



SUBALTERNITY AND FEMALE AGENCY IN FARUQI'S THE MIRROR OF BEAUTY

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ABSTRACT

*This article examines female identity negotiations in the colonized patriarchal society of 19th century Indo-Islamic civilization as represented in *The Mirror of Beauty* (Faruqi, 2013). The subalternity and female agency is studied through the characterization of Wazir Khanum, the protagonist, in *The Mirror of Beauty*. Wazir Khanum identity construction is studied comparatively in relation to Nehal Begum of *Twilight in Delhi* (Ali, 1940) and Azra of *The Weary Generations* (Hussain, 1963). The background is the 19th-century Delhi, just before full British colonial control over the subcontinent, Shamsur Rehman Faruqi presents Wazir Khanum, mother of the famous Urdu poet Dagh Dehlvi — as an intelligent, independent, and culturally confident and beautiful and an independent woman. Orientalism (Said, 1978), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *can the subaltern speak?* (1985) and Homi K. Bhabha's *hybridity and third space*, along with the concept of "writing back," the article shows how Faruqi uses Wazir Khanum to reclaim the richness of pre-colonial Indo-Islamic culture while challenging colonial stereotypes of the Eastern woman and traditional patriarchal restrictions. A comparison with Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* reveals how Faruqi moves beyond nostalgic lament to assertive reclamation. Wazir Khanum demonstrates the fiercely independent and assertive female identity which is exemplified analysis of multiple excerpts. The analysis demonstrates that the characterization of Wazir Khanum is unconventional, and rightful claim of a space for female agency in a colonized patriarchal society.*

Keywords: *Postcolonial Gender identity, Hybridity, Subalternity.*

INTRODUCTION

The feminist and postcolonial theorists often find fertile grounds in the fields of knowledge and cultural productions especially in literature for the analyses of silencing, marginalization, and subalternity produced by patriarchy and colonialism. Women are subaltern and are doubly marginalized in a colonized patriarchal cultural production. Discourse practices reflect this marginalizations as discourse is reflection of identity and cultural practices as discursive practices are specific forms of social practices (Foucault, 1992). But the contextual parameters and interrelations affect gender and subjectivity roles, and agency. Cultural and discursive hierarchies make the analysis of genders more complex and entangled with racial marginalizations as described in Postcolonial theory. Women are subaltern in postcolonial patriarchal society who negotiate identity in colonial and patriarchal cultural in the third space of enunciation as postulated by Bhabha (1994: 38). This third space of enunciation provides the space required for mimicry



which is hybridity. Mimicry is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas. This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of the colonized's servitude. This mimicry is also a form of hidden mockery in itself.

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite. Hence, colonial discourse creates an ambivalent space where mimicry operates.

White men discursive representation in colonialism is saviour of brown women from brown men (Spivak 1985) which implies that women in need of help from white men, hence represented as needy and presupposed as without agency and voice. And civilizing mission discourse shifts burden to the brown men who is uncivilized, primitive, hence needs education and civility from the West. The *Mirror Beauty* starts with the rescue of Wazir Khanum by East India Company officer Marston Blake, hence begins the novel by justifying the British presence as saviors and the emergence of contact zones. Whereas *The Weary Generations* starts with the land grant to a native informant Roshan Agha by the colonial masters as no-man's land with re-naming a village which is presumed as without a name and identity hence renamed after colonial intervention renamed as Roshan Pur, hence identity and ownership begin with colonialism and how it is conceptualized, justified and re-named in colonialism. The lands, the bodies and voices of subaltern became the battlegrounds for justifications and claims upon lands and bodies, and the voices heard and silenced (Spivak. 1985). This colonial power and hegemony of patriarchy nexus studied in this paper through the protagonist Wazir Khanum's representation in the *Mirror of Beauty* (Faruqi, 203).

The *Mirror of Beauty* being the tale of an extraordinary woman in nineteenth century India who struggled all her life to choose for herself against all odds. Wazir Khanum is a mirror to reflect upon and understand the gender and colonial fusion in the mid-19th century Indo-Muslim civilization of Delhi. It reflects upon the sunset of the Mughal empire as does the *Twilight in Delhi* (Ali, 1940) but from a different perspective and with a different paradigm and approach to reflect upon the colonial effects upon the land, mind and body of subaltern. The trauma of partition and devastating effects of the Raj are mourned at the departure of the colonizers in *The Weary Generations* (1963) where again the paradigm shifts. All these novels are interwoven trajectories for the study of colonialism and gender during the Raj in the subcontinent though there are other novels, but this study is limited to these aspect/novels only.

