

Haunted by History, Grounded in Faith: Jinn Epistemologies and Decolonial Reimaginings in Ayesha Muzaffar's *The Bhabis of Lahore and Other Forbidden Tales of the City*

Khadeeja Bilqees

00362msengf24@student.iiu.edu.pk

International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Dr. Sofia Hussain

sofia.hussain@iiu.edu.pk

International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Maryam Khan

00372msengf24@student.iiu.edu.pk

International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Khadeeja Bilqees 00362msengf24@student.iiu.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

*In Gothic studies, the supernatural has often been interpreted through Western psychological frameworks, marginalizing theological or mythic epistemologies. This paper argues that Ayesha Muzaffar's *The Bhabis of Lahore and Other Forbidden Tales of the City* develops a decolonial Gothic rooted in Islamic cosmology, where haunting affirms the presence of nonhuman agents integral to the indigenous worldview rather than hinting towards repressed desires. Her short stories challenge the colonial ideals of enlightenment and rationality while offering an alternative worldview rooted in the indigenous episteme. Drawing on Walter Dignolo's concept of epistemic delinking, Taylor's theorization of re-enchantment, and Rebecca Duncan's idea of decolonial Gothic, we perform close readings of selected stories that integrate Quranic jinn lore and oral narrative structures. The analysis reveals that Muzaffar redefines the Gothic as a communal negotiation with the unseen, challenging the privatized, symbolic hauntings of the Western canon. This reframing opens new possibilities for non-Western Gothic criticism, inviting readings that foreground the spiritual and the communal as vital sources of meaning beyond the secular boundaries of Western thought.*

Keywords: Decoloniality, decolonial gothic, re-enchantment, transmodernity

INTRODUCTION

The Gothic genre, as it has emerged in the West, is often characterized by haunted spaces—phantoms, crypts, and castles—that give form to repressed individual or collective anxieties. The supernatural in this tradition is typically read as symbolic, revealing hidden human desires, fears, or social tensions. Fred Botting famously defines the Gothic as a “writing of excess,” suggesting that its supernatural elements amplify the irrational and the emotional beyond the bounds of Enlightenment reason, an excess that, if stripped away, would leave the familiar world intact. However, such a reading of the Gothic genre proves inadequate in the South Asian context, where the supernatural is not regarded as excessive or symbolic but is culturally embedded in everyday life and taken seriously within lived experiences. In a context where “a completely matter-of-fact acceptance of the agency of non-human beings of many kinds” (Ghosh 53) exists, ghosts and spirits are not perceived as mere projections of the human psyche or social critique, but rather as real presences with active roles in the world. In this framework, the Gothic sheds its metaphorical weight and becomes literal—it is fantasy as not a departure from reality, but as something “divinely true for those who believe” (Sadaf 14). This approach

to the Gothic departs from the prevailing definitions of the genre, which remain confined to the symbolic realm.

In light of this discussion, this paper seeks to position Ayesha Muzaffar's collection of short stories, *The Bhabis of Lahore and Other Forbidden Tales of the City*, as a decolonial intervention in the gothic genre. Muzaffar draws upon the South Asian oral folkloric gothic tradition and places it against the backdrop of colonial modernity to build up a subtle critique of the colonial ideals of enlightenment and rationality. Her collection of short stories offers an alternative worldview, one that foregrounds the traditional, local episteme in a modern, global context. Her stories are rich with supernatural figures rooted in local myths of jinns that fall in love and those that haunt. Not only do these stories draw upon the cultural tradition, but also the Islamic eschatology. But these tales do not exist in isolation from the modern world. In fact, Muzaffar integrates the two to give us an image of a woman running after her Jinn lover in front of McDonald's, an image that feels entirely unfamiliar and improbable. Her stories are not decolonial in the sense of portraying the colonial trauma through supernatural symbols, but rather through their reclamation of the indigenous systems of knowledge.

