

RETREAT, REFUGE AND CONFINEMENT IN DANIYAL MUEENUDDIN'S *IN OTHER ROOMS, OTHER WONDERS*

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Abstract

This paper catechizes the act of refuge, retreat and confinement on the part of women as a result of the denial of their personal space In Other Rooms, Other Wonders by Daniyal Mueenuddin. Disappointed and misused by patriarchal society, Saleema, Zainab, Husna, Helen, Sonya, Lilly and the unnamed wives of Nawabdin and Rezak create their own worlds in kitchens, latrines or rooms to rule over where they can. Moreover, the invisible line between the public and private spheres of men and women respectively, further pushes these women towards seclusion and isolation. Different ideologies including Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the Other, Betty Friedan's ideas in The Feminine Mystique and the concept of Separate Spheres would be kept in mind to explore the real self of the above mentioned women and the way social obligations and controlling relations push these females into cocoons. This piece of writing is argumentative and analytical in nature. Consequently, this paper explores individual, economic as well as societal motives which lead women to the well of alienation and self-denial.

The act of retreat, refuge and confinement can be interpreted as a silent protest against the ways a woman is being deprived of her own freedom and individuality *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin. For Husna, Saleema, Lilly and Zainab rooms are cocoons in which they take refuge to grow emotionally as well as psychologically. Rejected or dejected by the society, these women alienate themselves to closed places like their room, kitchen or bathroom as a sort of retreat. For them, alienation is a means to protect themselves against those forces which bring about their annihilation in the world of men, which is rooted in the gender based rituals and obligations imposed on them. The title of the book, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, gives a clue to the consistent act of retreat, refuge and confinement on the part of the female protagonists and their associations with their rooms in the story.

Mueenuddin, thoughtfully titled his short story collection as *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* in order to depict the world inside the rooms and the wonders it hide. A room for

Mueenuddin's female protagonists, is a microcosm of the world where they feel safe while outside are only patriarchal forces. However, in order to obtain some personal space, these females risk alienating themselves not only from the outside world but from themselves only. They become passive and catalyze no change in the life of the surrounding males while themselves in wonders. This notion is expounded by Betty Friedan in *Feminine Mystique* in which she proclaims that despite asserting their separate identity and presence in the house, women shrink themselves to a specified area as they are simply contented to exist, feeling safety in the flimsy security of their own created world represented by the rooms, the kitchens and the toilets. To Zainab, Husna, Saleema, Lilly, Sonya and Helen, an enclosed place offers not only protection but also independence. It is a place that not only shields them from the vast darkness of the universe and its imposing demands but also a personal space which is mostly denied to women in a South Asian society.

The unseen division of the life between the private and public spheres is substantial reason behind women's retreat, refuge and confinement. The women mirrored in Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, are supposed to live in their private spheres in this collection. They are either house wives or work as maid servants. In their private world, man is the subject; he is the sole authority while woman is the object and man's possession. In consequence, these females being marginalized in the society, find refuge in loneliness and solitude. By drawing a line between the realms of men and women, the idea of their inequality is established and becomes another way of confining a woman. The image of a woman working in the house all the time, keeping it, cooking for husband and nurturing his children is constructed from the very first story "Nawabdin Electrician" and is maintained till the last story "A Spoiled Man" in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Representing the true picture of Pakistani women, Mueenuddin's female characters never insist on equal rights. Contrary to this, they conform to the demands of a chauvinist society by appearing meek, docile and fragile despite their strong physique and strong wills as described by Mueenuddin in this collection.

Nawabdin's wife, who is neither known nor named except with reference to her husband, seems to have no other world or occupation except cooking for her husband and children. It is noteworthy that whenever Nawabdin enters the house, he expects and always finds her in the kitchen because this is the sphere defined for her as a woman. After sniffing the air to guess what is cooked today "he went in to her, finding her always in the same posture, making him tea, fanning the fire in the little hearth" (Mueenuddin, "Nawabdin Electrician" 6). Moreover, when he asks his wife to make *parathas* and offers his help in lighting the stove, she refuses it by informing him that he is not good at domestic chores. "You can never light it, I'll end up doing it anyway," (8). So the life and responsibilities in rural areas of Pakistan are divided gender wise. The first sight of Zainab as well as of Nawabdin's wife is always that of cooking something. Jaglani first encounters Zainab in the kitchen and her first image is that of a typical village woman working in the house of landlords; "Entering his house through a side door, Jaglani saw a woman crouched over the hearth in the courtyard lit by a single bare bulb, cooking *parathas* in clarified butter

(Mueenuddin, "Provide, Provide" 58) . It seems as if Zainab is not born for anything else in the world except cooking and serving Jaglani. She presses his feet, massages him, feeds him and makes love with him. In fact the idea that a woman should indulge only in household work is propagated by every culture in every age and is well illustrated by Mueenuddin in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* but specifically in the story "Provide, Provide", through the depiction of a woman cattle thief. Once in Duniyapur a woman is caught while stealing the cattle, an act usually done by men only. "No woman had ever before been known to lift cattle, and people came from miles around to see her, sitting defiantly on the *charpoy* in the *dera*, waiting to be turned over to police"(Mueenuddin, "Provide, Provide", 59). Stealing of animal is not what a woman is supposed to do. In fact any woman who steps out of her private sphere is not acceptable to the society.

