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Reappropriation of Western Tropes in Ayesha Muzaffar's *Jinnistan* and *The Bhabhis of Lahore*: A Case for Pakistani Anglophone Paranormal Short Fiction

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores paranormal elements in Ayesha Muzaffar's short story collections, Jinnistan (2023) and The Bhabhis of Lahore (2022), both of which are notable contributions to Pakistani Anglophone paranormal short fiction. The study investigates how religious and cultural influences shape the portrayal of paranormal creatures in Pakistani literature, with a specific focus on the reappropriation of Western paranormal tropes. While Western fiction often portrays possession through a Christian lens, Pakistani works reinterpret this theme using Islamic perspectives on jinn and maintain a distinctly South Asian supernatural aesthetic. Thus, the objective is to explore the distinct characteristics of Pakistani paranormal short fiction and how Western tropes are adapted within this framework.*

Keywords: paranormal fiction, jinn, reappropriation, supernatural, Islamic beliefs, folklore, possession

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Introduction

Pakistani paranormal fiction has long been an established genre, but primarily in Urdu. One of the most popular examples of this is the Darr digest, a widely read publication that has captivated readers for generations. This genre's enduring presence can be attributed to its deep roots in oral storytelling traditions, passed down from elders to younger generations. Religion has also played a central role, as belief in the existence of jinn is a fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings, and this acknowledgment has shaped much of the narrative content in Urdu paranormal fiction. Additionally, Pakistan's historical connection to India before independence has resulted in the integration of stories about bhoot and churail—mythical spirits and ghosts from Indian and Bangladeshi cultures—into its paranormal literature. This blend of religious beliefs and shared cultural heritage has given rise to a unique and ever-evolving body of Urdu paranormal fiction.

In contrast, Pakistani Anglophone paranormal short fiction is a relatively recent development. Writers such as Ayesha Muzaffar and Usman T. Malik have brought this genre to the forefront by crafting stories in English that retain the cultural richness of Urdu fiction while making it accessible to a global audience. This emerging genre is steadily gaining popularity, offering a fresh perspective while staying true to the deep-seated traditions of storytelling in Pakistan. While Pakistani paranormal short fiction is deeply rooted in religious and cultural practices, it also adeptly reimagines tropes and motifs from Western paranormal fiction, an already well-established and widely recognized genre, within a uniquely Pakistani context. Authors like Ayesha Muzaffar, for example, integrate local folklore, Islamic beliefs, and societal norms with familiar elements such as haunted houses, ghostly apparitions, and paranormal entities in her short story collections, Jinnistan (2023) and The Bhabhis of Lahore (2022). This fusion not only creates a unique blend that resonates with both local and global audiences but also highlights the versatility and adaptability of Pakistani paranormal short fiction across different global and cultural landscapes.

Despite the two genres being separated by regions and distance, there is a significant overlap in themes, characters, and motifs between Pakistani and Western paranormal fiction. While Pakistani stories focus on jinn and churails, Western stories often feature ghosts and poltergeists. It goes without saying that religion holds a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of the paranormal in both Pakistani and Western fiction. However, it's also important to recognize that contemporary Western paranormal fiction draws heavily from imagination and scientific concepts.

In Western paranormal fiction, characters often acquire their powers through various paranormal means. Such exploration of the paranormal powers extends

beyond cultural narratives and into popular Western fiction where series like The Vampire Chronicles (1976-2018) by Anne Rice, The Vampire Diaries (1991–1992) by L. J. Smith, and Twilight (2005-2020) by Stephenie Meyer feature a variety of paranormal beings, including vampires, werewolves, and hybrids. These stories blend old myths with modern science and imaginative storytelling, where vampires grapple with their immortality, werewolves confront their dual nature, and hybrids combine traits from different paranormal beings. In many popular series like Twilight, vampires and humans are often portrayed as procreating a third creature, which possesses the traits of both humans and vampires. As one part of it is human, the new vampire will exhibit humane characteristics, such as emotional depth and moral dilemmas, alongside their paranormal traits. This blending of human and vampire traits creates complex characters who navigate their dual nature, adding depth to the narrative. In the contemporary world,

