

GENDERED SPACES AND FEMALE ERASURE IN *THE LOST CHILDREN OF PARADISE*

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Abstract

Science fiction provides a speculative domain to create alternative representations for the misrepresented and silenced. Female writers have also utilized speculative fiction as a space to escape marginalized positions. Gilani's *The Lost Children of Paradise* (2021), however, preserves traditional gendered spaces for women in a technologically advanced Pakistan. The aim of this research is to study the role of female agency in the speculative narrative of the male-dominant society depicted in Gilani's novel. This research offers a content-based analysis of Gilani's novel in order to develop an understanding of the passive role of women in the text and their silence within a male-dominated narrative. It utilizes feminist theory and the concept of gendered spaces to analyze the role of women in the narrative of a futuristic Pakistan in Gilani's novel. This research shows that *The Lost Children of Paradise* (2021), a dystopian science fiction book set in Pakistan in the twenty-second century, depicts a civilization that is technologically sophisticated but socially inert. Gilani's female characters play largely supporting roles; they are caregivers, lovers, or unnoticed supporters. There is a persistent stagnation of the system in the novel, which produces a pessimistic outlook. It also promotes objectified and erased women. This study contributes to an understanding of speculative fiction by male writers in Pakistan. It will allow further research into the role of women in Pakistani speculative fiction, especially that written by male authors, as an avenue for examining the promotion of gendered spaces.

Key Words: *Speculative, science fiction, representation, gendered spaces, silence.*

1.1. Introduction

In speculative fiction, imagined futures are rarely neutral. They often reflect the anxieties, aspirations, and ideological blind spots of the present. Omar Gilani's *The Lost Children of Paradise* (2021), a dystopian science fiction novel set in 22nd century Pakistan, offers a technologically advanced yet socially stagnant society. Despite its futuristic setting, the novel preserves and reinforces traditional patriarchal norms, particularly through the systematic exclusion of women from the administrative structure, decision making roles and public discourse. Whether it is the police department, politics or corporate world, women are absent, even in the present world women play an active part in all spheres of life.

Omar Gilani's female characters have very limited roles behind the main scenes as passive players. They appear as caregivers, lovers, or hidden supporters never as leaders. Simultaneously the novel uses ethnic stereotypes, particularly of the conservative Pashtun male, and symbolic architecture like walls, to represent rigid power hierarchies and social divisions. The following literature review situates Gilani's work within the broader traditions of both eastern and western speculative fiction to analyze how patriarchy, ethnicity and traditions are preserved and aestheticized in narratives of the future.

1.2. Literature Review

This section overviews the concept of representation, speculative fiction, feminism, postcolonial feminism, gendered spaces, and representation of women in literature in general along with representation of women in Pakistani literature in English. The insights drawn from

the literature reviewed aids in developing the theoretical framework for the analysis of the primary text.

1.2.1. Representation in Literature

Literature, according to Baudelaire, fulfils the task of a “universal translator” (Gardels). According to him, the poets translate the “language of the universe into the language of man” (Gardels). Therefore, it follows the Platonian constraints of reality as humans perceive around them is merely a reflection (Raman 67). In this way, there is a divide between human “knowledge and what is thought of as “objective reality” (Raman 72), as can be seen in literature as well which is supposedly a reflection of reality. Kant also explains how our mind organizes and categorizes the reality we perceive and therefore what we understand is a colored version of the objective reality (Raman 70).

A significant genre that involves an altered representation of reality is Speculative fiction. Lubomír Doležel defines speculative fiction “what did not happen but might have happened” (101) and R. B. Gill denotes it as “works presenting modes of being that contrast with the audience’s understanding of ordinary reality” (73). Darko Suvin’s view of science fiction also entails “cognitive estrangement” (7). Science Fiction, according to Suvin, “is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (7).

Paul Ricoeur studies the use of imagination in literature to create a “productive reference” to reality (128). He compares works of literature with images or photographs, explaining how images have a preexisting referent which they aim to reproduce. However, fiction, according to Ricoeur, does not have such a referent. He also argues that fiction’s “productive state of imagination” increases reality with “iconic augmentation” (128). In this way fiction adds to reality rather than just copying it.

