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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bodies, Madness, and Resistance: A Comparative Reading of Anwara Syed Haq's "পাগলি" ("Pagli") and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the patriarchal construction of female madness through a comparative reading of Anwara Syed Haq's "পাগলি" ("Pagli," 2009) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). The study explores a research gap by critiquing the systemic marginalization and objectification of women through psychiatric and social labeling. It focuses on the treatment of Sheuli – an ostracized mother from rural Bangladesh – and Jane – a repressed American victim of medical misogyny. The researcher employs feminist criticism and comparative literary analysis to reveal the shared themes of male dominance, societal surveillance of female bodies, and the attempted stripping of women's agency in these stories. While both protagonists occupy a cross-cultural intersection of gender, madness, and resistance, their responses, linguistic expressions, and embodied behaviors reflect the specificities of their respective sociocultural environments. The paper draws on a multidisciplinary framework, incorporating concepts such as biopower, gaze, panopticism, and hysteria. By juxtaposing the stories, this paper reveals how socially diagnosed mental instability can paradoxically enable women to resist and subvert oppressive societal norms. In comparing these works, the study provides insights into the nuanced portrayal of gendered madness, highlighting both its cultural specificity and universal resonance, as well as its potential as a powerful critique of patriarchal mechanisms.

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1. Introduction

The short stories "পাগলি" ("Pagli"; The Madwoman; 2009) by Bangladeshi writer Anwara Syed Haq (1949-) and "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) by American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) have no factual or historical contact, yet both deal with the same enduring theme in different spatiotemporalities. Parallelly, both stories confront and criticize the role of patriarchy in women's madness, and each has a central character who challenges

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the patriarchal ideology through the experience of madness. This paper conducts a comparative feminist analysis of how these aspects are represented by the respective authors. Employing a topical approach, this inter-literary study intends to establish the similarities and variations in the narrative treatment of madness between the stories. For this purpose, the English translation of Haq's short story, titled "Pagli" (2015), translated by Masrufa Ayesha Nusrat, has been used alongside Gilman's original writing in English. The use of the translation allows for a more equitable comparative framework in the medium of academic English, while also acknowledging the story's original cultural and linguistic roots and remaining sensitive to the possible shifts in meaning that translation may introduce. Through close reading and textual analysis, this study aims to contribute to the broader field of Comparative Literature by foregrounding cross-cultural representations of gendered madness.

It is imperative to mention why "The Yellow Wallpaper," which has an extensive feminist scholarship, is being re-researched in this paper. Existing studies often overlook how cultural contexts shape the representation of mental illness and its connection to gendered resistance. Moreover, reviewing the present literature shows that critical engagement with South Asian literary depictions of female madness, particularly through a comparative lens, remains limited. While "The Hysteric Yell from Women: A Comparative Study of *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *Carrie*" (2021) briefly notes social and temporal influences on the protagonists, it does not provide an in-depth analysis of how specific cultural nuances shape the psychological conditions of women. Dr. Özyön (2020) studies Gilman's feminist development through two of her works: "*The Yellow Wallpaper"* and *Herland*; but she does not analyze the connection between cultural contexts and mental illness. Another study (2019) comparatively explores class difference and racial oppression/resistance in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Abdelmalek). In her comparative paper "Unmuting Women's Bodies," Puthiyedath (2020) investigates how two pioneering women writers

challenge patriarchal discourse by openly addressing female desire and bodily autonomy in their works.

Similar to my paper, Irem Seklem (2014) explicitly engages with how patriarchal cultural contexts define and enforce female madness, linking mental illness representations to gendered subjugation. Likewise, the study "Same Plight, Different Struggle" (2016) takes into account the distinct historical backgrounds, observing how "Unlike Ophelia's submission to her gendered roles assigned by the male order, which doomed her self-destruction and loss of female subjectivity, the narrator in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' went mad as a form of radical revolt against the patriarchal deprivation of her female identity" (Jing 472). In both cases, the focus is on two Western texts, which pose a certain limitation from a cross-cultural perspective. Zi-yi and Xiao-chun (2023) also maintain a strong Western focus using intertextuality theory to examine connections between "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Aligning with the abovementioned gaps, this study examines how Haq and Gilman construct madness as both a product of patriarchal oppression and a vehicle for subversion. The objective is to uncover the ways in which cultural and temporal specificities influence the portrayal of madness, and to explore how such portrayals function as critiques of systemic gendered control in two distinct societies.