The vampires which were originally creatures to fear, have become more sympathetic which helps people relate to their trials and suffering. The "old" vampires are similar to how vampires were portrayed in folklore that is as monsters that celebrate the evil inside of them. The "new" vampires on the other hand relate less to the folkloric legends for they are more like humans than monsters, as they still hold onto morality. (Guðmundsdóttir 1)

While vampires and werewolves do not exist in Pakistani folklore, Pakistani paranormal short fiction reimagines these paranormal beings as creatures from local mythology, specifically jinn. This unique twist on Western tropes features human-jinn marriages, where humans and jinn come together, resulting in offspring with special features. The offspring resulting from these unions can manifest in two distinct forms. One possibility is a human child who is possessed by a jinn, experiencing paranormal phenomena, unsettling thoughts, and disturbing urges as a result of this connection. Alternatively, the offspring can appear as lizards, snakes, or other scaly creatures that jinn are known to shape-shift in Islam. Shaykh al-Islam (Ibn Taymiyah) stated,

The jinn may appear in human and animal form, so they may appear as snakes and scorpions etc, or in the form of camels, cattle, sheep, horses, mules and donkeys, or in the form of birds, or in the form of humans, as the shaytan came to Quraysh in the form of Suraqah ibn Malik ibn Ju'sham when they wanted to set out for Badr. (qtd. in "What Do Jinn Look Like?")

It goes without saying that humans and jinn cannot have an appropriate offspring, given the difference in species and the fact that human-jinn marriages are impermissible in Islam. However, romance and empathy between humans and jinn are the most common themes in not just Pakistani paranormal fiction, but

also across global Islamic societies. David Ghanim in The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights explores deeply the themes of love between jinn and humans, highlighting how the existence of jinn and their interactions with humans, including romantic and sexual relationships, are so ingrained in cultural understanding that they are seen as normal and acceptable (Ghanim 52). In the narrative of Arabian Nights, romance is depicted as an irrational and uncontrollable force, making relationships with jinn unsurprising given that love itself is portrayed as enigmatic and beyond full comprehension (Ghanim 53). Hence,

…the jinn are not to be blamed for falling in love with them, but the real culprit is love itself, which is uncontrollable and striking in strange ways. Just like love among humans, these stories narrate about princes who fall in love with jinn instantaneously, love attachments are ignited by seeing a portrait of a jinnah, pinning with grief when the beloved is far away, taking dangerous and long journeys in search of the beloved, and enduring hardships to be united with them. (Ghanim 53)

It's because of such fascination with the rare occurrence of love between jinn and humans that these relationships are often depicted with a sense of mystery and acceptance in cultural narratives. Although such interactions are rare in real life, local mythology in the Pakistani context often depicts interactions between human males and beautiful shape-shifting beings such as sirens, churails, and pichal-peris. These mythical creatures are not described as partaking in intimate encounters with human males, but are sometimes portrayed as taking on the role of a wife in these mythological narratives. On the other side, jinn are often depicted as falling in love with human females and even possessing their bodies out of jealousy to prevent human men from having them.

However, regardless of gender, humans are often left at a disadvantage in such relationships. The romantic encounter often does not end well for humans, and characters like Yawar from "3 men 3 stories" and Ali from "Chachu Ali's Jinni" in Jinnistan face severe consequences for engaging in a haram relationship. Where Yawar is cursed with the inability to hear the divine after engaging in love-making with the siren, Ali spends all his life in obsession and despair, hoping to find the pichal-peri he encountered on a mountain road. The fixation led him to physical and mental deterioration, ultimately driving him to madness in a futile search for his lost love.