Julie Sedivyy posits regarding this role of fiction that fiction allows us to “step out of the constraints of actual reality to project ourselves into possibilities that don’t exist, might exist, may not exist, might have existed in the past” (Berger). Nivens also argues that fiction has always provided new and familiar “visions of reality” (1). Its entire purpose is to present a fantastic and imaginary novel which is removed from the restrictions of reality. However, it is familiar in its representation of realistic elements of human life (Nivens 1). This can include gender politics, race and identity.

Lisa Zunshine illustrates how through fiction one can “attribute to a person a certain mental state” (29). She studies how “writers intuitively explore our constant readiness to posit a mind whenever we observe behavior” (Zunshine 28) and how “fictional narratives endlessly experiment with rather than automatically execute our evolved cognitive adaption” (190). This means that through a text a writer creates a character and promotes an interpretation to the reader regarding the behavior and mind of that character. Moreover, Sedivyy also believes that fiction that engages the reader in this manner also shapes our culture by making us more “attentive to... the intricate, complex contents” of another person’s thoughts and feelings (Berger).

The significance of representation of a particular gender or race or ethnic or other identity within a text, thus, is considered a political act. Lucas and Ordeniza also discuss how literature has a significant effect over the contemporary society and how it may be able to solve social issues through representation of marginalized people especially women (6). However, much of the fiction enhances the marginalized condition of the marginalized individuals such as women and projects the dominant discourse which is of course harmful for the former. This representation of women has been addressed by the feminist theorists.

1.2.2. Feminism Movement

Feminism started in the late nineteenth century as a movement for gender equality and empowerment. The first wave of feminism, often known as the suffrage movement, advocated for women's voting rights and other legal reforms. The movement challenged concepts of masculine domination, supremacy, and power. It was a struggle against cultural norms, folk wisdom, and traditions that denied women's human rights. The second wave of feminism, which developed the previous wave's political movement in the contemporary world, began to emerge in the 1960s. Western culture and philosophy, which saw gender in terms of structuralist dichotomies in which men were given preference over women, were challenged by this movement. They were increasingly aware of their marginalization in society, culture, and politics.

In 1960, the beauty pageant protest brought attention to the dehumanization of women and the way their bodies are displayed for the male gaze. The prevalent notion at the time, according to Freeman (1975), that "the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all" was contested by this change in feminist thinking (qtd. in Nwaosa). The second-wave of feminism was, thus, more than just a political movement because it was empowering women and fostering the ideas of equality, womanhood, and empowerment. The third wave of feminism, known as "Lipstick" feminism, first appeared in the 1990s as a critique of the first two waves (Mcnaughton).

Feminism's complex and multidimensional character was rapidly encroaching on the literary, academic, and social spheres of existence. The Western intellectual landscape was evolving at the time due to the influence of poststructuralism. Academics questioned the definition of gender itself and criticized essentialist perspectives on it. Feminist politics underwent a paradigm shift during the third wave of feminism. The politics of unity were replaced by "a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition," rejecting the big narratives of emancipation, liberation, and human rights (Snyder 176).

Third-wave feminism provided a form of feminism that addressed the needs and concerns of individual women, sharing similar views on the fluidity of gender identities. Gender/sex, body/self, male/female, powerful/powerless, material/abstract, socialist/Marxist, and so on were all decentered by it. (Krolokke and Sorensen 18). However, much of this focalized the western perspective and even though there were literary theorists such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar addressing the concept of "The Madwoman in the Attic" where they explored literature from a feminist perspective, criticized the representation of women in literature, and inspected the limitation of the female expression, the issues are still prevalent today.

1.2.3. Representation of Women in Literature

Women have been misrepresented or absent from literature in the past. In Medieval era, women were not considered equal to men and Medieval English literature was guided by the religious image of Mother Mary, also called Virgin Mary (Lucas and Ordeniza 8). Therefore, besides the suppression of weak women, the most common used characteristics in the literature of this era was the idea of purity associated with the "The virgin" (Lucas and Ordeniza 8).

Moreover, in medieval literature, such as can be found in Spenser's "The Faerie Queen" in the character of Una, the virgin ladies were the guiding figures for the character of the hero or the knight, in the case of "The Faerie Queen" (Lucas and Ordeniza 8). These ladies, epitomizing beauty and grace, would guide the hero to the path of God. On the other hand, the identity of a witch was also commonly associated with women that were disobedient and also feared for their knowledge (Lucas and Ordeniza 8). Much of this was prevalent even in the Elizabethan era where women were removed from the roles of responsibilities and not even allowed to perform (Lucas and Ordeniza 8).