Decoloniality and Decolonial Gothic

Coloniality is an ongoing phenomenon. It manifested not only through the material violence and the extraction of resources from the colonized lands, but also through a form of epistemic violence in which the indigenous knowledges and worldviews were rejected as inferior (Macaulay). This epistemic colonization has ensured that colonization continues longer after the colonizers are gone. Here, modernity comes into play. Mignolo sees it as another means of colonization, the mask that coloniality wears to appear acceptable. Under modernity's disguise of progress and economic growth, colonization, especially economic colonization, still continues. Hence, there's a need to upend this Eurocentric imperialism. By eurocentric imperialism, Mignolo refers to "an epistemic phenomenon that received its name from the territorial location of actors, languages, and institutions that managed to project as universal their own world sense and worldview. The projection established the idea of modernity and its darker and hidden side: coloniality" (Mignolo and Walsh 194). Mignolo continues that we can engage in decoloniality by "creating and illuminating pluriversal and interspersal paths that disturb the totality from which the universal and the global are most often perceived" (Mignolo and Walsh 2). Quijano further builds upon this:

It is necessary to extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity. The alternative, then, is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power. First of all, epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality. (Quijano 31)

Quijano highlights the need to free rationality and modernity from the clutches of coloniality. He argues that the first step should be to engage in epistemological decolonization; there is a need for new channels of communication built upon an equal exchange of knowledge and experiences. Enrique Dussel, building upon this idea, presents the concept of transmodernity. Distinguishing it from postmodernity, Dussel writes that "'Trans'-modernity, in contrast, demands a whole new interpretation of modernity in order to include moments that were never incorporated into the European version" (223). He situates modernity as a discourse, one with cultural, political, and economic dimensions and implications. As such, modernity becomes another product of colonial expansion, functioning hand in hand with coloniality. It opens up new markets; indeed, capitalization could not have thrived without modernization. In his effort to "delink," as Mignolo terms it, Dussel further explains that "the emergence of other cultures, until now depreciated and unvalued, from beyond the horizon of European

modernity is thus not a miracle arising from nothingness, but rather a return by these cultures to their status as actors in the history of the world-system” (224). While Western culture continues to dominate globally in technical and political terms, Dussel stresses that this does not erase the creative and resistant force of other cultural systems that continue to grow from outside the Western framework. Muzaffar’s short story collection can thus be seen as an attempt at presenting a form of transmodernity. She does not exclude the Western elements entirely, but rather embraces them and integrates them with the indigenous culture and religion.

Weber, in his famous lecture, *Science as a Vocation*, advocates the superiority of science, intellect, and rationality and the process of “disenchantment” that happened due to modernization. He celebrates that we “no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed”. Weber’s view has been criticized in Postcolonial studies multiple times, but we will refer to Charles Taylor’s concept of re-enchantment for the purpose of this study. Taylor laments that it is not only the supernatural beings and plots that are lost due to disenchantment, “but also the motivation regarding religion and religious context” (18). He uses the term “anthropomorphizing” to refer to this man-centered worldview. Since modernity is closely tied to secularism, it is only natural that the ascent of one leads to the ascent of the other. Consequently, not only does rationality replace intuition and spirituality, but it has also banished religion from the public sphere. This banishment has been reflected in the literary genres as well. The supernatural and the non-human have been banished to what Ghosh calls the generic “outhouses”: fantasy, gothic, climate fiction, etc. The world has become knowable and transparent.

Ghosh contends that Weber’s rationalization of modern life is “a process that begins in the economy and in the administration, but eventually pervades the sphere of free time, private life, entertainment, feelings” (20). And as it permeates all things, it becomes in itself a religion, another form of enchantment. Ghosh argues that maybe disenchantment never happened; what happened in the process of modernization was another form of “enchantment just as powerful as any dithyrambic mythology” (140). This enchantment, on account of being packaged as the truth—fact, not fantasy—is even harder to dispel. Charles Taylor comments on this in the following words:

The practice that resists our sense of strong evaluation is the practice of seeing the world as a set of objects that we can get objective knowledge of (which is useful for using them) and that that is all there is. This is a kind of epistemological blockage. “Epistemological blockage” of course, itself has ethical bases: what is admired is the disenchanted human being who can control his own environment and can stand up and remake the world and do a lot of good. It is that kind of satisfied sense of the power that human beings have, which I think underlies the whole Cartesian view, which is a kind of ethic, a way of being involved in the world. (25)

Taylor advocates for re-enchantment, for getting past that “epistemological blockage” and to “look on the physical universe surrounding us as a lot of matter which has its own internal laws for their own sake” (18). Such a view would enable us to decenter man as the center of the universe, all rational and intellectual, and open alternative views, inclusive of other creatures, cultures, and cosmologies.

