" (Line 64)

Generic Nouns

A generic noun refers to a general class rather than being referred to a particular and specified gender, individual, or instance, but the "generic nouns, even those which seem to be gender-free, are often used in a gender-specific way" (Mills, 1995).

- **people** - "A river of people pressed in all directions with great urgency" (Line 15)
- **passersby** - "passersby jostled him as he tried to concentrate on the poem before him" (Line 13)
- **children** - "His children would be waiting eagerly for the mangoes he bought every day" (Line 7), "The children, exhausted from the long morning in school" (Line 64); also "Children will dance in the streets" (Line 74)
- **crowds** - "Soon he forgot the crowds, the perspiration that covered his face" (Line 21), "She would disappear into the crowds that were milling about them" (Line 46)
- **passengers** - "Soon he was swallowed by a throng of passengers packed together like matchsticks in a matchbox" (Line 95)
- **everyone** - "everyone hastening to the refuge of darkened rooms and ice water" (Line 15)

Phrase/Sentence-Level Analysis

This section will further look deep into the prebuilt narrative and try to understand the gender perspective, societal norms, and taboo outline in the narration using phrases and sentence structures. This analysis is further based on three levels - phrases from a male perspective, phrases from a female perspective and the phrases that contain or relate to jokes, socials and sexual taboos.

Phrases from a Female Perspective

The narrative carried by Naqvi throughout the short story is predominantly from the perspective of Saeed, which limits the direct female viewpoints. Furthermore, it reflects the patriarchal society perfectly, which does not provide the intended and necessary care to female ideas and views.

- "She mumbled something about the heat and that he might have picked up melons instead." (Line 61)
Context: Razia responds to Saeed's explanation for not bringing mangoes, suggesting an alternative (melons) and commenting on the heat, reflecting her domestic role.
- "So hot, it's so hot," Razia grumbled. (Line 68)
Context: Razia expresses discomfort with the heat, lying on a cot, emphasizing her physical exhaustion in the domestic setting.
- "But when I make maash, you want masur and now you don't want..." she broke off, distraught. (Line 97)
Context: Razia reacts to Saeed's complaint about the food (daal), showing frustration and emotional distress, tied to her role as a provider.
- "Here, have some lassi, the yogurt is very sweet today." (Line 97)

Context: Razia offers Saeed a drink, reinforcing her nurturing role despite his irritability.

- “What’s this,” she asked. “Where’s the fruit?” (Line 106)

Context: Razia questions Saeed about the package (containing sandals, bangles, and attar of roses), expecting fruit, indicating her focus on household routines.

- “Attar of roses?” she said, looking at him incredulously. (Line 106)

Context: Razia expresses surprise at the gift, highlighting her unfamiliarity with such gestures, suggesting a lack of intimacy or recognition from Saeed.

The phrases from the perspective of Razia are scarce and tied to domesticity and emotional reactions towards the behaviors of Saeed. The lack of dialogue from the mysterious woman underscores her role – a passive object of desire defined entirely by Saeed’s gaze. The patriarchal norms are reinforced by the lack of female dialogue that positions women as secondary to males.

Phrases from a Male Perspective

The narrative by Saeed dominates the whole narration with phrases that reflect his internal monologue, thoughts, desires, including the internal conflict.

- “If only he could take the magazine home with him.” (Line 6)

Context: Saeed’s desire to buy a poetry magazine reflects his intellectual and poetic interests, contrasting with his financial constraints.

- “Attar of roses? Yes, strong, potent, attar of roses, Saeed told himself, an exciting aroma.” (Line 24)

Context: Saeed identifies the scent of the mysterious woman, initiating his fixation and framing her as a sensory object.

- “Never had he seen hands of such extraordinary beauty.” (Line 28)

Context: Saeed’s admiration of the woman’s hands highlights his objectifying gaze, reducing her to fragmented body parts.

- “How yielding to the touch, he thought, the clasp like a promise of love.” (Line 30)

Context: Saeed’s sexualized fantasy about the woman’s hands reveals the male gaze and his romanticized obsession.

- “His behavior was improper; he looked away quickly.” (Line 37)

Context: Saeed acknowledges the societal taboo of staring at a woman, showing awareness of cultural norms.