2. Methodology of the Study

This paper adopts a library research approach, drawing on scholarly books, journal articles, and online sources, including eBooks. It combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and textual analysis as its primary analytical frameworks. CDA examines language, dialogue patterns, and narrative structures to explore how the protagonists articulate and negotiate their identities under patriarchal scrutiny. Sheuli's erratic expressions reflect her social marginalization and psychological struggle, while Jane's internal monologue and constrained

journal entries reveal her suppressed agency within domestic-medical authority. CDA helps uncover implicit power dynamics, disciplinary discourses, and gendered norms embedded in the texts' language. As Teun A. Van Dijk observes, "Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (466).

Complementing this, textual analysis involves close reading of both stories to analyze narrative style, key excerpts, symbolism, and imagery. "[T]he analyst must understand the broader social structures that influence the messages present in the text under investigation" (Hawkins 1754). This method situates the texts within their distinct socio-historical contexts: Haq's critique of 21st century rural Bangladeshi patriarchy and Gilman's exposure of 19th century American domestic oppression. It reveals how madness, rather than a purely psychological condition, emerges as a culturally embedded response to systemic marginalization. Together, these methods enable a comparative understanding of how gendered madness is constructed, contested, and resisted across different cultural and historical frameworks.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Analysis

This paper provides an intersectional understanding of "Pagli" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" by applying a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, embedded within this study. Broadly drawing from feminist theories, the study integrates insights from Michel Foucault, Laura Mulvey, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, among others. Concepts such as biopower, male gaze, medical gaze, panopticism, the second sex, hysteria, etc., are drawn upon as the complexities between gender, madness, and resistance are explored. Additionally, the research focuses on the points of thematic convergence and divergence. Through this lens,

the study foregrounds how madness functions not merely as a symptom but as a site of contestation and resistance to gendered oppression.

3.2 Comparative Literature

Comparative literature "enables us to discover relations, differences, hidden causes, questions not before asked" and "a hypothesis is always provisional" (Domínguez et al. xvi). This facilitates understanding and practices of inter-animation (exchange, share, appropriation) and reciprocal illumination (symmetry, balance, counter-hegemony), allowing us to develop a more nuanced understanding of our own taste and knowledge, tolerant attitude to the 'other', and a critical-dialectical awareness of contingency. It tells us that there are worlds outside the world we live in, that there are the others that complement each self. Ben Hutchinson states "From the early 19th century to the early 21st, 'doing' comparative literature has meant doing something that is ultimately impossible—namely, mediating in an unprejudiced way between competing traditions" (38). In attempting this 'impossible' task, this paper provides a comparative analysis of "*Pagli* and "*The Yellow Wallpaper,"* drawing upon Dionýz Ďurišin's theory of typological affinities: Literary similarity between two works (at least) that cannot be explained by contact **(**Domínguez et al. 144)**.** Thus, the literary similarities arise not from direct contact between the two works but from analogous economic, social, political, or psychological conditions (Domínguez 63). This framework facilitates cross-cultural comparisons by focusing on shared themes, narrative structures, and character tropes shaped by similar socio-historical pressures.

In applying this theory, typological affinity allows for an examination of how both authors – Anwara Syed Haq and Charlotte Perkins Gilman – portray women who are silenced, surveilled, and medicalized under male-dominated systems, even though the two stories have completely different geographical and temporal contexts (detailed in "Methodology" section). Sheuli's social ostracization and Jane's psychological repression echo each other thematically, revealing a

typological connection rooted in systemic gendered marginalization. This approach underscores how similar literary representations of madness can emerge from distinct yet structurally parallel patriarchal cultures.