Similar becomes the fate of women, too, who fall victim to the jinn's love. As jinn are made of fire, they experience heightened emotions, including jealousy and revenge, inflicting harm on anyone who tries to free the woman of jinn possession. In some narratives, the woman gets impregnated with a jinn, though

these females have little say in the act of consummation because jinn manipulate their memories, causing them to be unaware of the jinn's presence and to dismiss any recollections as nightmares. The pregnant female does not become alarmed until the strange symptoms of pregnancy appear. "The Womb" in Jinnistan is one such narrative about Kiran, who became extremely sick as a result of an odd pregnancy, possibly caused by a jinn. Her pregnancy symptoms were even stranger, for

> What showed up as the eight month on the reports, was the third month of pregnancy for Kiran…each time she felt the child move, she had a panic attack…Kiran never peed…Weeks passed and [she] stopped talking. She occasionally ate, painted her nails, and believed everything was well…She looked like a wilted flower, half devoured by hoverflies. (Muzaffar 76-77)

One day, Kiran was rushed to the hospital because of her deteriorating health. She went to the bathroom and prepared for the delivery. The first minute went easy while the second minute felt like forever. She delivered in the third minute and found "on the bathroom floor, covered in blood, lay a beautiful, giant, baby lizard" (77). She picked up the lizard and kissed it, referring to it as her "beautiful winter child" (77), a sign that she had been possessed during her pregnancy.

Kiran's disturbing pregnancy by a jinn and the born creature as a result is not an uncommon motif in South Asian folklore and Pakistani paranormal fiction. In "Shaadi Ever After," a short story in The Bhabhis of Lahore (2023) by Ayesha Muzaffar, Sajeer grapples with the unsettling truth of an altered reality, where her former lover is revealed to be a jinn, and the child she carries in her womb is his offspring. Though her memories are manipulated, her marriage with Nibhaan faces the real consequences of paranormal control as she struggles to distinguish reality from illusion.

Despite believing in an everlasting love with her cousin Hashim, Sajeer was married to Nibhaan and brought to a house that seemed alive. The fifty-five-year-old house had been home to Hindu landlords who set their wives on fire, Aryan soldiers with dancing women, and people who rebuilt it after a brothel was destroyed. Having housed both humans and supernatural entities, the house quickly began playing tricks on Sajeer's mind. One moment, the sky was clear; the next, it was raining. She dreamt of her sister-in-law levitating and chasing her through rice fields, leaving real wounds that vanished in an instant. Sweets turned into worm-infested horrors, only to reappear intact. Strange objects like nails wrapped in newspaper disappeared without explanation. She often overheard her husband and sister-in-law whispering about a jinn in the house.

Her relationship with Nibhaan, her husband, was even more bizarre and complicated. He could predict the exact timing of her irregular periods, recall her thoughts about Hashim, and even identify objects she touched by scent. His most bizarre behavior surfaced between Zohar and Maghrib on Fridays when his "pale color would turn rosy pink, and his devilish eyes would turn loopy and sleepy" (171), making it seem like she lived with two husbands—one affectionate and another disturbingly omniscient. However, the real horror began during their honeymoon when, on the flight to Bangkok, Sajeer dreamt that

…the plane stood still, and little dwarfs fell from the sky and entered it. They slowly spread my legs apart and planted a seed inside. Lying next…was a goat with its legs apart as well, and the dwarf accidentally planted a human baby seed in the goat…and..the goat baby…inside me. (162)

Upon arrival, she found her upper vagina stapled "with a funny string" (162), which dissolved into her skin over time. It was one month after the honeymoon that Sajeer started to feel dizzier and dizzier. She felt overstimulated by lights, and her body appeared to be floating during sleep. When she tried to inspect the situation by opening her eyes one night, she saw that "many women with cloaks covering their faces, had lifted [her] on the top of their heads. They were swinging [her] in a calm manner, as if [she] was a baby that they were singing a soothing lullaby to" (171-172). Soon after, everyone congratulated Sajeer on her pregnancy, but she wanted to confirm it with a proper test. On checking with a pregnancy stick, there appeared "two red lines. And then just at that moment, a third one formed. Within a moment, the line had six red lines on it" (174). Soon, her stomach expanded at an unnatural pace, resembling a nine-month pregnancy within two months. One evening in the pool, she heard voices calling "Mama" from inside her belly—first a child's, then a baby's cry, then a manly scream. She felt