- “He felt anxiety rise in him like a dry cough, and panic gripped him.” (Line 47)

Context: Saeed’s emotional turmoil as he contemplates losing sight of the woman underscores his obsessive state.

- “What was he doing? He was an educated schoolmaster who attempted every day to instill in his students the moral and ethical values of his society.” (Line 53)

Context: Saeed reflects on his role and the impropriety of his actions, highlighting his internal conflict between desire and duty.

- “A surge of mortification overcame him, his heart beat violently.” (Line 54)

Context: Saeed’s guilt after nearly pursuing the woman reflects his struggle with societal expectations.

- “The mangoes didn’t look good today, I’m sure they weren’t ripe, I didn’t buy any.” (Line 60)

Context: Saeed's excuse to Razia for not bringing fruit reveals his distraction and dishonesty, tied to his obsession.

- "Perhaps I can see her face today, he mused, if only I can see her face." (Line 93)

Context: Saeed's persistent desire to see the woman's face underscores his fixation and objectification.

Phrases on Jokes, Social and Sexual Taboos

Being a reflection of social constraints, the text does not contain any explicit jokes but what it does contain is a reflection of social and sexual taboos.

Social Taboos

- "His behavior was improper; he looked away quickly." (Line 37)
Context: Saeed recognizes that staring at the mysterious woman violates cultural norms of propriety in a public space.
- "What was he doing? He was an educated schoolmaster who attempted every day to instill in his students the moral and ethical values of his society." (Line 53)
Context: Saeed's self-reproach for pursuing the woman highlights the societal expectation of moral conduct, especially for a man in his position.
- "Some women standing no more than a few inches from him grumbled that he was in the women's section, one tried to push him with her basket." (Line 99)
Context: Saeed's intrusion into the women's section of the bus violates gender segregation norms, prompting complaints.
- "The division was arbitrary, so he ignored their muttering and kept his eyes on her." (Line 99)
Context: Saeed disregards the gender segregation norm to pursue his obsession, reflecting male privilege.

Sexual Taboos

- "How yielding to the touch, he thought, the clasp like a promise of love." (Line 30)
Context: Saeed's sexualized fantasy about the woman's hands reveals an inappropriate desire, taboo in a conservative setting.
- "In one dream, from which he woke up drenched in perspiration, he clasped in his arms a woman wrapped in a burka and as he fondled her body, the face masked by the veil, he realized that under the satiny burka she was naked." (Line 97)
Context: Saeed's dream of a naked woman under a burka explicitly violates cultural taboos around sexuality and modesty.
- "In moments of intimacy when he clung to her in feverish night-time passion in the dark, he saw nothing but the throbbing brightness of his own release." (Line 72)
Context: Saeed's description of intimacy with Razia focuses on his own pleasure, reflecting a male-centric view of sexuality.
- "Dark, circled with kohl, like nights of love, he thought." (Line 93)
Context: Saeed's romanticized perception of the woman's eyes sexualizes her, reinforcing the male gaze as a taboo desire.

The social taboos are centered around gender segregation, propriety and Saeed's framed actions that violate the customs of a conservative society. Moreover, the sexual taboos are not explicit. Still, they are reflected in the framed fantasies and dreams that objectify the mysterious woman while highlighting his illicit desires, and the female agency is constrained. In contrast, the male desires are centered and reinforced.

Over shadowed by the male-dominated narrative of Saeed the phrase/sentence level analysis reveals a lack in representation of women the main character that carries core of the story Bukra-Women we do not witness even a single dialogue from her perspective or point of view all the story is based on Saeed with a few involvements of Razia and other character that like shopkeeper, etc. and they are male as well. Seen in the dialogue, Saeed took his male privilege to pursue mysterious women till a street where an incident stopped him from reaching her address, while the morals stopped him, so he chose not to encounter her in public space. This whole is a clear sign of the benefits that patriarchal society gives to a male and he can violate if he wants, but, in this story, it was only internal conflict and Saeed's own morals being a teacher, father and husband that stopped him.

Discourse Level Analysis

This section of study will focus on the analysis of the text as a whole and will try to unveil discourse, focusing on how the broader narrative structures construct gender and power dynamics. This will analyze further three elements Character, metaphors and representation.

Character Analysis

In "Attar of Roses" the main characters are Saeed, Razia, Shabir, Navid and Masud. There are minor characters (e.g., fruit-seller's assistant, peddler) but they are less noticeable, unnamed and briefly mentioned, so they remain excluded.