4. Narrating Madness Across Cultures

Written in the third-person omniscient point of view, "Pagli" is a 21st century Bangla narrative about a mother, possibly named Sheuli, who escapes from her village as a result of experiencing postpartum depression. Caught stealing from a shop at the next village, the hysteric, frenzied woman is chased by a group of young boys and physically abused until finally being taken in by a local family. Throughout the story, her naked, bruised body is the focus of the sexually charged 22-year-old Khorshed, a member of that family. Haq provides a critical feminist perspective on the treatment of Sheuli in a rural Bangladeshi setting, highlighting how the gaze of Khorshed and the social context constructs the identity of this mother, labelling her as a 'pagli' or 'madwoman'. Being a victim of social stigma, discrimination, and the resulting hysteria or madness, Sheuli reacts in a manner that is unlike the social norms and challenges the boundaries set forth by the values and ideologies of patriarchy. As Mah-Zareen writes: "Subverting the paradigmatic norms, she seems to live in a world of her own where other people's decisions simply do not count. Failing in her role as a mother, she becomes aimless, senseless and strips herself of clothes and all sanctioned codes of society" (25-26).

To rewind a hundred years, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's semi-autobiographical short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" tells a similar tale of a mother experiencing postpartum depression, narrated in the first-person, set in an American countryside estate. The unnamed mother, possibly called Jane, is a creative individual who is driven to psychosis due to her physician husband's recommendation of the 'rest cure' being enforced upon her. In this critical feminist narrative, Gilman directly refers to its creator, physician Silas Weir Mitchell, and critiques such "a striking example of 19th century medical

misogyny" (Stiles 32) in this story. Just like Sheuli, this woman also becomes the object of gaze of her husband, but her body is kept captive in a room, fully clothed, as opposed to the naked body of Sheuli in the open, public sphere. Enclosed in an old children's nursery decorated with yellow wallpaper, Jane starts hallucinating that the wallpaper moves and there is a woman behind it trying to get out. Jane records her journey from sanity towards lunacy in her journal.

5. The Mad Body and the Male Gaze

Both protagonists are excluded and marginalized by their societies for being mad. The unclothed body of the mad Sheuli becomes a form of license for the so-called 'normal' people with sound minds to enact violence upon her bare body. The shedding of her clothes might be a result of her insane volition, yet this angers the community she encounters. They cannot allow her to run amok without covering her body, which is marked by that very society, manifesting its religious and cultural values, as a sign of a woman's modesty, dignity, motherhood, womanhood, etc. It is pertinent to note that men's bodies are also subject to such normative codes of decorum and religious modesty. However, the distinction lies in the fact that women are more intensively policed, with greater surveillance and symbolic burden placed on their embodiment. As Mahmood postulates, "women's adoption of religious clothing is taken to be a sign of social coercion in a way that men's wearing of religiously symbolic clothing is not" (75). This renders the experience categorically gendered and asymmetrical in most cases. In the same manner, Sheuli's body is literally marked as a sort of punishment for subverting the established social codes as Haq writes: "The infuriated boys started throwing whatever they could get hold of: clods of earth, broken pieces of brick, lumps of concrete" ("Pagli" 80). Sheuli's cries of protest at her tormentors angers them further since she is not supposed to act like a normal person, "They were unwilling to accept any protest from a mad woman. Why should an abnormal creature behave like a normal person?" (80). The ab/normal dichotomy is interestingly reminiscent of Arundhati Roy's character Ammu, who broke the love laws "that

lay down who should be loved and how. And how much." (Roy 40). Sheuli, much like Ammu, is a non-conforming individual who steps outside the social norms and defy gendered expectations. Thus, her protest is overlooked as she does not act the way the tormentors anticipate, or rather permit. The merit of her protest is not taken into consideration and her voice is actively stifled. Due to Sheuli's madness, she is treated by the phallocentric public like an animal, "[the boys] beat her as they used to beat the monkeys" (Haq, "Pagli" 86).