Circling back to Ghosh’s argument about the banishment of the supernatural and the non-human to “generic outhouses”, Shazia Sadaf further points out that Western definitions of fantasy tend to limit its seriousness and cognitive value: “From a Western majoritarian viewpoint, fantasy is defined as unreal or antireal in comparison to the corporeality of the world we live in. In such a definition, there is little flexibility for culturally different perceptions of what is real as parallelly existent around us...” (14). Sadaf highlights an important gap in the existing perception/definition of the fantasy genre. Uncritically accepting the dominant, hegemonic narrative of what is real and unreal without questioning leaves us in danger of outrightly dismissing alternative perspectives without giving them a fighting chance. What is fantastic or unreal in the Western worldview may very well be rooted in the lived realities of the various indigenous peoples.

When it comes to the Gothic genre specifically, Duncan's concept of decolonial Gothic provides a space to articulate Gothic narratives not bound by Western ideals of rationality and enlightenment. Not only are these narratives not bound, but they actively try to dispel and undermine these colonial structures. Duncan defines decolonial Gothic as "a synthesis of perspectives on the Gothic that emphasize the foundational role of capitalism, with those that underscore the master narrative of Enlightenment" (315). She draws upon Mignolo to emphasize the role of decolonial thinking in shedding "particular light on the crises and inequalities of the millennial present" (306). Duncan argues that postcolonial Gothic proves inadequate to address these issues since it draws on postmodern skepticism toward "master narratives," using haunting to expose colonial history as fragmented and unrecoverable (308). However, this assumes that colonialism is over, overlooking how colonial structures still persist. Decolonial Gothic, on the other hand, addresses the ongoing colonial power instead of its haunting aftermath.

Decolonial Gothic thus emerges as a form of Mignolo's "border thinking", a literary mode that defies Eurocentric narrative structures and centers non-Western cosmologies. It bridges Quijano's project of epistemological decolonization and Dussel's vision of transmodernity, while resisting Weberian disenchantment by reclaiming enchanted worldviews as valid epistemes. It aligns with Taylor's re-enchantment and Ghosh's critique of modernity's false transparency, leading to world-constructs in which the jinn are not metaphors for suppressed fears but participants in an ontological framework that persists despite colonial and modernist attempts to erase it. As Sadaf notes, such an approach reclaims the fantastic and the nonhuman as cognitive and cultural realities rather than as irrational residues. In this sense, Decolonial Gothic does not merely invert Western tropes of horror or madness; it enacts a decolonial reorientation of perception itself—one that restores the unseen, the spiritual, and the cosmological as legitimate sites of knowing and storytelling.

This paper argues that Muzaffar's stories neatly fall into this category of the decolonial Gothic through their framing of the supernatural not as escapist fantasy, but as embedded truth, real within the epistemic framework of Islamic belief and South Asian folk memory. It is in this spirit of decoloniality and epistemic delinking that we will be analyzing Ayesha Muzaffar's *The Bhabis of Lahore and Other Forbidden Tales of the City*. This paper is divided into two sections. The first one investigates how the stories are rooted in indigenous culture and traditions, including religious influences. The next section focuses on how they act as a rebuttal to the Enlightenment and its associated capitalism.

South Asian Indigenous Cosmologies and the Supernatural in Muzaffar's Collection

This section explores how Muzaffar situates her short stories in the Decolonial Gothic by grounding them in the South Asian folkloric tradition and Islamic cosmology. Her jinns, spirits, dreams, and inexplicable events are not oddities to be explained away, but ontologically real forces with complex social agency, emotional, and spiritual. They are wronged, they seek revenge, and they interfere in human affairs with emotions and intent. The human characters encountering the supernatural cannot explain it away using rationality, and the possessed cannot be treated using science and medicine. Muzaffar disrupts the anthropocentric Cartesian illusion of man as the rational, all-knowing being and reclaims an enchanted and communal worldview to stage what Walter Mignolo calls "epistemic disobedience", a refusal to think solely within the colonial modern framework of rationality. The following discussion examines how this decolonial epistemology unfolds in her stories.