…a scaly movement up my legs…like a cold, cold, thing had been thrust up the vaginal canal…[it was] a moist, flaky exterior which was constantly in motion. I quickly pulled it towards the ground…which led to a tight, cramp in [her] vagina…A splash of liquid appeared on the ground…There, lying in front…covered in a sticky liquid was a baby snake-like creature. It started wiggling towards me. Mama. (200)

Yet, no one believed Sajeer, not even doctors. Struggling with these horrors, she confided in Hashim, who gave her verses to recite for cleansing. Unknowingly, she uttered Satanic verses, leading to her sister-in-law's possession by multiple Hindu jinn. Tragedies followed: Nibhaan lost a major business deal, and his mother died suddenly. He blamed Sajeer, revealing that her family had a history

of marrying jinn due to an ancestral debt. He told Sajeer about meeting her mother before the wedding, who

…said that in their family, girls had been married to jinn…This…happens because of a debt that your ancestors took from the jinn, and it won't stop. So, one day your mama started to dream about a jinn asking for your hand in marriage…Your mama didn't permit it to see you, but then when the jinn showered your baba with opportunities, your mama with a house and jewels…She told the jinn that yes, my daughter is rightfully yours. (203-204)

However, the jinn was left furious over losing his human wife, as Sajeer's mother broke the pact with him. Desperate to reunite with his lover, the jinn started doing hazri on Sajeer's cousin, Hashim, "so that fire and clay could unite" (204). In Islam, hazri refers to a jinn being summoned or manifesting through a human host, often during rituals or possession, where the jinn speaks or acts through the person. Hazri is often a part of ruqya, where jinn are summoned during the recitation of specific prayers to confront and expel them (Zadeh 131-60). However, hazri often results in the jinn taking control, causing the possessed individual to act out of character while others remain unaware that it is the jinn acting and not the real person. The person's memories are often manipulated by the jinn, leaving them unaware of what happened during the possession, as if they had no recollection of the events. This is why Hashim does not remember ever being in love with Sajeer, but she vividly recalls moments they shared, unaware that these memories are merely fabrications planted by the jinn. After her marriage to Nibhaan, the jinn also manipulated Sajeer's memories. When she believed she was seeing Hashim and receiving verses from him to cleanse the house and its members, it was actually the jinn orchestrating these events. As Nibhaan tells her,

You never did go home. You never left the premises. The house didn't let you. You sat in the living room and talked to your mama and in that very living room you sat and held my hand and called me Hashim…I saw the jinn make love to you at night, hurt you till you wept and I took you in my arms and consoled you. I know this child is not mine…because before yesterday night, I never in my right mind slept with you. (186-205)

Nibhaan was instructed to take Shajeer seas apart to prevent the jinn from following them, but the vengeful jinn retaliated by killing Nibhaan's mother, driving his sister insane, and ruining his career. The story ends with the reunion of Sajeer and the jinn, as Nibhaan, seeing that she will always be in love with the jinn, divorces her. Sajeer feels the presence of the jinn and runs toward him, who was "with his arms wide open waiting" (206) for her.

In Pakistani paranormal short fiction, jinn possession is deeply influenced by Islamic concepts, reflecting the belief that jinn, as paranormal entities, can possess or influence humans. This interpretation is rooted in religious teachings and traditional folklore. In contrast, Western paranormal fiction often portrays possession through the lens of Christian doctrines, focusing on demonic entities and exorcisms as part of its narrative framework. For example, Mark 5:9 illustrates this with Jesus asking the possessed man, "What is your name?" and the man replying, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (The Holy Bible, Mark 5:9). Similarly, another verse depicts Jesus encountering a man possessed by many demons, who identifies himself as "Legion" due to the multitude of demons within him (The Holy Bible, Luke 8:30).

As both religions, Islam and Christianity, acknowledge the existence of demons and the possibility of spirit possession, a number of similar instances of possession and exorcism can be observed in their respective narratives. These instances often reflect the cultural and doctrinal differences in how each religion interprets the supernatural, with Christian accounts on demons and Islamic narratives focusing on jinn. For example, Kiran's disturbing experience is not just a unique incident but part of a larger tradition of stories that explore the supernatural influence of spirits and jinn on human lives. In the latter weeks of her pregnancy, Kiran's condition worsened. She didn't talk anymore, her eyelashes came off, and "because of no protection around her eyes, her eyes inflated to the size of little gumballs" (77). Such unsettling symptoms were clear signs of jinn possession, indicative of the dark forces exerting their influence over Kiran's physical well-being.