Perhaps, Haq intentionally discards Sheuli of her clothes to criticize the dominant social and religious metanarratives that exist in Bangladesh, in relation to Muslim women's clothing. In saying so, this act of disrobing can also be interpreted broadly as a symbolic rejection of all kinds of bodily regulation, which reveals a critique that transcends gender and/or religious boundaries. Even after discarding normal behavior and being identified as "an abnormal creature" (80), it is still expected of the abnormal Sheuli to cover herself from the gaze of boys and follow the social codes set forth for 'normal' women, while the male gaze is kept unchecked. This complexity adds another gendered layer to Foucault's panoptic lens, where he notes: "Visibility is a trap" (*Discipline and Punish* 200). The contradiction lies in how visibility becomes a form of punishment for women, while the enforcers of this patriarchal surveillance remain largely invisible, unaccountable, and normalized in their authority.

On one occasion, the *Choto chachi* (Khorshed's paternal uncle's wife) rebukes Sheuli for her immodesty: "'You shameless whore! Cover yourself properly with your sari! Aren't you ashamed to walk around naked in front of these grown-up boys? Do they understand that you're mad?'" (83-84). Dictated by internalized patriarchy, the passive, submissive and subordinate position of women in society is reflected in her words, "'How stupid of her family to let her walk about like this!'" (84). Though it is her body, Sheuli is not free to do with it what she pleases, her body is openly criticized, shamed, and abused by the patriarchal society, "every inch of her body was wrapped in ceaseless tears, blood, frustration, sorrow

and bereavement" (89). This echoes Simone de Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex*, "And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called 'the sex,' meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; … He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (26). In light of this, Sheuli's agency is doubly removed: first, through her gendered reduction to 'the Other,' and second, through her classification as mentally 'other' than normal.

In her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey notes how "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (11). This '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' is evident in both short stories. Although Mulvey's theory originates in film studies, it is applicable here as both narratives construct the female body as a site of visual control, objectification, and social judgment within a patriarchal gaze. Gilman's protagonist is continuously supervised and kept in check as she details in her journal, "[John] hardly lets me stir without special direction" (2). This literal gaze takes a symbolic form in John's absence as Jane feels that the wallpaper "looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!" (Gilman 4). She talks about how "two bulbous eyes stare at [her]" (4) and how their impertinent, undying look angers her. These eyes crawl about in all directions and "those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere" (4). When she thinks John has noticed how she has been tearing off the wallpaper, she writes "I don't like the look in his eyes" (11). The eyes of patriarchy monitor Jane all the time as she is stuck in one room with nothing to do but follow the patterns of the wallpaper.

In Haq's story. Sheuli's postnatal body, full of "an ocean of milk" (Haq, "Pagli" 89), becomes the site of male desire and a "sexed body" (qtd. in Mah-Zareen 26) to satisfy the lust of men. Her body is vividly described by her unconsented observer Khorshed, who "marveled at the beauty of the woman's body despite all the battering" (Haq, "Pagli" 81) and whose "eyes were glued to her body. Everything else in the world seemed insignificant at that moment" (82). In both

cases, the women are objectified and subjected to the surveillance of the ever watchful/erotic male gaze. Their madness is caused by it and the gaze justifies its operation due to the madness. This reflects the position of control and authority of the men and the subservient position of passive powerlessness of the mad women.