Even when women garnered literary agency by the Romantic era, where Mary Shelley wrote one of the first science fiction works in English literature with *Frankenstein*, Nina Baym writes in *Woman's Fiction* that “often the women deliberately and even proudly disavowed membership in an artistic fraternity” (xii). Women writers such as Mary An Evans used male pen names such as George Eliot to write. Baym explores how “women were expected to write specifically for their own sex and within the tradition of their woman’s culture rather than within the Great Tradition. They never presented themselves as followers in the footsteps of Milton or Spenser” (xiii). This limited their creative expression.

Victorian Literature was dominated by novelists such as Dicken, Hardy and the Bronte sisters. Dickens has portrayed women in his works in a variety of ways, including as destructive, angelic, abused, malevolent, and true mothers. However, he prefers to depict women as angelic figures who symbolize happiness (Lucas and Ordeniza 9). Thomas Hardy's concept of portraying women in his works is grounded in realism, and he portrayed women as possessing greater instinct and impulse than males (Lucas and Ordeniza 9) Bronte's ideas on women are predicated on what they ought to do to become financially and psychologically independent, which was not truly the case in their lives (Lucas and Ordeniza 9). Bayn also elucidates how “representation of gender behavior in women’s fiction... were challenging the male- defined status quo” (xiii).

Josephine Campbell expounds upon the Matilda effect which denotes the “systematic undervaluation and denial of recognition of women's contributions and achievements, particularly in the scientific field” . Mileva Marić, Einstein’s wife, had a lot of contributions in the development of his work. Since her achievements were well known and she was awarded two Nobel awards for them, Marie Curie was the unusual exception of a woman in science. But a lot of men research historians disregarded her since she was her husband's helper (Campbell). Watson and Crick stealing the model of DNA from Rosalind Franklin is another notable example.

Contemporary literature, film and television have also worked to uphold the patriarchal and narrowed representation of women (Lucas and Ordeniza 7). According to Lucas and Ordeniza, Disney and such production companies play a huge role in “shaping the psyche” of young children especially girls in regard to gender roles through the representation of female characters. Sangeetha also discusses literature and media, specifically in the South Asian demographic, representing “marital rape and domestic violence as localized structure of feminist exploitation” (12). It becomes pertinent, therefore, for fictional narratives to be responsible with representation.

1.2.4. Post-colonial Feminism

Ritu Tyagi outlines Postcolonial feminist theory as “primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations” (45). With special reference to the writings of women authors, it focuses on how gender differences are constructed in colonial and anticolonial discourses as well as how women are portrayed in these discourses. Several philosophical, methodological, and political issues are brought up by postcolonial feminist critics in the study of gender representation (Tyagi 45).

White feminists' interaction with their indigenous counterparts has always been a focus of postcolonial feminist thought. White feminists have neglected the racial, cultural, and historical characteristics that define the situation of colonized women in their haste to express their concerns. By doing this, they have oppressed colonial women by forcing White feminist models upon them (Tyagi 47). Therefore, a woman in a colonized space is inflicted with “double colonization” (Tyagi 45).

As Fatima Mernissi argues in *Beyond the Veil*, patriarchal societies tend to define a woman’s power in emotional and domestic terms, while reserving institutional authority for men (Mernissi 98). According to Mernissi, Muslim society is divided ideologically between

the secluded world of the home and harem, which is coded as feminine and familial, and the public world of the umma, which is coded as male. The veil maintains this division, enabling women to move through public areas without compromising their sense of privacy. Islam is different from the West in that it views female sexuality as something that needs to be controlled since it is dangerously active rather than inherently inert (Tyagi 48).

1.2.5. Gendered Spaces

The status of women in society is a byproduct of a variety of factors which include but are not limited to culture and religion (Spain 137). According to Spain, the “physical separation of women and men” also becomes a major factor that defines the boundaries between them (137). It aids in the perpetuation of “gender stratification by reducing women's access to socially valued knowledge” (Spain 137) and therefore creates a gap in knowledge which furthers their limitation in the progressing society.