Similarly, in another short story, "Under Apa's Bed" in Jinnistan, the "Apa," a little girl, was possessed by a Christian jinn, Joseph. The girl was strange since she was born; she was "so big. And she was getting bigger by the minute. She felt heavier after weeks…[she] didn't eat or talk much, she just grew…and when she turned eight, she could fit into her ami's clothes" (99).

Besides Apa's strange physique, unusual events began occurring in the house and around her. People no longer visited the house, and she was labeled as "bebarkati" (99). The milkman stopped sending his son to deliver the milk because his "son's eyes went upwards and wouldn't shut each time apa had come to receive the milk" (99). Similarly, the kitchen walls were covered with mold after apa went near them, and the postman who suggested apa's family take her to some religious scholar was found dead the next day.

…it was no ordinary dead body. There was dried urine on his Friday namaz clothes. The cracked bones in his unresponsive fingers were evident as they hung lifelessly. His nails looked like they had been bitten off by an animal. The corpse

appeared to be freezing cold…[his] ears had to be covered with a velvet cloth; his daughters had reported hearing giggles coming from their father's ears, calling out to them…The feet had been stapled sideways, The ankles were broken, and the skin on the left foot's pinky toe had been scraped off. (100)

Everyone was scared of interacting with apa, especially Zafar-ud-Din, apa's grandfather. He would keep a pocket Quran with him and recite Pahla Kalma all night until the next morning. He would see apa "shaping her body into a bridge and walking on her arms and legs with her head upside down…it was fast, apa's crawling" (101). It wasn't until some time later that the milkman brought a religious scholar to investigate what was wrong. Even before he entered, the religious scholar "had sensed unearthly presences" (105) in the house. He disclosed that a family of jinn resided in the house with Apa. Upon further inquiry, the jinn, Joseph, explained that years ago in the Murree hills, Apa's mother had inadvertently urinated on a Christian jinn. In retaliation, they sent a family of jinn to live with Apa, who not only possessed her but also harmed anyone who tried to interfere with the possession.

This theme of possession and revenge is similarly pervasive within Western narratives, where characters often struggle with demonic or ghostly entities that take control of their bodies and minds. For Roman Catholics, three things are necessary to confirm a spirit possession: the possessed must speak in unknown or foreign languages, they must exhibit superhuman strength, and they must possess knowledge (typically about the exorcist) that they could not have acquired naturally (Hayen 384). Michael J. Sersch in Demons on the Couch (2019) reveals an interesting fact about Christian possession, that Jesus was believed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It was similar to the earlier Hebrew prophets (though this idea was later dismissed as heretical), and his adversaries thought he was possessed by a demon (Sersch 30-31).

Many works in Western paranormal fiction explore the themes of demonic possession and supernatural revenge. In Hell: The Possession and Exorcism of Cassie Stevens (2018) by Tom Lewis, Cassie Stevens is haunted by a demonic spirit after surviving a near-death experience. The story unfolds in a quiet coastal New England town where Cassie experiences terrifying phenomena and feels the presence of something evil watching her. Anyone who attempts to assist Cassie is met with brutal death, as they are pitted against the dark and relentless demonic forces that seek to maintain their hold over her. The demon first lured its victims with frightening manifestations to instill terror, only to subsequently kill them as they became paralyzed by fear. For example, when Father Jenkins opened the door of the rectory thinking the girl outside might be homeless without shelter, he knew something was wrong.