This paper's theoretical perspective is based upon the major works of three postcolonial scholars; Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Subaltern theory* and Homi K. Bhabha's *Hybridity and Third Space*. These key concepts provide the conceptual space to discuss the characterization of Wazir Khanum visa-a-vis to Begum Nihal, and Azra of *Twilight in Delhi* and *The Weary Generations*. This discussion paves the way for the understanding of these two questions; 1. How does Wazir Khanum negotiate her identity in colonized and patriarchal society in *The Mirror of Beauty*?

Orientalism (Said, 1978) is considered one of the major works on Postcolonialism along with Frantz Fanon, Homi K Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said posits that the academic knowledge of the West about the East is ideological



and political, which is never neutral and impartial, and it establishes stereotyped subjects and their ways of knowing and living also marginalized and rejected. The knowledge creates epistemic violence as it establishes dominant framework of knowledge which reject alternative ways of knowing and hence place knowledge from alternative as non-existing. Through the discourse the West constructed the stereotyped image of the “Orient” as exotic, backward, irrational, sensual, and timeless — in contrast to the rational, progressive, and masculine West. This binarism provides the base upon which the colonial empire stands out so huge and high with so-called moral justification of civilizing mission. The misery, helplessness and marginality of women also quoted for in this justification and discursively constructed colonization of others’ lands as a rescue mission for brown women and civilizing mission for men and their culture. The “native woman” was often portrayed helpless and are in the dire need of rescue. Said showed how knowledge itself became a tool of domination. Wazir Khanum rescued by Edward Marston Blak, an Officer in the East Indian Company provides the first contact zone and base for a story. She is represented as rescued but in depth she is displaced in her culture and relocated with a thinking that there she will have better and independent life. In this uprooting the patriarchal Indo-Muslim culture has its role too. As Spivak has averred this is a typical example of “White men saving brown women from brown men”. Spivak takes this further by asking: “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak, 1988). It is averred in this essay that doubly marginalized, unrepresented and oppressed can never be heard in the power dynamics of political, economic and cultural structures. In this article the question of gender identity is problematized with the question of colonial and patriarchal power dynamics and the question of gender identity as conceptualized in the writing back of the most prominent writers of the subcontinent, the female characters of these writers’ prominent novels are selected to study the development in postcolonial thought about literary gender representation and also how colonized female subjects negotiate their identity in colonized and patriarchal society. Situating the subaltern within a multiplicity of hierarchies is not enough: we must also think about the crucial relations between these hierarchies, between different forces and discourses (Loomba, 2002. p. 200).

Shamsur Rehman Faruqi’s Wazir Khanum is an exception to some extent when compared to the other well-known female characters of the sub-continent novels. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi’s *The Mirror of Beauty* makes a strong intervention by placing Wazir Khanum at the center of the story because in other postcolonial novels female characters do not occupy such a central place, whereas in *The Mirror of Beauty* the whole story is evolved/developed around Wazir Khanum. The postcolonial patriarchal world is seen from her eyes. And whereas in most historical accounts, Wazir Khanum, the mother of the famous Urdu poet Dagh Dehlvi of the 19th century appeared only as a footnote or a scandalous figure in other representations. It means Wazir Khanum made silenced/invisible, and her voice has never been heard in other narrations/representation, but representation of this historical figure, Wazir Khanum, in *The Mirror of Beauty* is an exception. Therefore, this character is selected for this study and this fictional -historical reimagines by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi as a complex, intelligent, and assertive woman who actively asserts herself and decides the matters of her own life in an Indo in the late



19th century while the old Mughal world fades and British power rises. Wazir Khanum is dazzlingly beautiful and fiercely independent woman.

To live a meaningful and purposeful life, Wazir Khanum lived her life in negotiating a respectable space for herself and for her children, but her journey remains cyclic in patriarchal and colonial society, she has her place only upon the margins and her positionality defines her choices and decisions through her life. She vehemently rejects the advances of the Resident Bahadur Willaim Fraser which means that only material gains are not her motives, she knows the status of her respect and place in a Firangi house as she experienced in Marston Blake house and relatives of Marston Balke rejected her and deprived her the custody of her children. She remained loyal and motherly to all her children and never shied away from the responsibility of her children. This journey of choices offered by a patriarchal culture tinted with colonialism offers her nothing but chains of misery and misfortunes and she passes her life in negotiating her space and tried to live a respectable life.

This article argues that cultural reclamation is claimed through the character of Wazir Khanum. Through her strong sense of self and profound connection to pre-colonial Indo-Islamic culture, she resists the silencing of subalternity (Spivak, 1988), challenges Orientalist stereotypes (Said, 1978), and creates a new, mixed identity that disrupts binary thinking (Bhabha, 1994).