Gendered spaces, Spain adds, exist within all spheres of existence, “in homes, schools, and workplaces” (137). These spaces help in not just reinforcing but also recreating and sustaining the distinctions between men and women in society for the obvious advantage of the dominant gender. These are so integrated within the system that they are often taken for granted (Spain 137). Yet, the status of women in any society is associated with the spaces which either limit or facilitate knowledge for them. This is significant in countries where women are generally perceived as inferior. Pakistan is also one such country where patriarchal values are still eminent and Pakistani Fiction therefore becomes a significant agency for such gendered spaces.

1.2.6. Pakistani Fiction in English

Zia Ahmed elaborates on how “Pakistani fiction is the continuation and extension of the fiction produced under the colonial rulers in India” (92). Therefore, it is naturally post-colonial in nature. During their struggle for independence, “a new breed of south Asian English writers challenged the narratives of empire as well as orthodoxies in their own society” (Shamsie 149). The first novel by a south Asian Muslim was *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) by Ahmed Ali (1910-1994) written before the partition of the subcontinent. Ali’s novel was about a “traditional but decaying Muslim household belonging to the urban elite of Old Delhi, the erstwhile Mughal Capital” (Shamsie 150). After migrating to Pakistan, Ahmed Ali attempted to incorporate the elements from the Urdu traditional *Ghazal* into the English verse.

Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001), Alamgir Hashmi (b. 1951), Salman Rushdie (b. 1947), Tariq Ali (b. 1943), Zulfiqar Ghose (1935- 2022), “a post-war diaspora writer” (Shamsie 155), “These writers provide a marked contrast to an earlier generation, such as Ahmed Ali and Attia Hosain, for whom English was the creative vehicle to convey nationalistic messages” (Shamsie 151). “Sara Suleri, Taufiq Rafat and Zulfikar Ghose belong to the group of writers who had already started writing before the independence of Pakistan” (Kazmi and Razia 667)

Kamila Shamsie (b. 1973) belonged to an even younger generation of Pakistani writers “whose English language writing has increasingly engaged in a discourse with the United States” (Shamsie 152). Mohsin Hamid (b. 1971), Uzma Aslam Khan (b.1969) along with Shamsie “grew up in Pakistan during the urban violence of the 1980s and 1990s; a backdrop of guns, drugs, and lawlessness runs through their novels” (Shamsie 152). Mohammed Hanif (b. 1965), Nadeem Aslam (b. 1966) present a commentary on Zia u Haq’s military regime in their works (Shamsie 153).

Hanif Kureshi (b. 1954), “the son of a Pakistani father and an English mother, was born in Britain and made his first trip to Pakistan at twenty-eight... he focuses on issues of identity and integration that face British Asians and the exclusions against which they battle” (Shamsie 154). Much of the contemporary Pakistani fiction dealt with the “geopolitics and the rise of religious extremism in Pakistan and the diaspora” (Shamsie 155). However, there has been a

rise in the speculative space by writers such as Osama Siddique, Usman T Malik, Bina Shah, Sidra F. Sheikh, Shazaf Fatima Haider etc.

Daily Times article “Discussion on Pakistani Science Fiction held” discusses the presence of science fiction in Pakistani literary arena. In Pakistani literary canon Ismat Chughtai’s “Roshni Ka Safar, a time travel story, is a one of the early works of science fiction. Manto and Mumtaz Mufti also worked with speculative fiction (*Daily Times*). Usman T. Malik posits that “science fiction was historically considered a genre with space travel, adventures and laser suits only, but the term broadened later as more and writers produced work that overlapped the genre.” (*Daily Times*).

According to Usman T. Malik, “Pakistani science fiction has been historically non-existent, except for a few writers,” (*Daily Times*). There have been writers occupying the speculative space, such as Osama Siddique with *Shutting out the Moon*, Usman T. Malik with *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan*, Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps*, Sidra F Sheikh’s *The Light Blue Jumper*, Shazaf Fatima Haider’s *A Firefly in the Dark*, Maha Khan Philips’ *The Curse of Mohenjodaro*, Sami Shah’s *Boy of Fire and Earth*.