6. Gaze, Power, and Discipline

In his discussion on 'Biopower,' Michel Foucault illustrates the tendency of power to progressively seize "things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it" (*The History of Sexuality* 136). This is vividly portrayed through Gilman's protagonist, who is completely isolated from social interactions, prohibited from going to places and meeting people, instructed to bed rest, and is "absolutely forbidden to 'work'" (1), i.e. write. In the name of treatment, passivity and intellectual suppression is forced upon her by her husband John, who "has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies" (Gilman 3-4). Jane is robbed of her imaginative faculty and subjugated to physical confinement. Everything she can and cannot do is determined by the likes of her husband, and all her veiled disagreements or protests are either unheard, ignored or dismissed. She is diagnosed with what John calls "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (1) and he denies her real condition, "he does not believe I am sick!" (1). Due to being an inferior woman, "the Other," her opinion is considered invalid and emotional. Her agency is taken away step by step, which contributes to the loss of her sense of individuality and selfhood, leading to her eventual psychosis. Even, she directly blames John for her condition: "John is a physician … perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster" (1).

The constructed abnormality of Sheuli and Jane closely aligns with another type of gaze articulated by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). This objective,

albeit hierarchical, 'medical gaze' "abstracts the suffering person from her sociological context and reframes her as a 'case' or a 'condition'" (qtd. in Balcioglu). On a similar note, the people surrounding the protagonists fail to notice their owns role in shaping the women's madness. Instead, they isolate the patients from the sociocultural and subjective realities that contribute to their distress, reducing them to problems that must be managed or treated. Sheuli and Jane become objects of scrutiny, their narratives eclipsed by a dominant clinical discourse. This dehumanizing authority, intersecting with gender dynamics, reinforces a power structure that not only silences and oppresses women but also produces a monotonous kind of knowledge—one that conveniently equates femininity with hysteria.

7. Infantilization, Silencing, and Loss of Voice

In terms of moral responsibility, Katie Peters contends how the infantilization narrative maintains "that women do not have sufficient knowledge or control to be responsible for their behavior—it reverts them to the status of children, underdeveloped in knowledge capacities and under the protection of others in their choices (thus lacking control as another will act on their behalf)" (14). In her article, she notes how treating a White woman like a child is often used to excuse her from blame—either by others who see her that way and do not hold her responsible, or by the woman herself to avoid being held accountable (Peters 14). Similarly, Jane denies her own instincts about her condition under the authority of John, "Personally, I disagree with their ideas. … But what is one to do?" (Gilman 1). Her marginalization is evident in the line, "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition" (1). She is almost treated like an infant by her husband who condescendingly calls her "a little girl" (7) and keeps her in a room with "windows [that] are barred for little children" (2). He keeps reassuring her that under his prescribed medicine and food regimen her condition is improving. However, when she contradicts him by saying that perhaps it is only her body that has improved but not her mind, he calls

it “a false and foolish fancy” (8). Being a man, he has access to knowledge, financial independence, and public life; as a woman, Jane is denied those same privileges. While she thinks “that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me [her] good” (1), he denies all her feminine and weak “fancies” (3) and does not even agree to redecorate her suffocating room.

It is interesting that in earlier texts such as Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879), resistant female figures like Nora defied such patriarchal constraints consciously. Yet Jane’s struggle in “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which was published later, reflects how deeply entrenched such systems of gendered control remained, particularly within the medical and domestic domains. Unable to articulate her condition, Jane protests in a rather tragic and metaphoric manner, portraying the darker side of resistance, i.e., the cost of sanity. In 19th century America, elite, educated women were institutionally silenced, just like this narrator and the author herself. Directly referring to Gilman, Appignanesi observes how she was “finally released from Weir Mitchell’s rest cure only to be instructed to ‘Live as domestic a life as possible…Have but two hours’ intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live.’” (328). The diverse endings of Nora and Jane, and of course Sheuli, depict the wide spectrum of female resistance, from symbolic breakdown to active rebellion, with each character shaped very much by the limits of their respective contexts, consciousness, and voice.