As Jenkins stepped closer, he saw that her drenched white gown was tattered and stained with something dark. Blood?...She lifted her head, and while her eyes remained concealed behind wet tangles of long black hair, he knew she was watching him. And he knew that no human life existed behind those eyes. "He sent me for you, Father," came her voice… (Lewis ch. 31)

Similar was the fate of Dr. Benjamin Switzer, Cassie's psychologist. He was once skeptical of supernatural phenomena, had dismised Janet Sterling's possession before her tragic suicide. However, after receiving a book on spirit possession, he began to reconsider. This slight shift in belief made him vulnerable to dark forces. Upon entering room 226—the site of Janet's death—he was met with an overwhelming stench of decay, chilling cold, and a trail of blood leading to the bathroom, drawing him deeper into an eerie and ominous scene.

A bloody handprint was on the shower curtains…He turned to leave the bathroom, and as he did, his eyes drifted past the stainless steel mirror above the sink... Janet Sterling's ghost stood in the shower behind him. It was grisly and decayed, with dark empty eyes that bore into his. Then that hideous gash in her neck opened, and blood oozed from it and down the front of her gown. (Lewis ch. 31)

Like the milkman in "Under Apa's Bed," both the Father and the psychologist in Cassie's story faced a gruesome and terrifying death at the hands of the demon. Jenkins was violently thrown against a wall and impaled by a wooden shard after being gripped by an invisible force. Meanwhile, Switzer's struggle with a ghost ended in a severe car crash. As he tried to free himself from his seatbelt, a heavy pipe fell onto his car, crushing his neck and severing his head from his body. The fact that both accidents occurred on the same night highlights how Western paranormal fiction reflects its religious acknowledgment and acceptance of the power and influence of demonic forces.

However, it must not be overlooked that Western paranormal fiction is influenced by various religious traditions, not just Christianity. In another prime example, The Dyke and the Dybbuk (1993) by Ellen Galford, a malevolent spirit from Jewish folklore takes possession of a contemporary London woman named Rainbow Rosenbloom. A Dybbuk is a dislocated spirit of a dead person in Jewish mythology, believed to depart from its host body once it has achieved its objective, which may occur naturally by taking its revenge or forcibly removed through an exorcism (Falk 538). In the book, the dybbuk, named Kokos, seeks revenge for an ancient wrong committed against her when she was alive. As Kokos takes over Rainbow's body, she begins to wreak havoc on Rainbow's life, illustrating the chaos and turmoil that spirit possession can bring.

While Western fiction often reimagines old myths in a contemporary setting, Pakistani narratives offer a unique perspective by blending local folklore and religious beliefs. This approach results in a fresh and culturally rich portrayal of the paranormal. For example, a similar take on the classical Western Siren can be seen in the first short story of Jinnistan, featuring a mysterious sea creature that lures Yawar with her looks and eventually succeeds in driving him to hellfire.

The Siren remains a haunting yet beloved figure in Western paranormal stories, captivating audiences with its mythical allure and dangerous charm. The idea of a siren originates from "Homer's account of the adventurous journey of Odysseus, [where] the song of the sirens was so appealing and tempting that it lured sailors to their deaths" (Frommolt 18). No doubt, the appeal of the Siren lies in its seductive and mysterious nature, symbolizing temptation, desire, and the risks of the unknown.

Throughout history, literature, and art, multiple accounts of siren's descriptions can be seen. Capri describes sirens as mythic, bird-like women (qtd. in Taylor 183) while the Greeks portrayed a siren as a "dangerous woman, who, with their beautiful singing voices lured sailors to their island" (Tindall-Gibson). In either case, sailors who followed the voice of the Sirens often met a tragic fate, lured by their enchanting songs to shipwreck on the treacherous shores surrounding their island.

Ayesha Muzaffar in Jinnistan takes a contemporary approach to the Siren archetype, portraying a similar mythical allure but with a cultural twist. The Siren in "3 Men 3 Stories" lures Yawar with her mesmerizing appearance and warns him of dire consequences should he pursue a relationship with her. Despite the warnings, Yawar, captivated by her beauty, chooses to engage with her, leading to a life-altering curse that affects his ability to hear the divine.

Nevertheless, the Pakistani reimagined archetype of a siren is similar to those of its Western counterparts in many ways. The prime job of a siren in Western paranormal context is to lure sailors to their death with their irresistible song. The Pakistani version of the siren, likewise, used a "honk-like sound" (4) to grab the attention of Yawar. The honk-like sound in the middle of the night echoed like a siren's call, prompting Yawar to search for its source, much like how sailors were drawn to the lure of a siren's song at sea.