Recent endeavors of Science Fiction in Pakistan include *UmroAyyar*, a 2024 film directed by Azfar Jafri and written by Atif Rehan Siddique. *UmroAyyar* (2024) which Farheen Jawaid describes as an “epic fantasy about a super-secret society of warriors for good who are fighting against an evil army that wants to take over the world”. It follows the ‘Heroes Journey’ structure of the narrative, which Jawaid elaborates is a legacy of Joseph Campbell, and incorporates visual effects with a “compromised screenplay”. Thus, the science fiction being produced in Pakistan seems to imitate or take influence from Western narratives.

1.2.7. Women in Pakistani Fiction

It is due to the portrayal of women in their novels, authors like Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Zulifkar Ghose, Talat Abbasi, and Qaisra Shahraz hold a significant space in Pakistani Literary sphere (Ahmed Z. 93). Sidhwa's work on post-colonial feminism depicted in *The Ice-Candy Man* (1988) is one of the most significant ones. The effects of the partition on women's lives and bodies are especially depicted in this book. According to Sara Suleri (1989), women's bodies were colonized twice: once by the British and again by men in the Indo-Pak subcontinent (Ahmed Z. 94).

In his book *The Moth Smoke* (2000), Mohsin Hamid gives brief glimpses into the life of Mumtaz, an urban lady who endures her husband's neglect (Ahmed Z. 95). In *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), Nadeem Aslam narrates the stories of numerous women, such as Koukab and Surraya. As Koukab grapples with a double murder and its damaging impact on her family, she makes a valiant effort to uphold her Islamic faith (Ahmed Z. 96). Additionally, Aamir Hussein's short stories in *Cactus Town and Other Short Stories* (2002) depict the harsh social and political circumstances that Pakistani women must endure while they live and travel (Ahmed Z. 96).

Shoaib Ahmed writes in his article “Fables depicting a ‘Haunted Pakistan’” about Usman T. Malik’s work *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan*, “[Usman] said he had written this book to represent a different Pakistan. A haunted Pakistan, a Pakistan which had come out of two-decade long war. These stories look at that haunted Pakistan through a different lens” (Ahmed S.). Areeba Tayyab, however, criticizes the representation of marginalized groups, specifically women in the work of Usman T. Malik. In her article “Tracing Horror and Violence in *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* through Speculative Fiction” she posits “All marginalized characters are portrayed as abject in these short stories, which gives society the authority to dominate them in a social setting. It justifies discrimination against women and toxic masculinity” (95). Similarly, Omar Gilani describes his debut novel, *The Lost Children of Paradise*, as “a science fiction mystery based in a futuristic Pakistan” (Gilani). However, the representation of women in his novel erases female influence and presence. This will be the gap that this research will work on.

1.2.8. Research Questions:

The following are questions that this research aims to answer:

- 1) How does Omar Gilani portray women in his novel *The Lost Children of Paradise* as a contemporary Pakistani male science fiction writer?
- 2) How are the gendered spaces created in Omar Gilani's *The Lost Children of Paradise*?
- 3) How do male Pakistani writers of speculative fiction portray women even in futuristic scenarios as supplementary to men?

1.3. Research Methodology

This research is qualitative and analytical. It draws on theoretical secondary sources to analyze the primary texts. The primary text that will be studied in this research is *The Lost Children of Paradise*. The research will apply Feminist Theory alongside the concept of gendered spaces to the primary text. The representation and discourse incorporated within the text to write about and write for the women will be focused on in this study. This research also utilizes secondary sources taken from online scholarly journals. For this purpose, websites such as Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, Project Muse etc. were accessed.

1.4. Analysis

Science fiction became a popular domain among women writers for the delineation of their emancipation in self-created speculative spaces for them. It had been dominated by men even after its origin by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1878). However, she also portrayed a male creature created by a male scientist and showcased the woman as a love interest rather than an active participant. Like *Frankenstein*, where the female remained silent and stereotyped in the main plot; two centuries later, Omar Gilani presents a narrative that recreates the same spatial location of the woman in his speculative dystopian Pakistan of 22nd century. This stagnant portrayal of women by diaspora writers is often attributed to the western stereotypical imagery prevalent in the spaces that they occupy. They themselves undergo a similar stereotyping in the West. Moreover, they attain the picture of their country of origin through the tales and stories their parents tell them. Therefore, the image of their homeland remains stagnant.