Women who renounce their homes in order to obtain their separate identity are never acknowledged by the people around. Nora, the female protagonist in *A Doll's House* is always been remembered as a controversial character as she challenges the idea of assuming that a woman is a plaything or a maid servant as depicted in the short story "A Spoiled man" in which Rezak a very old man, agrees to marry a feeble minded girl just because she can cook and bear a child for him. So the eligibility of a woman for marriage is not measured on the scale of her physical as well as mental stability but her utility is kept in mind, that she can cook and rear children for a man is quite enough. A woman, it seems, is thus bound to live her life according to the rules set by the dead and the unknown. Murad, knowing the fact that Lilly is not made for village life, not only marries her but also tries to push her into a private sphere, she is not accustomed to. He utters; "Come on, Lilly. What have you done since you got here? What happened to reading or running the house? (Mueenuddin, "Lilly" 217). No doubt, Lilly confronts this attitude of Murad's, saying that she is not a kitten with a pink bow around her neck, nor is she so dutiful and that Murad knew this quite well before marriage, but in the end of the story, Mueenuddin indicates her compliance. Jane Eyre in the novel *Jane Eyre*, raises her voice against this forced attribution of domestic sphere to women in the following way; "Women are supposed to be very calm generally:... they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags" (Bronte 167).

However, it is worth mentioning that not a single female character, in this short story collection, is an outdoor worker. They either belong to the tenant class like Nawabdin's wife, Saleema, Rezak's wife and the elite class represented by Lilly, Rafia and the daughters of K. K. Harouni are also found entangled in domesticity of their lives. There are suggestions that Helen wants to be a doctor in future but perhaps because she is an American not a Pakistani woman. The only vocation women seem to hold in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* is that of a maid-servant. Due to economic conditions if women of poor class have to work; they work in the houses of the elite without breaking the domestic sphere created for them by the society.

Zainab, in "Provide, Provide" is appointed as a maidservant at Jaglani's house where she is supposed to manage his household and cook for him. In the beginning of the story, Mustafa, the driver of Jaglani, requests him to try the services of his sister. "Let my sister cook for you and keep the house. Let her try for a week or two. If she doesn't do well, then please let her go" (Mueenuddin, "Provide, Provide" 57). So Zainab starts cooking and serving Jaglani as a servant. "...she brought the food, four or five small dishes of curry on a steel tray, with the *parathas* in a woven reed basket covered with a napkin..." (58). Similarly, Saleema has a history of working in many houses as a maid servant. In the house of K. K. Harouni, she is hired to serve the master's eldest daughter Kamila who lives in New York and has come to stay with her father this summer. She washes Kamila's clothes and makes *chapattis* there. She gets a permanent job in K. K. Harouni's kitchen with the intervention of Rafik who praises her expertise in domestic chores in front of the master. "She's a poor girl and her husband is sick and she's useful in the kitchen. She makes the *chapattis* (Mueenuddin, "Saleema" 35). So Saleema manages to live and rear her son by serving as a maidservant at Gulfishan. Daniel Defoe in one of his essays criticizes the particular attitude of confined women which ultimately snubs their talent and individuality. They work all day and night but their work is never considered respectable nor are they. He says "For I cannot think that GOD Almighty ever made them [women] so delicate, so glorious creatures; and furnished them with such charms, so agreeable and so delightful to mankind; with souls capable of the same accomplishments with men: and all, to be only Stewards of our Houses, Cooks, and Slaves" ("The Education of Women").

Despite the servant class of the women in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, women belonging to ruling class are also seen entangled in their private and domestic sphere and their only preoccupation is that of managing relationships, playing cards and making tea. All women friends of K. K. Harouni are shown doing nothing except entertaining their friends and guests. Even Kamila seems to have no earnest perspective in her life except showing interest in her father's activities. Women belonging to the lower middle class who can neither be a maidservant nor the landlady seek some respectable position in the house hold or in a school as a teacher in order to fulfill their dreams.

Husna is a candid example of this kind of practice. Though she studies in a college and is expected to graduate soon, she still has to serve as a helper to the estranged wife of K. K. Harouni. She is counted neither in servants nor as office employee, but she succeeds, though temporarily, in making a space for herself in K. K. Harouni's mansion by providing and extending all kinds of favors to Harouni. She serves Harouni the way Zainab does Jaglani by pressing his feet and catering to his carnal desires. Thus women are restricted to the private spheres as depicted by Mueenuddin in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. This restriction involves their all-time presence within the four walls of the house which not only limits their capacity and their gifts but also makes them economically dependent on men. This economic dependency on men further makes them vulnerable and reduces the chances of their individual existence which in many cases in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* results in women's acquiescence and by retreating in enclosed spaces. Construing this power

politics, some of Mueenuddin's female characters try to obtain economic independence but in vain as the hostile society poses innumerable problems so that they finally give up by retiring to enclosed places.