Saeed

Traits: Educated, schoolmaster, father, husband, poetic, obsessed, impulsive, anxious, guilty, conflicted, privileged.

Evidence:

- Educated/schoolmaster: "He was an educated schoolmaster who attempted every day to instill in his students the moral and ethical values of his society" (Line 53).
- Father/husband: "His children would be waiting eagerly for the mangoes he bought every day" (Line 7); "His wife, Razia, appeared to be startled" (Line 61).
- Poetic: "Saeed took out his notebook and opened it to the page where his unfinished ghazal was inscribed" (Line 84).
- Obsessed: "What he had thought of as madness before he now accepted as truth" (Line 97).
- Impulsive: "How could he have considered pursuing a strange woman merely to satisfy a foolish, impulsive whim?" (Line 54).
- Anxious: "He felt anxiety rise in him like a dry cough, panic gripped him" (Line 47).
- Guilty/conflicted: "All at once he was seized with an overpowering sense of shame and guilt" (Line 52); "A surge of mortification overcame him" (Line 54).

- Privileged: "The division was arbitrary, so he ignored their muttering and kept his eyes on her" (Line 99) (ignoring gender segregation norms).

Razia

Traits: Wife, mother, domestic, tired, attentive, distraught, surprised, unadorned.

Evidence:

- Wife/mother: "His wife, Razia, appeared to be startled" (Line 61); implied mother in "The children, exhausted from the long morning in school" (Line 64).
- Domestic: "Razia brought his food on a tray" (Line 67); "the clatter of pans in the kitchen" (Line 66).
- Tired: "She looked tired, there were dark rings around her eyes" (Line 70).
- Attentive: "Here, have some lassi, the yogurt is very sweet today" (Line 97).
- Distraught: "She broke off, distraught" (Line 97).
- Surprised: "Attar of roses?' she said, looking at him incredulously" (Line 106).
- Unadorned: "Her fingers, thin and knotted, were ringless" (Line 97).

Shabir

Traits: Student, bold, witty.

Evidence:

- "It was Shabir, smiling boldly, who retorted" (Line 79); responds with wit: "It means, sir, that although we have to sit in class and listen to you, now and then we should think about running out into the rain" (Line 79).

Navid

Traits: Student, thoughtful, nervous.

Evidence:

- "Navid spoke thoughtfully, nervously rubbing the back of his neck with one hand as he squinted his eyes at his teacher" (Line 80).

Masud

Traits: Student, romantic, poetic, rejected.

Evidence:

- "It was Masud this time, a man-child who had been in love more than once already, was rejected each time, and was now metamorphosed into a poet" (Line 81).

The text portrays Saeed with a complex embodiment of both intellectual authority and emotional turmoil including traits of obsession and guilt that highlights his agency within a patriarchal framework while Razia is pushed to comply with roles related to nurturing and domestic wife and her

emotional reactions are tied with only Saeed's behavior furthermore the male students Shabir, Navid and Masud - they contain different and distinct type of personalities that reflect youthful energy and individuality but on contrary female characters lack such kind of depth and details. This disparity enhances and reinforces male dominance in the narrative.

Metaphors for Male

Metaphors for Saeed emphasize his emotional and psychological state, portraying him as a complex figure caught between desire and societal expectations:

- “like a man under a spell, made stupid by some power he did not know” (Line 50)
Context: Saeed's pursuit of the mysterious woman is likened to being enchanted, suggesting his obsession overrides rational control.
- “he felt as if he were in a boat deluged with water, about to go down, about to sink” (Line 47)
Context: Saeed's anxiety is compared to a sinking boat, emphasizing his overwhelming panic.
- “anxiety rises in him like a dry cough” (Line 47)
Context: His emotional turmoil is likened to a physical ailment, highlighting its intensity.
- “a weariness descended upon him like a thick blanket” (Line 95)
Context: Saeed's exhaustion after losing the woman is depicted as a heavy, suffocating blanket, underscoring his emotional weight.
- “He felt like an animal that had been trapped and was struggling to be free” (Line 105)
Context: Saeed's desperation is compared to a trapped animal, reflecting his loss of control and primal urge.