The voicelessness of Sheuli and Jane is most prominently reflected in the fact that both protagonists are somewhat nameless. The character Sumona hears the name ‘Sheuli’ from *Choto chachi* but it is not confirmed. Calling her by her new psychological status, Sumona asks “‘*Pagli*, what’s your name?’” (Haq 85). Mah-Zareen observes, “She is not only robbed of her clothes, but also of her name. She is now only ‘Pagli’ for everyone … Sheuli becomes nothing but a mere ‘female body’ ready to be ravished to satisfy a male’s turgid desire” (26). Sheuli does not even get to write her own story, unlike Jane. Jane only journals in secret and is always on the lookout from John and his sister Jennie. For instance, she fearfully

records: “There comes John, and I must put this away, —he hates to have me write a word” (Gilman 3) or “There comes John’s sister. … I must not let her find me writing. ... I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!” (4). Writing is the only way this woman can express her identity, voice, agency, and autonomy, and so when she gets too sick and tired to write, her postpartum depression takes the form of psychosis. She starts to imagine a woman behind the wallpaper, a symbol of the patriarchy that suffocates her, and in the height of her madness she claims to have escaped from John and “Jane” (13), which is perhaps her own name. According to Sabina Dosani, “Gilman fashions a nameless writer, banned from writing, writing about going mad, going mad as she writes” (411). Anwesha Sahoo points out: “The fact that she is nameless hints at the universality of women in similar situations who are forced to restrict their voice” (202).

Namelessness also highlights how motherhood is intricately associated with the identity of womanhood. For instance, Sumona says regarding Sheuli, “her body bears the signs of someone who has recently given birth. She probably has more children” (Haq, “Pagli” 86). Khorshed also refers to two other nameless women, two mothers who became mad because of being tortured in their families, “cursed and kicked, slapped and beaten … forced to stand in ponds in water up to their noses to cool their brains” (81), much like how John feels about Jane’s fancies. Along with these women, the individual identities of ‘Sheuli’ and ‘Jane’ become lost under the shroud of motherhood. Ultimately, they emerge as anonymous mad women with no personal identity other than being mothers and wives – roles decided for them by the men of their societies.

Not all women might experience the same voicelessness. Indeed, in some cases, women may even have the upper hand in domestic dynamics with dormant male counterparts. However, in this particular paper, the protagonists of Gilman and Haq specifically depict the opposite but common pattern - one where women’s madness is integrally associated with their slow erasure.

8. The Symbolic Rope and the Return to Control

There is a certain phantasmagoric quality to how both women call "attention to the hypervisibility and cultural constructions of [gender]," rehearsing "ways to render … gender categories 'strange' and to thus 'disturb' cultural perceptions of identity formation" (Brooks 5). Sheuli and Jane make traditional gender stereotypes appear unfamiliar—thereby unsettling dominant understandings of identity in a way that mirrors the shifting, illusory nature of phantasmagoria. In patriarchal narratives, normal women usually follow and submit to the laws and social codes stereotyped for them by the phallocentric society. However, neither Sheuli nor Jane are normal women. Therefore, they both challenge the existing systems in their own contexts. In order to prevent them from doing so, rope serves as a subtle but strong symbol of patriarchy in both the stories. The extent of Sheuli's subversion through madness ends very soon since "society cannot allow a mad woman to [keep] wander[ing] on her own without any male supervision" (Mah-Zareen 26). She is cleaned up, fed, dressed in a modest *sari* (traditional garment of women in Bangladesh), and tied up in the cow-shed with a rope. Khorshed is asked to "keep an eye on her at night" and "See that she does not untie the rope and escape" (Haq, "Pagli" 87), so that they can hand her over once they can trace her family. It is ironic that Khorshed is instructed to be her guardian and she is not handed over to the police as they "were quite capable of raping her in their custody" (87), yet Khorshed is the very person who attempts to molest her at the end of the story.