Firstly, we are going to analyze the short story titled "The Jinn in Mahjbeen's Phupho," in which Yalooli, a jinni (female jinn) banished from her tribe in the Himalayas, becomes obsessed with Mahjbeen. Her Phupoo (paternal aunt) succeeds in "banishing her [Yalooli] from being near Mahjbeen, with wazaif and parhae" but at a cost. Yalooli begins haunting Mahjbeen's Phupo instead, leading her to suffer decades of illness and sleep paralysis, before dying during childbirth (Muzaffar 119-120). Even then, the jinni does not disappear but goes back to haunt Mahjbeen. After Mahjbeen's mother-in-law banishes her again, she enters Hira, "the only saheili Mahjbeen had ever had" (120). The story ends with the implication that after Hira's death, the jinni enters Zaryab, Hira and Mahjbeen's friend (124).

Yalooli never vanquished as depicted in the Western sense; she lingers and is feared as a part of the family's mythos. Phupo's oblation becomes the stuff that whispers of piety, intergenerational trauma, and oral memory, not a clinical diagnosis.

In this story, Muzaffar radically transforms the site of the supernatural from subjective affliction to communal residue. In Western Gothic literature, for instance, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", mental illness isolates the female protagonist and is often treated as a symbol (Lanser 420). In contrast to that, Mahjbeen's Phupho's suffering is not symbolic or metaphorical. It is part of a broader barzakh (spiritual veil) structure, where oblation is interpreted through Sufi and Quranic frames as acts of divine proximity. In addition to that, the narrative resists the Enlightenment's secular scientific impulse to categorize experience. The responses are ritualistic, such as 'burning shawls', burying Quranic amulets', and reading protective surahs. These are not signifiers of irrationality but expressions of cosmologically grounded communal epistemology, reaffirming Sylvia Wynter's critique that the colonial definition of 'Man' excludes those who live by spiritual, not secular, logics.

In another story, "Shaadi Ever After", the main character, Sajeer, comes to know that her mother, in a moment of desperation and fear, had promised her to a jinn. The jinn, a being made of fire (Qur'an, 15:27), begins to possess her cousin Hashim as a vessel to remain close to Sajeer. When this spiritual contract begins to affect Sajeer's sister-in-law, Gul's physical well-being and mental health, the family does not consult doctors but turns to "phonchay huwe sahibs, bazurgs, and molvis" to resolve the crisis. (Muzaffar 184-185). Later on, the story culminates in the ritual 'cutting' of the bond through a spiritual ceremony, after which Hashim regains his consciousness and is freed.

In this narrative, Muzaffar repositions the gothic relationship between self and haunting beings. Where Western gothic literature, such as *The Turn of the Screw*, internalizes the ghost as an illumination of repressed trauma and guilt, Muzaffar externalizes the Jinn as a being with its historical background, rights, and emotions. The Jinn is not just a monster but a participant in a sacred contract, a cosmological being who is wronged and seeks justice. The linguistic elements explicitly reference this ontological divide—"This sinister thing possessed him for years so that fire and clay could unite" (Muzaffar 204)—drawing on Quranic materiality and Islamic metaphysics. The narrative thus bypasses modern epistemology of psychiatry and reclaims ritual as a mode of knowledge. Hashim and Gul are not comforted through therapy or sessions with a psychiatrist, but rather through the restoration of cosmological balance—a form of "epistemic delinking" (Mignolo) and "re-enchantment" (Taylor)—that prioritizes divine logic over secular reasoning. Ultimately, "Shaadi Ever After" transforms haunting from a symptom of madness into a dialogue between worlds, where restoration replaces repression and ritual supplants therapy as the site of truth and reconciliation.