Multiple times in the short story, the siren is referred to as a star, reflecting on her ethereal and captivating nature. This unique approach on the traditional siren, who lures by her voice but is never found or seen (Tindall-Gibson), takes a more engaging twist in the Pakistani context. Here, the siren is not only found but also

interacts with Yawar, who talks with her and falls in love with her. Furthermore, Yawar wondering "if she was Chinese or Japanese…[or] Korean" because of "the little clothing she wore" (6) implies that the siren was not native. She was from a foreign place, just like the traditional sirens who live far, far away in the sea.

Moreover, the sirens in mythology are often depicted as half-human, half-bird. But since Pakistani paranormal fiction is heavily influenced by cultural folklore, creatures with twisted feet are manifested as sirens. In the short story, when the siren moved on the boat, "Yawar noticed her feet were twisted–turned backwards–and yet, he thought that those, too, were indeed beautiful" (7).

The idea of twisted feet is often associated with Churails and Pichal-peris, popular paranormal creatures in Pakistan and surrounding Hindu and Bengali cultures. Ploss describes a "Churel" as being "beautiful from the front and black from the rear; she always has feet turned the wrong way round with the heels in front and the toes behind" (408). She also "assumes the form of a beautiful young woman and leads young men astray at night, especially those who are good looking" (408). Likewise, a pichal-peri is another demonic creature that lures the men in mountains with her captivating looks and feeds off them. In fact, pichal-peri is another name for Churail in Indian and Pakistani Punjab regions, Petni/Shakchunni in Bengal, and Pontianak in Malaysia and Indonesia.

In the short story, Yawar's perception of the siren's twisted feet as beautiful suggests he was under her spell. Despite his lifelong belief in science and logic, he disregards reason, much like sailors enchanted by a Western siren's song. Her knowledge of him should have raised suspicion, yet he passively listens as she recounts tales of sinking ships, deceived captains, and men lured to their doom by her voice. Subsequently, Yawar met the same fate as sailors who fell under the siren's spell. The lovemaking with the siren cursed his ears for life, rendering them deaf to the words of God, much like the sailors who became deaf to reason upon hearing the siren's song. Even after twelve years, Yawar would "sit on the farthest corner of the beach, waiting for a boat to wash up against the shore" (9).

Mythology is, undoubtedly, a globally popular subject, featuring creatures and narratives that continue to fascinate people across cultures and generations. Many themes and characters overlap between Western and Pakistani paranormal fiction. Like the siren, which is often a symbol of the devil in Western contexts, the goat, frequently associated with the devil, transforms into a goat-jinn in Pakistani narratives.

Besides the inverted pentagram, which is an upside-down star, the goat is one of the most notable symbols linked to satanism in the West. This originates from its

associations with the occult, including the goat-like representation of the occult deity Baphomet. As the main symbol for the Satanist to worship Satan, the Baphomet signifies "their loyalty to Satan as their God. For years, Baphomet has been declared as the symbol in worshipping Satan" (Firdaus 231). Similarly, the Goat of Mendes is another popular satanic symbol which shows the "freedom of sexuality,…wild desire and endless sex activities for the Satanist" (Firdaus 232). Many authors like Morris L. West and Tom Lewis have explored the symbolism of the goat as a representation of Satan in Western literature and culture. In West's book, The Devil's Advocate (2021), the goat is used to symbolize demonic forces and evil, drawing on traditional associations with occult practices and satanic rituals. Lewis takes a further approach in HELL: The Possession and Exorcism of Cassie Stevens (2018) where he explores the themes of Satanic cults and its consequences in detail. The story revolves around Cassie, who becomes the target of a demonic possession orchestrated by a secretive cult. The book vividly depicts the cult's rituals, including the use of a goat's head as a central symbol of their dark practices.