The narratives in West about East especially the subaltern image of women seems stagnant in Gilani's fiction as well. In his speculative narrative he could not change the status and treatment of female characters even in a narrative pertaining to the 22nd century. Instead of the deconstructing the Eurocentric perspective of Eastern subjugated and marginalized women in the society, he strengthens the image through the characters by erasing them from the main plot. Ironically, it can be assumed that the female characters like Sara and Sumaya are capable but due to dominant patriarchs of the society, they cannot come in front of the people and work for others in the main administrative structure of the society. The narrative serves as a mirror for the patriarchs of our society and serves as a lash and shameful position to see the real face behind the elite visage and solid walls of their cities and bungalows. In a way it propagates the concept of gendered spaces for men and women.

Despite being set a century ahead, Gillani's novel mirrors contemporary gender norms in Pakistan. The narrative follows three central male figures; Barrister Chaudhary, Nawaz, and Adil; while five female characters remain structurally marginalized. The stereotypical representation and treatment of the female characters is evident in the discourse. When barrister Chaudhary a typical elite's (feudal as the title Chaudhary shows) son with his girlfriend on the road says to her, "jaan, take a hit of this, and tell me I'm not the greatest cheetah around" (4). This manner of addressing the girl is significant as it subjugates and objectifies the female. Moreover, it is evident that he is using her to make himself feel good about himself.

Moreover, the girl is described as, "The passenger, a girl much younger, played with a blue ribbon on the collar of the school uniform" (4). This depicts women as mere objects for the men. To showcase his superiority and strength he includes dialogues like, "Oh jaan, of

course! You are with me!...Would I let anything happen to you, my jalebi?" (4). The manner with which he addresses her and the terminologies he uses such as "jaan" and "jalebi" create this notion of power and objectification. The boy uses his wealth and father's position to use teenage girls for his own pleasure as he says "jaan, don't worry...He's just a thulla, they can't do anything to me – know who my father is? I'll talk to him" (5). Such discourse showcases the corruption and moral degradation of present Pakistan even within the context of the 22nd century.

Gilani is, therefore, showcasing Pakistan "embroiled in age-old problems" while "most of the developed world looks to the stars" (Gilani, back cover). Even after a century, Pakistan is able to borrow technology, but the patriarchs would not change the gender spaces. In postcolonial discourse, critics note the harm done by the British on those they colonized. In the contemporary era, it is considered a stale conversation as people are realizing their own capacity for change, however, Gilani refers to the colonial era even within the context of the 22nd century. One of the characters mentions, "Some say the Brits had opened the brothel, but that's probably just propaganda, the rulers of this land before the Brits was Nawaz's guess, they did enjoy then extramaritally" (61). This showcases the myopic vision of the past. Moreover, the mention of brothels and the treatment of women in the narrative creates a male-centered perspective and shows women only in association with the male characters in the novel as their accomplices, family or as objects of their pleasure.

The narrative delves further towards the discourse regarding the origin of brothels, continuing the objectifying gaze towards women. The characters situate the origin with the Mughals and their role as people who flourished the extramarital relations as they bought women slaves for their own merriments (61). This continuous discourse regarding prostitutes runs parallel to the moral deterioration that is prevalent in the narrative. However, it also projects an objectification of women throughout the narrative. It is uncanny for the 22nd century individual to associate the scents with prostitutes and to be tempted and aroused by "the pungent sweet smells of ittar and desire rose to welcome him" (61).

Sara is an intelligent woman, but the circumstances compelled her to become a prostitute. She is aware that she has a questionable job, but she prays. She says, "I wanted to be an air hostess. Take the cruises to space, serve people tea, that sent, of thing" (63). It means the women here have passion to do something meaningful in the society, but the patriarchal system doesn't allow her to do that. Nawaz answers Sara when she showed her desire that she wanted to become a pilot he says, "Really. I've always wondered what it would be like to fuck up there, and you are a most worthy copilot for such a quest." (64). This enhances the notion of the myopic perspective of the men in the narrative and their inability to take a woman seriously. Even her limited sphere of life, Sara is not devoid of intelligence. She tells about her hidden talent. "It's a pellet-pistol, something I've been working on in my spare time" (66). She is, therefore, capable and talented. However, Nawaz is only concerned about his own advantage, "In language I understand, please. I flick this at someone and they die?"