Metaphors for Female

Metaphors for female characters focus on physical appearance, reinforcing their objectification and contrasting their portrayals.

For the Mysterious Woman

- “thin blue veins were like delicate shadows across the face of a rose petal” (Line 29)
Context: Her hands are compared to a rose petal, idealizing her beauty and fragility.
- “feet... like the moon at midnight, gray clouds rolling in thin strips across a disc of gold” (Line 32)
Context: Her feet are likened to a poetic, celestial image, enhancing her mystique and unattainability.
- “Dark, circled with kohl, like nights of love” (Line 93)
Context: Her eyes are compared to romantic, sensual nights, sexualizing her through Saeed's gaze.

For Razia

- “fine lines crowded the area at the sides of her mouth like tiny cobwebs” (Line 70)
Context: Razia's aging and weariness are likened to cobwebs, suggesting neglect and fragility tied to her domestic role.

The male metaphors are focused on the psychological complexity of Saeed that grants him agency and depth, while female metaphors are emphasized on physicality - the mysterious woman idealized as ethereal and sensual on other end Razia defined as worn and domestic. This contrast reinforces gender stereotypes, female objectification while crafting a male-centric experience.

Representation of the Male in Text

The primary male character in the text is Saeed and he is portrayed complex and agentic figure filled with intellectual and emotional depth.

- **Intellectual Authority:** As an “educated schoolmaster” (Line 53), Saeed teaches poetry (e.g., Iqbal’s ghazals, Line 78) and writes his own ghazal (Line 84), reflecting intellectual engagement.
- **Emotional Complexity:** His obsession with the mysterious woman (“What he had thought of as madness before he now accepted as truth,” Line 97) and guilt (“a surge of mortification,” Line 54) highlight a conflicted inner life.
- **Agency and Privilege:** Saeed’s ability to pursue the woman, ignoring social norms (“The division was arbitrary, so he ignored their muttering,” Line 99), reflects male privilege, allowing him to act on his desires despite societal constraints.
- **Moral Conflict:** His role as a moral educator (“instill in his students the moral and ethical values,” Line 53) contrasts with his impulsive behavior, suggesting a critique of patriarchal entitlement.
- **Final Gesture:** Buying gifts for Razia (“black sandals,” “black glass bangles,” “attar of roses,” Line 106) may indicate remorse or an attempt to reconnect, but it also frames Razia as a recipient of his desires, reinforcing his control.

The representation of Saeed center’s perspective that grants him agency, complexity and privilege within a patriarchal framework. The obsession and guilt are a protentional critique of male desires, but the ability to act freely underscores the male dominance.

Representation of Women in Text

Female characters, the mysterious woman and Razia, are portrayed through Saeed’s perspective, which limits their agency and emphasizes objectification

Mysterious Woman

- **Objectification:** Described through fragmented body parts (“her hands,” “her feet,” Lines 27, 32) and poetic metaphors (“rose petal,” “moon at midnight,” Lines 29, 32), she is an unattainable fantasy.
- **Lack of Agency:** She has no dialogue or inner thoughts, existing solely as “a woman clad in a black burka” (Line 25), defined by Saeed’s gaze (“Dark, circled with kohl, like nights of love,” Line 93).
- **Cultural Symbol:** Her burka symbolizes inaccessibility and modesty, reinforcing cultural constraints on women’s visibility and agency.

Razia

- Domestic Role: Portrayed as an obedient wife and implied mother (“Razia brought his food on a tray,” Line 67; “The children, exhausted,” Line 64, her actions center on serving Saeed.
- Weariness: Descriptions like “her eyes drooped” and “fine lines... like tiny cobwebs” (Lines 68, 70) emphasize exhaustion, contrasting with the mysterious woman’s idealized beauty.
- Limited Agency: Her dialogue is reactive “Attar of roses?” she said, looking at him incredulously,” Line 106, and she lacks inner thoughts, reducing her to a functional role.
- Recipient of Male Action: Saeed’s gifts at the end (“black sandals,” “attar of roses,” Line 106) suggest recognition but also position her as an object of his desires, mirroring his fixation on the mysterious woman.

Overall, the female characters are completely marginalized and objectified the mysterious woman remains the prominent victim of objectification in the whole narrative furthermore, the lack of agency and dialogue reinforces the patriarchal norms, including women defined by Saeed’s perspective and actions.