Another story from Muzaffar's collection, "The Bhabis of Lahore," also documents a similar instance where the Mufti says: "When I was reciting, I felt darkness in the room. I followed it. It was his wife. He was married off as a child to a goat-jinn in the mountains. He has not returned to her, and thus she is not letting any of his marriages work" (Muzaffar 12). During the wedding ceremony of the protagonist's brother, the mufti says the former statement, claiming the narrator's brother is already married to a goat jinn from the mountains, and declares this to be the cause of his repeated failed marriages. This revelation is accepted not with ridicule, but with immediate spiritual recourse and fear. Even the narrator, initially skeptical, allows the event to be disclosed without mockery, and later acknowledges the collective truth value of such divine interruptions. The crucial point here is the public nature of the epistemological crisis. The event is not treated as an individual mental breakdown but as a collective or, per se, communal problem requiring religious adjudication. The mufti's claim is taken seriously, and the bride's family rejects the proposal not due to shame but in order to avoid cosmological interference. This public spiritual intervention stands in contrast to the subjective madness and isolated guilt of the Western Gothic literature. In Muzaffar's narrative, the community becomes the epistemic unit, and the supernatural is dealt with through consultation and divine judgment, not just individual repression. This reaffirms Taylor's assertion that Western disenchantment rests on the privatization of

belief, whereas South Asian cosmologies maintain public religious vocabularies. In the introduction to his book, *A Secular Age*, Taylor distinguishes the societies in which “religion is everywhere, interwoven with everything else” from the ones where “religion or its absence is largely a private matter” (1). By grounding the Gothic in a communal spiritual vocabulary, Muzaffar not only departs from Western narrative conventions but also affirms a decolonial framework in which belief remains a shared, public resource. She reinstates enchantment into the social sphere by framing the supernatural as a public truth rather than a private delusion. In doing so, she challenges the secular individualism that underpins Western modernity.

One of the chapters of Muzaffar’s short story “Shadi Ever After” is named as “Jinn-in-Law,” which is an ironically titled narrative as it documents the problems in the marriage of the protagonist, Sajeer, that are attributed to a Jinn who has claimed her as his wife. The Jinn causes paranoia, illness, and infertility not only to her but to her new husband, forcing families to recognize cosmological interference. Despite his role in breaking up Sajeer’s marriage, the Jinn is not the one to be blamed. It was Sajeer’s mother who had promised her daughter to the Jinn and then broken her promise. The Jinn merely demands justice as narrated in the story: “She broke her promise, and she approached all sorts of people to help you heal. Your mama broke her pact with a jinn. And then, the jinn started doing ‘hazri’, on your cousin Hashim. This sinister thing possessed him for years so that fire and clay could unite. When your phupho found out, she took Hashim away and got powerful ruqya done” (Muzaffar 204). This line invokes spiritual rituals like “hazri” and “ruqya”, and shows how the Jinn operates within divine timelines, not human contracts. Through the Jinn’s demand for justice, Muzaffar reclaims the unseen as a site of “epistemic delinking”—an insistence that divine contracts and spiritual accountability can coexist with, and even supersede, secular notions of reason.

Theorists of Western female Gothic fiction, such as Creed and Wallace, draw on Freudian concepts like the “heimlich” and “abjection” to examine the genre’s capacity to address women’s issues, yet their interpretation—“inscribed in a symbolic economy” (Creed 11)—ultimately confines these issues to the symbolic realm. Contrary to Western Gothic fiction, where marital haunting often appears from female repression, like in the case of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, the haunting in Muzaffar’s narrative is mythic and theological. Feminist critics like Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha functions not as a literal supernatural entity but as a symbolic embodiment of Jane’s repressed anger and passion. In contrast, the haunting Sajeer faces is not due to marital oppression. The story of her and her Jinn lover reveals the way the jinns occupy the liminal space between contract and covenant, where Islamic laws, unseen oaths, and family customs intersect. Instead of a tale of a romantic rupture, it becomes a theoretical commentary on spiritual obligation, consent, and feminine agency within a multilayered metaphysical system. Muzaffar’s unearthly beings are not otherworldly intrusions; they are interlocutors, enforcing covenants invisible to secular eyes. The protagonist is not exorcised or freed but repositioned within this theological web, emphasizing the legitimacy of multiple forms of truth beyond rational empiricism and opening up “coexisting temporalities” (Mignolo and Walsh 3). This shift destabilizes the Western symbolic order, grounding the Gothic instead in a theology where spiritual and social obligations are inseparable.