About the corrupt system, Nawaz himself claims, "Darling, I'm a policewala – If there is one thing we're good at, it's breaking the law" (64). South-Asian male, in this way, entertain themselves by the institution of prostitution. They can buy physical pleasure for themselves, as "Nawaz winked at her, dropped some money on the dresser, and walked out into the street, now less venomous as the sun finally receded (68). Going to the "Mandi" and listening to the old female singer "Lata" (69) becomes a source of relaxation and smile of Nawaz.

Nawaz is shown to be attached to his mother. She is portrayed as a typical mother, widow who waits for her son and makes "Parathas" for him (70). Her son takes care of her health; she is a cancer patient and is taken for periodic checkups by her son regularly regardless of his business. This can be analyzed in contrast with his relationship with prostitutes and how women are placed in two different spaces. His lack of respect for women in general is evident

in his criticism, when he says about Noshi Khala, “Midlife crisis, spent all her savings on those facial modpacks, now looks like a frog with a bob-cut” (70). In this way, women are divided in gendered spaces based on their relationship and association with the male characters and their own perception of morality.

During Adil’s journey behind the wall’s, the depiction of rustic women, “... a group of women sat, washing clothes” (74). Even within a scientifically developed world, rustic women are presented in the same way. Moreover, there is total absence of women in the venture of Adil and Nawaz and in the administrative search for the child-lifters and the container mystery. Though the whole information was given by Sumaya about the “Firdous-e- Bareen” where the criminals were found. (259).

The women in the novel are not shown to be weak. However, their portrayal is in connection and association with the male characters. The narrative takes place from the male perspective and thus it places women within the spaces allotted to them by the patriarchal system which is often adhered to by men as it is convenient to them. Adil’s perspective is shown in this way, “He’d have to place his faith in the system, but that too seemed to be rotten to the core” (259). When Adil went behind the walls for the first time, he saw women in “blue burkas” (91). He said to Nawaz, “Well, it is rather oppressive to women” (91), to which he responded, “to women? What about us poor men who have to look at those sacks? Fucking tragedy what it is” (91). On another instance Nawaz says, “Perfectly, Adil. Just keep your head stable, don’t blink too much, and find something worth looking at.” (261). This gives a clearer picture of the male mentality that shapes the narrative.

The presence of intelligent Sumayya and her work behind the scenes makes their venture a success. She works secretly with her journalist friend makes Adil a celebrity and she communicates with him on the phone or virtually, throughout their mission, to give him information and GPS of “Firdous-e-Bareen”, a nursery of making children into addicts, cyborgs, and terrorists (259). In this way, female characters are not only kept hidden regardless of their role in the progress of the male characters. Sumayya is virtually with him till the gate of “Firdous-e-bareen” but not in the real and physical action (259).

Gilani does not deny the strength and intelligence of women characters but due to the patriarchal system and set gender spaces, the women erasure is obvious. Adil’s venture started when he needed to disguise and, “he stopped next to a small cart laden with clothes and picked out a shirt, a brown leather jacket, and a cap. The shirt was terribly old and in faded bold letters on the front it said, “malaala” (211). The name of malaala even a century ahead revives the story of Pashtun women’s struggle for the emancipation of women. Gilani’s awareness of injustice is worth appreciating but the persistent stagnation of the system is pessimistic in approach and promotes an objectified and erased women.

1.5. Conclusion:

Speculative fiction mirrors the fears, goals, and ideological blind spots of a generation. *The Lost Children of Paradise* (2021), a dystopian science fiction book set in Pakistan in the twenty-second century, depicts a civilization that is technologically sophisticated but socially inert. The novel maintains and upholds existing patriarchal values despite its futuristic setting, especially through the deliberate exclusion of women from positions of authority, decision-making, and public debate. Women are underrepresented in the corporate, political, and police sectors, even though they are actively involved in many aspects of society today.

Omar Gilani's female characters play largely supporting roles. They never show up as leaders; instead, they are caregivers, lovers, or unnoticed supporters. The book depicts strict power structures and societal divisions at the same time by using symbolic architecture, such as walls, and ethnic stereotypes, especially of the orthodox Pashtun man. In order to examine how patriarchy, ethnicity, and traditions are maintained and aestheticized in future narratives, this research analyzed Gilani's work within the context of gendered spaces.

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