Due to the system of Separate Spheres, especially prevalent in Pakistan, a woman has to be dependent on the males around her for food as well as all desires and necessities of life. Most of the female characters in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* seek to free themselves from this endless labor without any reward but there is no way out. The women, who rely on their males for bread and butter, are in more pathetic condition and are more frequently found in enclosed spaces as compared to those who are somewhat independent. Since economics plays a major role, the woman who can earn a living, not only become relatively independent, they are also respected by their spouses. Therefore, they are able to achieve a personal space as well as societal respect as suggested by Virginia Woolf in her essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929). To achieve this position a woman has to struggle a great deal as the society is inclined to curb her desire for independence. Interestingly, the men know that they can keep their control only through money.

Need for financial independence can be seen first in the short story "Provide, Provide". Believing that a woman can be subjugated and overpowered through money, Zainab's first husband threatens to starve her by not sending her money in the hope that it will compel her to return to him despite her reservations. Mustafa tells Jaglani; "Her husband doesn't send any money, because he wants to starve her out and force her back to his home" (Mueenuddin, "Provide, Provide" 57). This sentence clearly depicts the way men manipulate the financial dependence of their wives. They use their financial superiority as a tool to tame them thus quashing their individuality and personal freedom. Thus Zainab starts working at Jaglani's farm as a maidservant in order to negate her husband's superiority. Lakshmi Kannan, a Tamil writer in her story, "Muniyakka" depicts the same aspect of a poor South Asian woman. A poor old woman, Muniyakka works at different houses as a maid so as not to be financially dependent on others, specifically on her sons who have deserted her. "Washing vessels in Anjaneyulu's brought her twenty rupees. She received another thirty-five for sweeping, swabbing the floors, and washing the clothes at Vasudev Chetty's" (Kannan 38).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that a woman is not an object that can be possessed, tuned or conquer with the help of money, yet ironically men consider it the only currency to trade a woman. For instance when Jaglani starts sleeping with Zainab, one day he leaves money for her saying; "Let me give you some money. You can buy clothes" (Mueenuddin, "Provide, Provide" 61). However, Zainab is quite conscious of these traps laid by men to conquer women and refuses to accept it saying; "You buy me things and then later you'll think you bought me. I was never for sale" (61). Due to her stubborn self-respect, Zainab remains unconquered until she gets married to Jaglani. She seems to have a clear understanding that her financial dependence on her husband requires her complete submission and this is the reason that she decides to serve as a maid at Jaglani so that she needs not to go back to her first husband. Similarly her rigidity in refuting Jaglani's offer reflects her desire to be the

master of her own destiny. “He went to the city for a few days, and on the evening when he returned to the farm he found the money still where he had left it” (62). So in this way Zainab manages to assert her individual existence as an upright human which unfortunately is compromised after her marriage with Jaglani. Similarly Lilly who has been living quite independently before marriage, under her phony fancies of farm life totally negates the significance of financial independence in a marriage and thus succumbs to self-evasion. One of the reasons behind Lilly’s satisfaction with life before marriage is her financial independence. “...as a grown-up she had always taken care of herself financially, tending the exclusive little atelier she had set up in the basement of her parents’ house, with a single seamstress and an old tailor, making very expensive wedding clothes” (Mueenuddin, “Lilly” 189). Moreover, she also receives money from the rent of some shops, she received as present from her grandfather. She lives in the annex of her parents’ house and enjoys complete freedom until she marries Murad Talwan. One of the basic reasons behind Lilly’s frustrated condition which makes her hide in the washroom, is her unemployed and dependent state. Murad forces her to read and keep the house despite rejoining her profession as a designer again. After marriage she has plenty of money but it is given by Murad. She is provided with every element of a luxurious life but does not have money and a room of her own which is necessary for a woman to preserve her individuality as referred to by Virginia Woolf in her essay “A Room of One’s Own”. So after marriage Lilly is deprived of both necessary components for the freedom of a woman; money and personal space which gives vent in the shape of her retreat and refuge at Jalpana.

Rezak’s wife in “A Spoiled Man” is another manifestation of the consequences of a woman’s financial reliance on the male members of her family. The wife is a weak minded girl of nineteen or twenty who is totally dependent on her father before marriage and thus is sold to Rezak, a very old man. Even after her marriage, her condition of living worsens. She cannot have food of her own choice despite what Rezak prefers to bring for her. This instance reveals the fact that one of the basic factors, involved in women’s subjugation, her frustration and her treatment as a commodity, is their economic dependency on men who feel themselves free in taking decisions and making the destinies of women; good or bad. However, the economic factor not only affects the life of uneducated rural women but also influences the educated women equally.