Across these narratives, Muzaffar continuously builds on Islamic cosmology where jinn are real beings as mentioned in the Quran, made of smokeless fire, and have the capabilities to interact with the human world. Their presence is not an anomaly but a continuation of divine creation. Cultural and religious practices such as reciting ‘Ayat ul Kursi’, wearing taweez (amulets), or invoking the Prophet’s names are not magical practices but acts of divine alignment. These narratives also follow the archetype of oral storytelling, digressive, resistant, and anecdotal, with layered closure. Characters like Sajeer and Mahjabeen inherit ancestral curses and family demons, and the boundary between dreams and reality is blurred in “The Never Happening Shaadi of Shaazia Farooq”. This narrative style mimics folkloric epistemology, where the truth is cumulative, affective, and relational. By embedding the Gothic within this oral, relational mode of knowing, Muzaffar crafts a narrative that is rooted in indigenous culture through both content and form. Such a Gothic narrative rejects Enlightenment rationalism. Instead, it

aligns itself with indigenous knowledge systems that privilege lived, communal experience over empirical verification or cryptic symbols.

Rebuke of Colonial Modernity, Consumer Culture, and Bourgeois Mentality

This section focuses on how Muzaffar's short stories, in addition to being rooted in indigenous cosmologies, also actively critique colonial modernity. Her narratives hollow out the spectacle of upper-middle-class life through hauntings, inexplicable misfortunes, and bodily affliction, engaging in decoloniality by unsettling the capitalist logic underlying bourgeois existence. They, to quote Duncan, "not only register the violent experience of capitalist transformation, but do so from the particular position of the colonial difference" (317). Ghosh argues in *The Great Derangement* that "the uncanny intimacy of our relationship with the nonhuman" (30) is excluded from the mainstream literature. He attributes this exclusion to the probabilistic worldview of nineteenth-century capitalist literary realism, which effectively silenced mystical or spiritual forces. Muzaffar restores these unearthly presences as legitimate epistemic agents, unveiling how rational domestic and consumer routines are constantly interrupted by older, enchanted forces. Muzaffar's collection critiques not only the metaphysical displacement wrought by colonial modernity but also the material and social structures that sustain it, particularly consumer capitalism and the commodified domestic ideal. In these narratives, consumer goods, spaces of aesthetic consumerism, aspirational weddings, and international travel serve as haunted metaphors of spiritual disconnection. Muzaffar reveals the cost of modernity not just as a loss of culture and tradition, but as epistemicide, a violence and assault against indigenous cosmologies that displaces the sacred with the performative.

In the short story "The Unwillingly Long Honeymoon of Arooj and Kamil," Arooj, the protagonist, embodies fear that is not neurotic. Her fragile nature to the uncanny reflects a gendered spiritual attunement that Muzaffar elevates. Her husband refuses intimacy in his parents' house, and the couple later dreams of "long-necked, very smiley, and see-through people" observing their private moments (135), hinting at spiritual vulnerability and ancestral memory concepts often erased in Western modernity. This aligns with Wynter's critique of secular humanism, which centers the abstract, disembodied figure of rational Man while dismissing the physical body and intuitive forms of knowledge historically associated with women and colonized peoples. There is also a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity—"the hotel"—that is unveiled as a haunted ground, disconnected from any cultural or spiritual roots. Arooj's alienation is a symptom of modernity's promise betrayed; escape becomes a trap, and luxury becomes a site of terror. This disruption critiques both the idea that happiness lies in consumption and travel and bourgeois gender roles. In addition to that, the couple's trip to Dubai becomes an analogy of the bourgeois escape gone wrong. What is seemingly introduced as a romantic indulgence descends into disarray and uncomfortable circumstances. Diagnosed with Covid, quarantined, and financially depleted, the couple's ordeal exposes the illusion of control and progress that capitalist modernity sustains. The vacation leaves them haunted by nightmares and traumatized for the foreseeable future. Muzaffar collapses the fantasy of the honeymoon into a narrative of illness and confinement, revealing how the modern ideals of freedom and prosperity rest upon fragile illusions. The story ultimately exposes the emptiness and anxiety hiding in the hollow promises of modern global life