The narrative uses metaphors and fragmentations to reinforce patriarchal norms and center Saeed’s perspective while objectifying women along with it. Identity lack of mysterious woman and Razia’s domestic confinement uplifts traditional gender roles. However, the guilt of Saeed, a surge of mortification (Line 54 and his subtle behavior towards Razia are a critique of his obsession, the futility of his fixation, although the critique is limited. Still, it is crucial as the narrative is male-dominated with women acting as passive figures, the metaphors do idealize the mysterious women and devalue Razia. Yet, fragmentation reduces women to body parts only in the narration privilege and agency that Saeed enjoys is clearly visible and the absence of female perspectives further upholds gender stereotyping with a subtle critique through his guilt.

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis is conducted on the text “Attar of Roses,” a short story taken from a collection of stories “Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan” by Tahira Naqvi. The analysis is based on Sara Mills’ (1995) feminist stylistics framework. It is conducted on three levels: Word, Phrase/Sentence and Discourse level, revealing the original ideas of a narrative that is deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, containing very few subversive elements. The study exposed that Saeed’s dominance overshadowed and marginalized portrayals of female characters as a whole. The Diasporic lens further enhanced this discrimination, reflecting South-Asian cultural context imposed and implied deeply in the text, highlighting tension between tradition and individual desire, enabling us to understand gender dynamics with a culturally displaced framework.

At the word level descriptors like “educated”, “anxious” (Line 53) for Saeed portrays him complex emotionally and intellectually, while body parts like “his heart” (Line 45) explains his inner turmoil while in contrast for mysterious woman the descriptors were “beautiful”, “pale” and “slender” (Line 26) and body parts like “her hands” (Line 27) that idealizes her as an object of desire while for Razia “tired”, “sweaty” and “ringless” (Line 97) describes her domestic weary figure body parts like “her upper lip”, “her thighs”, “her belly” (Line 69, 72) reinforces objectification. Generic nouns like “people” and “children” (Line 15) are neuter but often male-dominated, although in traditional terms

of South Asia, these terms are associated with male and men hold social power and women are confined to domestic roles of aesthetics – carrying cultural expectations across the borders.

The conducted analysis at the phrase/sentence level hints at male dominance vividly phrase from Saeed like “How yielding to the touch, he thought, the clasp like a promise of love” (Line 30) and “a surge of mortification” (Line 54) uncovers his trembling obsession and guilt centered around his agency and male gaze. The restrained dialogue from Razia like “So hot, it’s so hot” (Line 68) and “Attar of roses?” she said, looking at him incredulously” (Line 106) ties her to domesticity and reactions to the actions of Saeed furthermore the silence of mysterious woman makes her a passive fantasy, taboos such as “Some women... grumbled that he was in the women’s section” (Line 99), and sexual taboos, like Saeed’s dream of a naked woman under a burka (Line 97), reflects cultural constraints rooted deeply in South Asian norms of gender segregation and modesty.

Furthermore, at the discourse level, the narrative reinforces patriarchal norms through making Saeed the center of attention with a complex character, educated, poetic, and conflicted (Line 53) - with metaphors like “a man under a spell” (Line 50) highlighting his agency. The mysterious woman is described as “rose petal” (Line 29) and “moon at midnight” (Line 32) an idealized voiceless object, while Razia with “tiny cobwebs” (Line 70) a weary housewife in context both of the woman lack agency only defined by Saeed’s attention and the roles imposed by the society. The context emerges further in tension between Saeed’s traditional imposed roles as schoolmaster and his transgressive desire perfectly reflects the displacement in cultural values in a modern setting. His continuous guilt and the gift that she presented to Razia “attar of roses” (Line 106) suggest a critique of his obsessiveness. However, even after that, the narrative is dominated by male representation and limits subversion, keeping women as passive figures.

“Attar of Roses” reinforces patriarchal general roles by the language and the privileges Saeed’s complexity and objectifies women, while the elements of diaspora highlight a constant conflict between tradition South Asian norms and individual desires. The direct critique that exists, though is very subtle via Saeed’s guilt and does not overturn the patriarchal framework that marginalizes women reflecting both gender and cultural displacements, although “Attar of Roses” has represented the ground realities perfectly showing us a realistic picture of the society.

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