Helen in “Our Lady of Paris” seems to have troubling economic problems. She feels herself at odds with Sohail’s parents who are infinitely rich. Her relationship with Sohail is quite strained because of the status gap between them. She seems to be dependent on him for everything and is thus not free to make her own decisions. Throughout her trip to France, Helen has been conscious of the fact that Sohail is bearing all her expenses for this trip. “She had hardly any of her own for this trip, no savings; at school she lived on nothing” (Mueenuddin, “Our Lady of Paris” 161). For this reason, despite her dislike, Helen cannot show her disregard for Sohail’s mother openly. Sohail’s parents have been very intimidating to her just because she is not financially strong. They evaluate her as a piece of art which breaks her confidence. She asks Sohail; “Did they like me? Did I do all right?” and Sohail

behaving like a master replies; “You did beautifully, my love. I was proud of you” (150). However, Helen’s economic dependence on Sohail explicitly comes to the surface when Sohail refuses to buy her the candies she loves by saying it costs four times more here. Even on her insistence, Sohail refuses to buy her the candies which hurts her self-esteem to a great extent. “She walked away, angry for a moment, and then her cheeks burned at the thought that she was spending his money” (161). So financial reliance on the partner deprives a woman of her selfhood and identity as happened to Helen in “Our Lady of Paris”. So economic independence enables a woman to state her mind, disagree, and ask for what she wants while reliance on the men leads to frustration, subjugation and compromise.

Analyzing from this perspective, Saleema seems to achieve this level of personal freedom through her economic independence in “Saleema” to some extent. She works as a maidservant at K. K. Harouni’s mansion and makes *chapattis* in the kitchen. She not only earns independently but gives financial support to her husband as well. This aspect makes her the most self-willed woman in the story and depicts the reversal of power dynamics due to the economic independence of a woman. Saleema is as free as a bird, deciding her direction, forming physical relations with other men and going wherever she wants and yet always uninterrupted by her husband. Her husband addicted to heroin, has lost his job as a peon in an office. All day he roams aimlessly slopping round the streets and unwanted by the people around. Due to his unemployment, he counts on the amount Saleema gives him as pocket money. This has made him a parasite who can never dare intervene in her adulterous activities. He knows quite well that Saleema has extra marital affair with Hassan, the cook in the house where she works as a maid servant. However, the strength money inculcates in Saleema is reflected when she slaps her husband and pushes him out of the room, when he asks her question about her relations with Hassan, for the first time. While “next day as usual he hungrily took the few rupees she gave—to buy twists of rocket pills, his amphetamine addiction” (Mueenuddin, “Saleema” 20). So the reversal of roles, converse the behaviors as well. Economic dependence on a man turns an American woman, Helen in “Our Lady of Paris”, into a submissive girl while on the other hand a man’s economic reliance on his wife brings in compromise on his honor which is considered the worst condition in a Pakistani society. Saleema works at houses to earn her own livelihood and to feed her husband as well, so she is free and the superior one in their marriage. This financial freedom gives Saleema the courage to make bold decisions. It makes her stronger and her husband weaker. Due to this fact, she treats her husband as an outcaste and renounces him openly in favor of Rafik, her new love. Her husband has no concern with any of her activities as long as he gets money for his pills from her. When Saleema, after making love with Rafik, goes to her room and tells her husband that she’ll never be in his bed again, the only thing he is concerned with is the continuity of the supply of money. In response to her anger, his only query is, “Will I get my money”? At this Saleema replies in a threatening tone; “yes, but if you ever say one funny word, that’s it” (40). This is interesting that it’s Saleema who is known to have a corrupt and bad character, yet because of her economic superiority over her husband, it’s she who blames and shouts at him rather than he, that’s how power of money works in a relationship.

However, she is renounced by the man who is superior to her in his economic condition. It is the power of money that makes Saleema decide to give birth to Rafik's child despite his unwillingness and it is money which makes her mother support her in bringing up her illegitimate child in the world.

Saleema's relationship with Rafik shows the other side of the issue. Rafik is an old servant at Gulfishan and far more stable than Saleema. So he readily prefers his wife and sons over Saleema when the time comes to decide between them. But this time Saleema remains quiet and goes back to the room she used to share with her husband with the same intimidating behavior. On her return to her room, she roughly pushes her husband saying; "'Don't smoke,' she ordered. 'And don't touch me, stay against the wall' (47). It is worth mentioning that in the end she loses her job and depends on the money Rafik send for their son but only till she has some address and then she ends up as a beggar. Thus economic security ensures a woman's social standing to some extent and perhaps that's why Husna in "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" seems to struggle for obtaining some kind of financial stability to fulfill her dreams.