Similarly, John appears to be the guardian in Gilman's story when he intellectually and physically suffocates Jane in the name of treatment. This was a Victorian method of treatment that aimed to domesticate women and keep them secluded in the privacy of their home, where they belonged. It served as a tool to regulate women, teach them self-control and how to act 'properly' as wife and mother, "reinforce 'proper' sexual behavior" (Stiles 32), and discourage intellectual pursuits. As a result of this treatment, Jane internalizes the oppressive

nature of patriarchy and finds a rope to tie the creeping woman behind the wallpaper if she tries to escape, one who symbolizes all women who are suppressed by patriarchy and the misogynistic rest cure for this apparent 'women's disease'. Losing all perception of herself, the mad woman becomes the prisoner of her own self that she tries to break free from. She writes in her journal, "I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!" (Gilman 12). This notion of self-imprisonment is apparent with regards to panopticism: "[S]He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; … [s]he inscribes in [her]self the power relation in which [s]he simultaneously plays both roles; [s]he becomes the principle of [her] own subjection" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 202-203). For Jane and Sheuli, rope stands for the limitations, constraints, shackles of patriarchy that prevent, restrict, suppress them from being their true selves.

9. Madness as Resistance and Reclamation

Paradoxically, the very system that caused their madness in the first place serves as a way out of patriarchy for both women. As Michel Foucault contends: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*The History of Sexuality* 95). This also corresponds with the feminist reinterpretations of hysteria, as Elaine Showalter asserts: "Feminist understanding of hysteria has been influenced by work in semiotics and discourse theory, seeing hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, communicating through the body messages that cannot be verbalized" (286). In the chapter "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender," she further notes how the 'herstory' of hysteria argues that it stems more from the oppressive social roles imposed on women than from biological or psychological flaws, tracing its roots to cultural myths surrounding femininity and to the influence of patriarchal power structures (287).

Madness becomes a tool for Sheuli's subversion in two instances. After being continuously pelted with stones and tortured, at one point she resists and fights back; as the following excerpt describes, "Continuing to scream, the mad woman suddenly wheeled around and ran in the direction from where she had come. Khorshed saw her white dilated eyes fill with anger rather than fear. Clenching her teeth, her naked breasts swaying, her arms held aloft, the mad woman ran back towards the boys" (Haq, "Pagli" 81). This resistance is met with success as "The bunch of hooligans were terrified and stepped out of her path" (81). So, Sheuli's body becomes symbolic of, firstly, her objectification, and secondly, her emancipation. Her second mode of resistance comes from her gaze rather than her body. As Khorshed approaches Sheuli, "The woman smiled in response, and lifting her face, looked at Khorshed. … Her gaze was so normal that Khorshed was perplexed. When an abnormal person behaves normally, it is intimidating, thought Khorshed. … the woman continued to watch … Khorshed felt rather uneasy" (85). In a sane condition, Sheuli would not possibly have the psychological and physical temperament to challenge her sociocultural system the way she did. But now she reclaims the gaze and throws it back at her observer, challenging his personal space and disturbing his normalness.

Madness also serves as a type of reclamation for Jane. Her first form of resistance against patriarchy was journaling about her madness, which she eventually fails to continue – coincidentally due to her madness. She begins questioning the so-called love, kindness, and care of her husband, and slowly begins to associate herself with the creeping woman and the "great many women behind" (Gilman 10) the moving wallpaper she studies every night. She starts to rip off the paper and when Jennie wants to do it, she threateningly claims "no person touches this paper but me—not *alive!*" (12). Tearing up the yellow wallpaper is symbolic of the protagonist's protest against her husband, who refused to change the wallpaper, which "becomes bars" (8) at nighttime. In the penultimate scene, she locks herself in her room and begins creeping around which represents that she now holds the power to the room which was previously her prison, with John as

its warden. She tells him, "'I've got out at last,' ... 'I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!'" (13). Jane finally breaks free from her feminized prison, the yellow wallpaper, where she was visibly and strategically confined, both physically and ideologically. By challenging the surveilling prison system, she questions the legitimacy of the punishments she has faced so far, unlearning her internalization. Her freedom is manifested when John is bound to take the passive role and she domineeringly calls him a "young man" (13). She subverts the gaze that dominated her by gazing back, "I looked at him over my shoulder" (13), which causes John to faint as she creeps over his fainted body. She dismisses her submissive position as his kept wife and descends into madness triumphantly. Therefore, in both stories, madness symbolizes the women's victimization by patriarchy as well as their tactical resistances to societal norms. After all, "The delinquent is an institutional product" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 301). Haq's and Gilman's protagonists – products of the structures that create them, and in turn, aim to define and confine them – navigate and practice subtle defiance in the respective narratives. Instead, they reject their victimhood, with their hysteria evolving as the site of silent, embodied protest.