"The Never Happening Shaadi of Shaazia Farooq" is also a narrative full of capitalist consumer culture. The requirement for a good rishta revolves around their financial prospects. The protagonist, Shaazia, comments about her failed rishtas: "This was the thirteenth family who had rejected me and we had no clue why. Aba had money, lots of it, and I had a plot in Bahria Town to my name..." (Muzaffar 48). It is almost as if the property in her name makes her adequate, even desirable, for marriage. Moreover, the cause behind her failed rishtas is immediately attributed to "ilm" by her sister, who had "at one time, even found some taweez under [Shaazia's] bed, signifying that it was all due to black magic" (48). The narrative critiques bourgeois Pakistani weddings as hyper-consumerist norms emptied of spiritual or divine meaning. Shaazia's family, concerned with social optics, refuses to acknowledge the possibility

of metaphysical imbalance. The intrusion of the irrational into the modern framework represents a rejection of the illusion of harmony in the presence of spiritual injustice.

On the other hand, Western gothic renders this series of failures as signs of personal anxiety or repression. Muzaffar conjures the problem outside the personal psyche, in spiritual and ancestral realms. The haunting exposes the hollowness of performative modernity, critiquing its epistemological blindness to the non-human and the sacred. While recalling Ghosh's concern that literary and political discourse have excluded the non-human, we can establish that Muzaffar's jinns are not metaphors but cosmic agents reacting to desecration. Muzaffar's narratives critique colonial modernity's false neutrality, exposing its violence against the spiritual fabric of life.

In "Shadi Ever After", the protagonist, named Sajeer, is a newlywed. Her husband experiences unexplained misfortunes such as infertility, nightmares, broken electronics, and arguments with invisible beings. The family suspects a Jinn is attached to Sajeer, the bride, due to a promise made by her mother during a time of despair to a spiritual entity in return for prosperity (Muzaffar 204). A 'molvi' confirms this bond between "fire and clay", referencing the Jinn and human natures in Islamic metaphysics. The family's response is not therapy or psychiatric consultation, but ritual, spiritual consultation that included calling a molvi, removal of certain objects, and Qur'anic recitation. These are not signs of superstition but of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo and Walsh 114) that manifests in a refusal to reduce suffering to a biomedical or neurotic disorder. This haunting of the domestic sphere critiques bourgeois domestic ideals of the modern couple, the well-planned and established lifestyle, and the beautiful home as spiritually incoherent. The home, ostensibly a site of love and peace, becomes a space of spiritual warfare. Muzaffar challenges the Enlightenment ideal of the house as a sanitized, rational unit, suggesting that, despite its cosmologically contested sphere, divine justice, spiritual forces, and ancestral oaths converge. In the end, the resolution comes not from insight but from metaphysical severance; the bond with the Jinn must be ritually broken.

Following the narratives, Muzaffar's bourgeois women are trapped between the demands of modern femininity, such as sophistication, obedience, beauty, and the spiritual complexity of their world. For instance, in "Shaadi Ever After", Sajeer's mother says, "It takes time. Ghar bnana parhta hai. It's a woman's job. You're tou so lucky. Na saas ka pressure aur na hi sussar ki rouk touk. Gul is a guest and she'll leave shortly. I fail to understand what problems you have. Your problems aren't even real problems. Wou Aneela ki beti ka husband usay marta hai. Saath wali Shaista hai na, she blames her bahu for not having a son. And you, you sit on the bed each day and have McDonald's" (Muzaffar 157). Sajeer's compliance with social and religious expectations fails to safeguard her from spiritual suffering and illness, revealing the impossibility of the bourgeois feminine idea. Muzaffar takes a subtle jab here at the Pakistani marriage culture of the middle class that expects women to nod and roll over because their material needs are met. Sajeer, despite having a wealthy husband and a privileged lifestyle, remains discontented, highlighting the eventual futility of material objects.