Belonging to a lower middle class family who had been rich once, Husna aspires to be rich and independent in the story. Mueenuddin's very first sentence in the story; "Husna needed a job" is very striking and lays the basis of the whole story ("In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" 107). Economy, status, money and penury are major factors in reducing the intensity of a woman's subjugation in a male oriented society to some extent, but none of these promises a secure independent future for them. If a woman succeeds in achieving personal freedom through a strong financial position, she is unable to retain it permanently. Moreover in this mock liberation, there is another kind of confinement which is depicted in Husna's character in the short story titled "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders". Although wealth and societal position is important in a woman's life and wealth can liberate her to some extent but the make-up of the societal mind-set still imposes many restrictions on women. Despite being economically independent, she is still the victim of the patriarchal society. Her secure position in society is established only after she is under the protection of a man. Husna understands the importance of being financially independent as she tells K. K. Harouni to whom she requests for a job. "I'm poor and need a job. Even begum Harouni agrees that I should have a profession. My father can give me nothing, he's weak and has lost his connections. Everyone says I should marry, but I won't" (109). So unlike other girls, who seek to have security under the custody of a man, Husna wants to make a life of her own. She refuses to accept herself as poor due to the splendid background of her ancestors and seeks to regain her lost position through her economic prosperity and connection with Harouni. In order to gain prestige, she does not hesitate to accept an ambiguous position between a servant and an assistant or companion for Begum Harouni. "Taking service in an ambiguous position with Begum Harouni had been the greatest concession she ever made to her mediocre prospects, and having made this concession increased her determination to rise..." (114). She decides not to marry in order to escape the dependent status of a wife of salaried man. She despises the economics of a wife in cooking and keeping the house and thus gets a

training from Harouni's manager in order to join the teaching profession which promises complete independence in thought as well as in money matters. She says "Goodbye to the life she would never have, a life she despised, economies that she would never make as she cooked and kept house for a clerking husband in the Old City, one of the boys who might have accepted her hand" (122). So despite depending on the meagre salary of a clerk husband, Husna decides to make money by becoming the mistress of K. K. Harouni and starts getting a monthly allowance which she gets increased in various cunning ways. She keeps on filling her boxes with the expensive articles she collects to make her future secure and in the end despite her urge to refuse to take anything from the house out of pride, she leaves Gulfishan with two trunks. So, though Husna seems to be well aware of the importance of money and financial stability, she mistakenly relies on a man for its provision which results in mental deterioration which is reflected through her habit of taking sleeping pills and her retreat in bedrooms. Thus economic reliance plays an important role in making these above mentioned women retreat in rooms, and other enclosed spaces.

These defines spheres and financial obligations are the causes, triggering women to confine themselves in closed separate cubicles in Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. After her marriage to Jaglani, Zainab in "Provide, Provide" is always found sitting in her room. It's significant that in Jaglani's absence, she does not live in their shared room but in her own personal room adjacent to it. Jaglani would always find her in her own room and not in the shared one. Jaglani thinks that she expects him to find her in her personal room but the case may be that she finds a sense of self-worth by being in her own room. On his arrival when Jaglani enquires about her whereabouts she would reply; "in my room" (73). Her room is her little world where she lives with her adopted daughter and does not let anyone entre except Jaglani. This is the room where she is the ruler; she is the subject. "Unlike the rest of the house, which was dark and crowded with furniture, Zainab's room had only a small low bed, padded with cotton, a chair, and a plain wooden table, on which she had arranged her makeup and combs, with a mirror in front of it, and in one corner a crib"(74). The plain furnishing shows how Zainab is consciously truthful about herself. This room is her only possession which is depicted consciously with the use of personal pronouns; "Jaglani walked through the room he shared with her and into her own quarters" (74). Zainab's guilty conscience about having an extra marital affair with Jaglani, her deprivation for not having a baby, the burden of the secret marriage results in her emotional as well as physical self-willed confinement to her room.

On the other hand, Saleema has a certain attachment with the kitchen and the cooks; "She had been a servant at three houses. In everyone she had opened her legs for the cook. The cooks tempted her, lording it over the kitchen, where she liked to sit" (Mueenuddin, "Saleema" 20). She usually plans her meetings with Rafik in the kitchen. Not only this but on the arrival of Rafik's old wife, she spends the whole night in the kitchen brooding on her obscure future; "That night she sat in the kitchen till midnight...watching the cockroaches scurry along the dirty floor" (47). The kitchen is where she feels she belongs, a room from where she cannot be ordered out. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Saleema urges Rafik to see

her in the kitchen for their last meeting; “Meet me tonight in the kitchen. You owe me that” (51). However, the bathroom is her final place for retreat whenever hurt by the people around her. In the beginning of the story she finds refuge in the toilet when debased by the drivers of the house. “She went into the latrine, holding back her tears. She didn’t even have a place to herself for that” (22). Moreover, on seeing Rafik sitting happily with his wife in his quarter, she finds no place but the latrine; “Seeing Rafik sitting cross legged with his wife “Saleema couldn’t help walking past on her way to the latrine” (Mueenuddin, “Saleema” 48). It seems as if throughout the story, Saleema keeps shuffling between the kitchen, her room and the latrine, which reveals her depraved and lonely soul. She has a room of her own but she moves to that of Rafik. A significant incident confirms her “room” to be her ultimate refuge when disappointed at Rafik’s reaction on her pregnancy, she leaves the room in anger but ultimately she has to come back at night to the same room, “That night she had nowhere else to sleep, and so went into Rafik’s quarters—“(41). Saleema’s final retreat on the arrival of Rafik’s wife is metaphorically depicted through her return to her old place, her old room, “Rafik brought the child to Saleema’s quarters, where she had retreated” (47). Rafik finds Saleema sitting in her room all the time in the same way as Jaglani finds Zainab in “Provide, Provide”. Taking refuge in enclosed isolated places is a theme that can be found in many feminist works. Writers like the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and A. S. Byatt use the same technique in their novels to suggest the emotionally suppressed female characters.

Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* confines herself in the old attic whenever she felt the rude behavior of her brother Tom Tulliver. Zainab specifically provides a glimpse of Mrs. Dalloway, the protagonist of Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, who always wants to be in her personal room in order to contemplate on the nature of freedom and identity. In the novel, she is defined by her married name; Mrs. Dalloway. This social recognition apparently promises confidence, status and happiness for Clarissa but inwardly instills a lack of self-esteem, insecurity, humiliation and confinement. This sort of retreat in room or the latrine is not only a refuge for the poor women but Mueenuddin suggests that even women belonging to the fashionable elite, also make such choices as a sort of catharsis. Lilly, Helen and Sonya are candid illustrations of it.

Lilly, the protagonist of Mueenuddin’s short story, “Lilly” represents the elite of Pakistan, yet her refuge to the washroom connects her to the whole suffering lot of women in this area. Like Zainab and Husna she tries to create a world of her own in her bedroom after her marriage to Murad, a feudal lord. Her desire for possession is described as, “She needed to make the room hers, to start with an ordered center and work her way out” (Mueenuddin, “Lilly” 202). In the start of her marriage, Lilly seems very excited with a sense of ruling Murad’s *dera* near Bahawalpur. But very soon she realizes that her individuality would be subsumed in the large persona as a couple. The strangeness of their earlier romance starts wearing off and; “she went back to being—exactly—herself” (205). Her life on the farm house, far away from the parties of Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, kept on losing interest and after three months since they first slept together, : “she found herself pulling away when

he began to touch her”(205). However, soon realizing her limitations, she gradually confines herself to her bedroom but the more she remains in her room, the more she yearns to breathe in the fresh air of Islamabad. Like Saleema, Lilly also retreats in the bathroom whenever confronted with an unexpected situation. On Murad’s request to have a drink with him despite going back to her friends, “She went to the bathroom,..., feeling trapped with Murad sitting quietly by the fire” (212). However, things worsen on the arrival of her former boyfriend with whom she makes love, while Murad is asleep in their room. After finishing with Bumpy, the very first suggestion is that of her going back to her room which reveals her guilty conscience and her restraint in making the choice, “Then without looking at him she pulled her hand away and walked toward her room”(214). However the most significant thing is the way she immediately goes to the bathroom in order to wash herself. She is horror struck on this act of hers and the bathroom is the only place where she can brood over it, “She sat on the toilet, trying to pee, as the horror of what she has done struck her. Married just three months,..., she fucked a man she barely knew and cared nothing about” (214). Ultimately, in the end she leaves the house to shake off her sense of guilt and shame in the vast fields of Murad’s lands. So retreat is when there is no space for one in society.

Helen is no less different from the other female characters in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Like other women in the short story collection, Helen also finds solace in enclosed spaces whenever depressed or led down by the people around her. Helen, the girlfriend of Sohail Harouni, goes through the same sort of mental processes during her relationship with Sohail in the short story “Our Lady of Paris”. Though both of them seem to be in a perfect bond of love, yet she has to face lots of hindrances in shape of Sohail’s dominating and possessive mother and their class gap as well as the cultural differences. To be an American woman makes no difference. She financially depends on Sohail Harouni, is easily made to feel inferior in front of his family and then forced by his mother to leave her son. It is noteworthy that in this short story collection, women take refuge in a solitary confined place whenever they encounter the process of decision making. Rafia, Sohail’s mother, tries her best to suggest to Helen that she is not a good match for Sohail and that she would not be having a free life with him. Helen’s lone seating with Rafia leaves her with lots of questions and in order to find the answers, she retreats to a separate room away from Sohail’s breath. The story ends with Helen’s decision to quit her holiday with Sohail and return to Paris, which is actually taken in complete solitude in a bedroom. “Helen wandered away from Sohail and up some stairs into the dark room—a bedroom—belonging to some widowed queen. She stared for a long time out the window, west, down the river as it flowed to the sea” (Mueenuddin, “Our Lady of Paris” 164). Before that, Helen has never been concerned with her future which is a major factor in the deterioration of a woman’s individuality, specifically in American women. According to Betty Freidan, women are not concerned with their past or future. They just live in their present. So does Helen. Throughout the story, Sohail’s future is the focal point despite Helen, as she describes; “I try to live in the present, not to ask so many questions” (157). However, in the end, she not only asks but answers the questions raised by her soul. It is noteworthy that in another story of this short story

collection, "A Spoiled Man", the reader finds that Sohail does not marry Helen but another American woman; Sonya which further helps in understanding the broken relation between Sohail and Helen in "Our Lady of Paris".