10. Concluding Reflections and Implications: Cultural Groundings and Universal Themes

Haq and Gilman challenge the role that patriarchy plays in constructing madness in women. The Victorian values that are abundant in Gilman's short story are synonymous with the religio-rural patriarchal values found in Haq's short story. The madness that ensues from the oppressive mechanisms of the two phallocentric sociocultural systems, ironically, serves as a form of resistance against and emancipation from those systems for Sheuli and Jane. Madness is the only medium through which they can take back control of their life, and it frees them from their imposed identity as solely wife and mother, as dictated by the men. Both authors, through different representations, criticize the gendered, misogynist treatment of madness and unveil the politics of patriarchal ideology that operates underneath. Though it appears to be two individual cases, what is noticeable is the

similar defective, dysfunctional mistreatment by men in both instances. Jane and Sheuli do not merely represent resistance on the personal level, but an outcry against the cultural construction of women's hysteria, one that inscribes the female body and psyche as a site of weakness and surrender, to be conditioned and kept in line by men.

Both authors comment on the impact of patriarchal suppression and marginalization on the body, psyche, and identity of women. However, their approach and degree of representation varies largely. Gilman's representation is more psychological, i.e. focusing on the mind of a woman forced to reside indoors, whereas Haq's approach deviates by focusing more on the physical, i.e. the body of a naked woman in the public domain under multiple gazes. This deviation may be due to differing spatiotemporalities and cultural contexts as well as ideological variations. Perhaps because of the progresses in women's rights since the 19th century, Sheuli can access the public space while Jane cannot. However, in Bangladesh, especially the rural region, "women's unconvincing place [is] conditioned by our religion and patriarchal society" ("Anwara Syed Haq"). As a result, Sheuli faces more physical, verbal, communal, systemic violence and social ostracization from her Muslim community, in contrast to Jane's medicalized, insidiously psychological, forcefully isolated, creatively repressed, and gaslighted abuse. Sheuli may be externally allowed in the public realm, and not interiorized like Jane, but her body is marked, and mind is regulated continuously, so as to remind her of her "negligible position in family life and society" ("Anwara Syed Haq"), even when she has broken all the codes of that society. Thus, the religious ideology plays a significant role alongside patriarchy in Haq's representation, as opposed to Gilman's. Furthermore, Gilman's representation of female madness makes more use of symbols, as opposed to Haq's representation which relies more on the literal structural erasure to represent "women's oppressive state against male domineer" ("Anwara Syed Haq").

This study also reveals a certain disturbingly persistent ‘universality’ or commonness in human experience, specifically women’s realities. This is the violence and domination of patriarchy and its traumatic impact upon the identity, body, and mind of women. While the heteronormative norms of decorum and modesty extend to both men and women, this paper emphasizes the disproportionate burden borne by women - across cultures and histories - under patriarchal systems. Although the texts belong to two separate languages, cultures, nations, and are written more than 100 years apart, the ideology remains unchanged, merely operating in differing regulatory forms. Therefore, broader impact of this comparative study is two-fold. Initially, it explores the changing spatiotemporalities, i.e. how changes in the sociocultural contexts condition the representation of female madness and determine the different ways the politics of patriarchy functions. Secondly, authorial agency factors in affecting this representation. Rooted in a more Western, medicalized scenario, Gilman had a personal agenda to criticize Weir Mitchell and his sexist treatment of the ‘rest cure’, whereas Haq intended to portray the condition of female madness in the Eastern religious and sociocultural context of her country. In this sense, both stories appear to be locally and culturally grounded in their own unique ways, while simultaneously encompassing broader universal themes.

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