…inside, the barn was dark and lit only by black candles along the walls. They were handed dark, hooded robes and told to wear over their clothes…They were gathered in a half circle around a marble altar. The altar was about three feet tall, and draped in a burgundy-colored cloth with an inverted cross embroidered into it. Black candles stood at either end. And barely visible in the flickering candlelight was a goat's head mounted to the back wall behind the altar. (Lewis ch. 5)

The book further dives into the gory details of satanic worshiping and its bizarre rituals that lead to Cassie's possession by a demonic creature. The inverted cross used in Satanic cults serves as a symbol of defiance against Christian beliefs, a powerful emblem of the dark forces at work. The resulting possession of Cassie exemplifies the peril and divine retribution associated with engaging in such malevolent practices in Christianity. In the Bible, practices such as divination, sorcery, and consulting the dead are condemned. According to Deuteronomy,

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. (The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, 18:10-12, NIV)

Like Christianity, Judaism also acknowledges and accepts the existence of satanism and goat-demons. As warned in the religious verses, "They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to goat-demons, after whom they prostitute

themselves. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations" (The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, Leviticus 17.7). Similarly, in another place, it is mentioned that "Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, and goat-demons shall cry to one another; there too Lilith shall repose and find a place to rest" (The Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, Isaiah 34:14).

Such passages highlight the presence of demonic entities in religious teachings and underscore a shared cultural and religious understanding of the paranormal. As the two major religions in the West are Christianity and Judaism ("History of World Religion"), together they shape the framework of Western paranormal fiction. Their shared belief in the supernatural and demonic forces profoundly influences the portrayal of spirit possession and other related themes within this genre.

In Pakistani paranormal short fiction, which draws from Islamic concepts and folklore, similar themes are also evident. Gharrār is a demon in Islamic mythology and folklore which embodies elements akin to the Western depiction of satanic entities. Edward William Lane The Thousand and One Nights describes Gharrār as resembling dogs or goats and believed to be born from Iblis and a demon from the fires of Samum (32). Gharrār is typically portrayed as a female demon, who preys on men, assaulting them, and mutilating their genitalia, often believed to reside in deserts near the Red Sea (Bane 148). In "The Bhabhis of Lahore," a short story by Ayesha Muzaffar, two siblings experience the evil doings of a goat-jinn in their lives. Throughout the story, the brother's disturbing marital history unfolds in astonishing detail. Married six times, each union ends in failure attributed to a peculiar curse from his childhood—a marriage to a goat-jinn. This supernatural entity sabotages his marriages: one wife elopes, another suspects him of infidelity, a third loses her eyesight, a fourth falls for his sister, and the fifth departs due to his infertility. As the mufti sahab reveals, the brother had been "been married off as a child to a goat-jinn in the mountains…[who] is not letting any of his marriages work" (Muzaffar 11). The situation intensifies with his sixth marriage, as the goat-jinn insists on a meeting in the mountains, or else she would kill the sixth wife. This portrayal in Pakistani paranormal fiction mirrors the Western depiction of demonic entities associated with Satanism, illustrating how different cultural and religious backgrounds shape supernatural narratives.

Conclusion

The reappropriation of Western paranormal tropes within Pakistani paranormal short fiction demonstrates how deeply these narratives are rooted in local cultural and religious contexts. The exploration of human-jinn relationships has highlighted a fascinating parallel to Western vampire lore and jinn possession,

with memory lapses and time distortions revealing a striking similarity to haunted artifacts in Western horror. Hence, Pakistani paranormal short fiction not only reinterprets but also uniquely reappropriates these paranormal themes, reflecting the distinct cultural and religious landscape of Pakistan while engaging with universal elements of the genre.

However, this reappropriation also suggests a more nuanced relationship between the two literary traditions. Rather than a one-way adaptation of Western tropes, the genre itself begins to take on a hybrid form, merging Western narrative structures and motifs with South Asian cultural, religious, and mythological frameworks. As a result, what emerges is not merely Western horror in a Pakistani setting, but a transformed and dialogic genre that accommodates Islamic and South Asian storytelling traditions within the broader framework of global paranormal fiction. This hybridity enriches the genre, offering layered meanings and culturally grounded reinterpretations that challenge the dominance of a purely Western paradigm.

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