Likewise the conflicts of Sonya, Sohail Harouni's wife in 'A Spoiled Man', find the ultimate solution in her retreat and confinement in Kalapani. There are evidences that Sonya is not well adjusted in Pakistan. She hates the people around and finds them crook and cunning. Though she tries her best to get accustomed to Pakistani life and culture by learning Urdu for communication, wearing Pakistani dresses, yet sometimes she would scream; " 'I hate it, everyone's a crook, nothing works here!' " (Mueenuddin, "A Spoiled Man" 228). Moreover her relationship with her husband is not pleasant as well. All these factors combine to make her feel that Kalapani is her only place for speculation and catharsis. In fact in the very beginning of the story Sonya is introduced through a closed imagery, when arrived at Kalapani in a cool dark car. "She sat in the back and smiled at him from the milky darkness of the car's interior" (223). So the very first image of Sonya suggests confinement, and suffocation in a woman's life. Likewise it is suggested that she is not happy with her life and this unhappiness connects her to a distant house in suburbs of Islamabad where she sometimes remains alone and sometimes arranges parties like Mrs. Dalloway in order to overlook the inner hollowness and solitude. Sonya's longing for personal space most often arises from her differences with her husband as well as with the Pakistani culture. It is mentioned that whenever she fights with her husband, Sohail, she rushes to be enclosed in her bedroom. It is noteworthy that after every quarrel with her husband, Sonya runs away to Kalapani, "she would storm out to her car and retreat to the Kalapani house, forty minutes away, arriving unannounced, withdrawing darkly into the master bedroom" (228). So both women, Helen and Sonya, react in the same way to the discrepancies in their relationship with the same man; Sohail Harouni.

However, Husna, in "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders", and the unnamed wife of Rezak, an old watchman in "A Spoiled Man" depict this act of refuge and retreat from a different angle. In the start, a room for Husna, is not a symbol of retreat but victory. It's her victory over K.K. Harouni's estranged wife that she has obtained the use of the annex at Harouni's house. In fact, Mueenuddin uses the same technique of metaphorical depiction of change in relationships through shift from one room to another as is done in "Saleema". However, contrarily, Husna's movement from a plain room to the annex and then from the annex to a room adjacent to Harouni's master bedroom marks the culmination of her position and power in Harouni's household. Her sense of temporary victory after shifting to Harouni's house is depicted elaborately through her thoughts, "Goodbye to the life she would never have, a life she despised, economies that she would never make as she cooked and kept house for a clerking husband in the Old City," (Mueenuddin, In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" 122). But for Husna, everything turns upside down after Harouni's illness. She is rudely told that his funeral is for the family only and that she should move to her room and stay there. Realizing her weak position, she does not dare telling Sarwat that she's moved next to the master bedroom and moves back to the annex, "and all day Husna stayed there, sitting on a

chair and looking down through the window at callers arriving and leaving”(133). Moreover, nobody bothers to inform her about Harouni’s death, “Husna felt that they had forgotten her, and she wanted to be forgotten. To stay here alone in these rooms, with rush mats on the floor...” (135). This jolt out of her recently acquired position, marks her emotional development and she leaves the house without contemplating about her next destination. So, room for Husna, stands for a journey from victory to refuge and confinement. It’s noteworthy that Mueenuddin’s female protagonists develop only when they desert their voluntary or involuntary refuge in rooms.

Zainab, in “Provide, Provide” breaks her silence and reveals her true self when she leaves her house at Duniapur and goes to see Jaglani at Firoza. She appears to be a developed character who will no more remain silent on the injustices being done to her. From a woman, who has been dependent on her brother or husband and retreats either in the kitchen or in her bedroom all the time, she emerges to be a self-willed woman who travels first in the *tonga* and then in the bus to see her dying husband. She reacts violently when Shabir, the son, interrupts her. “Get your hands off me, you little piece of shit. I’m his wife. Don’t touch me” (Mueenuddin, “Provide, Provide 85). Jaglani, shocked at this aspect of Zainab’s personality, refuses to see her, regretting that she has spoken in the most vulgar Punjabi like other village women. Similarly Saleema prefers begging over selling her body, despite the fact that she has been a woman of easy access for men around her. So her true love for Rafik, which actually destroys her, is revealed after her renunciation of closed spaces. Lilly, on the other hand, goes through real meditation on her life when at night she leaves Murad’s *dera*, to take a breath in the open fields. “The land stretched away around her, the villages, the fields of wheat and trees in lines along the boundaries of the fields....None of it had reference to her, she controlled nothing here” (Mueenuddin, “Lilly” 219). She considers different possibilities about her future life which she thinks, she must avoid. She realizes that in future though Murad will be rich yet he will finally be cold to her. She also considers the option of committing suicide but she finally decides to be wise and self-forgiving which actually suggests her new way of life without any marital compulsions and guilty conscience. Husna and Helen, similarly, make their decisions by freeing themselves from the act of retreat, refuge and confinement in rooms, kitchens or bathrooms. Moreover, In K.K. Harouni’s world, there are women, who are asked to stay behind doors in order to make them realize their status and position However, Rezak, the protagonist of “A Spoiled Man” is an exceptional case because he also owns a cubicle in which he spends the last days of his life.