Sajeer's suffering also reveals how the colonial ideal of the respectable woman persists within postcolonial, middle-class domesticity. Wynter argues that the colonial figure of the respectable woman is a fiction based on racialized assumptions and gendered ideals that erase spiritual labor and emotional complexity, something that becomes apparent in Sajeer's case. Muzaffar's women are haunted because they are asked to be everything and allowed to be nothing. Their bodies become the site of cosmological struggle, where ancestral, spiritual, and personal histories collide. Ultimately, Ayesha Muzaffar rejects the disenchanting, secular vision of life offered by capitalist modernity. Her hauntings do not reach a resolution through diagnosis or rational closure, but through spiritual questioning and negotiation, and by practicing rituals and invoking ancestors. This narrative structure affirms the price of Islamic cosmologies and oral traditions as epistemologies in their own right. In this context, Duncan's idea of haunting as a decolonial strategy finds nuanced realization: jinns, inexplicable misfortunes, and curses work not as Gothic gimmicks but as compliances of epistemic justice restoring visibility to the sacred

and the unseen. Muzaffar offers not merely a critique but a cosmological counter-narrative, reconfirming the legitimacy of non-Western ways of knowing and being.

CONCLUSION: RE-MYSTIFYING THE WORLD BY REPOSITIONING THE GOTHIC LITERATURE

The Bhabis of Lahore and Other Forbidden Tales of the City conclusively reorients the gothic literature away from its Western roots in inhibition and secular turmoil towards a mode of epistemic resistance and re-enchantment. Muzaffar's Tales of Jinns, inexplicable illness, ancestral hauntings, and spiritually charged domestic crises are not tales of horror in the conventional sense. Rather, they function as decolonial interventions, literary enactments of what Walter Dignolo argues as epistemic disobedience. By reasserting the gothic for Islamic cosmologies, communal spirituality, and oral tradition, Muzaffar refuses the Enlightenment-driven marginalization of the nonhuman and the unearthly presence around humans. Her fiction insists on the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems and the necessity of rethinking literary form, truth, and spiritual authority beyond colonial modernity and capitalist systems.

Muzaffar's stories also respond directly to Amitav Ghosh's critique of modern fiction's exclusion of the nonhuman and the sacred. By returning enchantment to the center of narrative structure, Muzaffar contributes to a greater literary decolonization project that backlashes against the Eurocentric definitions of realism, meaning-making, and genre. She joins a developing mindset of South Asian writers such as Musharraf Ali Shah and Sami Shah, who reimagine and reestablish the boundaries and liminal spaces of speculative fiction and supernatural literature by applying the existing genre tropes to "South Asian cultural, religious, and historical concerns" (Sadaf and Kanwal 5). This shift is leading to an emerging body of literature that spiritually and culturally resonates with Pakistanis.

Across these narratives that are specifically analyzed to fulfill the purpose, including "Shaadi Ever After", "The Never Happening Shaadi of Shaazia Farooq", "The Jinn in Mahjbeen's Phupho", and "The Unwillingly Long Honeymoon of Arooj and Kamil". Ayesha Muzaffar builds a world in which Jinns are not symbolic projections, repression, or trauma like Western fiction, but instead active metaphysical agents, engrossed with human beings through forgotten promises, divine contracts, and inherited bonds. The supernatural is not anomalous but deeply integrated into everyday life, appearing in dreams, marital life, bedrooms, and kitchens. This integration challenges the logocentric point of view that equates reason with truth and spirituality with irrationality. For that, Muzaffar exposes the spiritual awareness of consumerist bourgeois life, capitalist development, and modern domestic sphere, all of which are haunted not by guilt, repression, or despair but by cosmological imbalance.

In addition to that, Muzaffar's fiction opens pathways for further critical exploration. One such avenue is the intersection of decolonial gothic with ecocentrism; several narratives, particularly "The Jinn in Mahjbeen's Phupho", gesture toward environmental desecration and its spiritual outcomes. The haunting of spaces following infrastructural disruption or ecological harm invites analysis through both cosmological and ecological lenses, suggesting a frame of eco-spiritual resistance framed within South Asian folk traditions.

Lastly, Muzaffar's storytelling methodology is rooted in a digressive structure, ancestral memory, and rich oral cadence, which resists Western narrative closure and affirms a form of storytelling that is layered, communal, and sacred. Her stories refuse to sever the human form from the divine, the present form from the ancestral, and the domestic form from the enchanted. These narratives not only invite readers to rethink the nature of the gothic but also to reconsider what counts as knowledge, whose stories are told, and the cosmologies that shape a purer understanding of the world. They do not exorcise the spirit; they listen to it.

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