Rezak is an old man who manages to get a job as a watch man at Sohail Harouni’s orchard, situated near his weekend home above Islamabad in the short story “A Spoiled Man”. Rezak does not live in the servant quarters but in “a hut that he had built for himself, a little wooden cubicle, faced with tin and mounted on thick legs” (Mueenuddin, “A Spoiled Man” 225). The box is portable and whenever he leaves a job, which often happens due to his quarrels with the workers or the boss, he takes it apart and drags it away on a truck, for which he always saves sufficient money. This nest of Rezak, according to Mueenuddin, is his

“guarantee of independence”. The cabin has all possible facilities including a cotton mattress, a pipe served as spittoon, a mirror and a shelf for shaving and an electric fan. Though Rezak is all alone but decorates his cabin with the photographs of film actresses, buys a radio and finally brings a cheap television to keep himself busy. He requests Sonya to provide him with electricity and then lights his hut with colored bulbs giving an impression of wedding decorations and soon after his marriage, he adds “crude plastic flowers” to it. But after Rezak’s death, the cabin is moved to a shaded corner of the big house and gradually loses all of its contents like mattress, Rezak’s cloths, television and many other things. A foreigner friend of Sonya rightly comments on his visit to Rezak’s cabin “That’s the man’s whole life in a nutshell, isn’t it?” (232).

Though Rezak possesses a sole hut and lives alone in it, but this choice of his cannot be taken as an act of refuge, retreat and confinement as discussed above with reference to the female characters in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Rezak does not face any of the problems these women are suffering from. Though he lives in a cubicle, but contrary to the static rooms, the kitchens and the bathrooms of the female characters in this short story collection, this cubicle is transportable and Rezak freely moves from one place to another carrying it with himself. In addition, Rezak does not confine to his hut as a reaction to any injustices to him, but he fully enjoys his company and entertains himself with all possible means. “He would lie in his cocoon, soft red lights glowing, the television volume turned up, and drink cup after cup of tea kept hot in a vacuum thermos, a refinement that made him smack his lips with appreciation” (233). Neither he suffers from financial crisis and depends on his care takers for his expenses like most of the women in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. His mobile cubicle rather strengthens his independence as stated by Mueenuddin in the start of the story unlike Saleema, Husna, Zainab, Helen, Sonya and other unnamed female characters who are denied of their individuality and personal space which is the right of all human beings. In consequence, these females rather the others in society, confine themselves gradually.

Constant confinement in the rooms or the stores, results in madness as happens in the case of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* and unnamed narrator of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Both of the women are locked up by their husbands in the upper stories of their houses which ultimately results in their insanity. The barred windows and closed doors in both of the works, reveal the physical as well as the mental imprisonment of women imposed by their spouses. However, the unnamed narrator in Gilman’s above mentioned short story frees herself through scratching the yellow wallpaper and liberating a woman image, a true reflection of herself. She says, “I’ve got out at last... And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” (Gilman 53). The same happens with Rezak’s unnamed wife. He marries her despite her dumbness because she could give him a son. This “poor little thing” is forced to live in Rezak’s portable cubicle. Rezak himself remains busy in fields throughout the day and goes everywhere after locking her inside. Her forced marriage is suggested through her crying; “The girl followed him and cried, until finally they were forced to lock

her in the hut" (Mueenuddin, "A Spoiled Man" 235). This confinement worsens her mental condition and one day she disappears and is never found again. It is noteworthy that four female characters in the eight short stories of Mueenuddin's short story collection, are unnamed. Mueenuddin perhaps illustrates it deliberately to suggest that a woman in a patriarchal society is known through her gender, her class and her marriage and that her personal identity and name are neither important nor required.

Mueenuddin offers many varied situations and characters where enclosed spaces can be studied. He often portrays hiding places as exclusively chosen by females as a tool of escape and to come to terms with their low self-worth and heart-aches. Saleema and Lilly shed their tears in bathrooms. Zainab and Husna confine themselves to their allotted rooms from which the two seldom emerge. Even Lilly, a modern woman, constantly retreats in her pristine room at the farm. In fact, most of the women *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* exist in one or two separate spaces that seem to define them. The men, such as Jaglani, Rezak, Hassan, Rafik, and Murad roam freely outside, when they venture into an enclosed space occupied by a woman, they become intruders and exploiters.

A close study of Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* reveals the fact that the female characters, in this short story collection, illustrate the concrete idea of confinement, retreat and refuge, which has already been present in an abstract form, in women of all times and all cultures. A woman's treatment as the Other, her unsaid incarceration in domestic sphere, the supposed expectations from a wife, and an attempt to keep her financially dependent on men; all are different forms of abstract or invisible confinement, refuge and retreat which are being manifested occasionally in South Asian fiction by a male writer specifically. In his short story collection, Mueenuddin mindfully introduces women representing different cultures and class and connects them with the same unspoken problem in order to manifest the same doom of all woman.

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