The *Mirror of Beauty* is an act of writing back (Ashcroft et al., 1989) but through reclamation by building a dignified, intelligent and civilized image of Indo - Islamic womanhood against colonial and patriarchal constraints. A comparison with Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* further highlights Faruqi's distinctive approach: where Ali mourns cultural loss through passive female figures, Faruqi asserts active reclamation through a bold, hybrid female protagonist. Bhabha argues that different cultural encounters, especially which have different power dynamics, are not simply a fusion of identities but generation of new-hybrid identities, subjects from both the cultures can never be the same after interacting with the other and result is simply not a new subject but a mixed one. Hybridity is "the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). It emerges in the "third space" — a liminal zone where cultural meanings are negotiated, translated, and transformed: "the 'inter' — the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

Hybridity creates a space where the negotiations take place. This hybrid space is productive where new identities because when contact zone happened, the both the colonizer and the colonized never came out of this the same as before this happening, so colonization has happened to the both. And it establishes a site of ambivalence and tension. The site of this ambivalence is experienced when Wazir Khanum visits William Fraser's mansion upon the hill at the outskirts of Delhi. This contact zone provides hybrid site for the amalgamation of the cultures, the poetry recited by Mirza Galib at the mansion of the resident Bahadur of the company and the attire of William Fraser is inspired by the Indo-Islamic culture. But here, the colonized, William Fraser, The Resident Magistrate, views Wazir Khanum as a nautch girl/prostitute and commodify her whereas the gaze of Nawab Shamsudin Ahmad Khan was quite different and the



noteworthy point is that Wazir Khanum feels safe in the company of the Nawab at the site developed/build and the mehfil/party is arranged by the white man. So here, the rescuer is brown men saving the brown woman instead of white man as we have seen in the first contact zone of Edward Marston Blak and the father of Wazir Khanum returning from the shrine where white man saved the brown woman from the brown man but the white man has taken a price of it with the commodity at the exchange is the brown woman offered by the brown man to the white man because the white man has wished so. The imposition of the colonial authority is quite clear and obvious here. Here, the third is not offered because at stake is doubly marginalized- a subaltern- a wazir khanum which is Chhoti Begum.

Said exposes how colonial discourse tried to fix the Eastern woman in negative stereotypes. Spivak warns us about the structural difficulty of letting the subaltern speak. Bhabha shows how hybrid identities can create space for resistance and new subjectivities. Together, they illuminate Wazir Khanum's character: she is a subaltern woman whose voice is mediated (Spivak), yet she occupies a productive third space where she reclaims her culture through hybrid femininity (Bhabha), directly challenging Orientalist images (Said).

This study uses a qualitative interpretive approach based on postcolonial literary theory. The main method is "qualitative textual analysis", which allows deep examination of how language, narrative style, character development, and cultural references shape gendered identity in a colonial and patriarchal setting. The three prominent encounters of Wazir Khanum are: Edward Marston Blake, the second is with Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan and the third is with William Fraser. These encounters provide a nuance understanding of cultural differences in approaching and thinking about women. Careful analysis of specific passages focusing on Wazir Khanum's dialogues, thoughts, descriptions of her beauty, interactions with men, and moments of resistance is done of selected relevant excerpts and incidents. The primary source is Faruqi's *The Mirror of Beauty* (2013 English translation), especially scenes that highlight Wazir Khanum's personality and relationships and major postcolonial theorists. The theoretical ideas guide the reading, but the text itself shapes how the theories are applied.

Limitations include focusing on only one character in one novel and using the English translation. However, Faruqi's rich reconstruction of Delhi's culture makes this a valuable case study for understanding postcolonial gender and cultural reclamation.

The contact zones worth discussing where Wazir Khanum negotiates her identity are her meeting with Captain Edward Marston Blake – Assistant English Political Agent in Jaipur, the second is encounter of Wazir Khanum with William Fraser – The Resident Bahadur of Delhi, and the third is her life with Dilawar-Ul-Mulk Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan Bahadur – ruler of Loharu and Ferozepur Jhirka. Wazir Khanum has son Navab Mirza Khan Dagh with Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan, and after the sad demise of the Navab, Wazir Khanum married to Agha Mirza Maulavi Turab Ali Khan also known as Agha Turab Ali – the manager of horse and elephant stable and Tent equipment to the Navab of Rampur, Wazir has son with him also known as Shah Muhammad Agha, and Mirza Muhammad Sultan Ghulam Fakhruddin Fathul Mulk Shah Bahadur – the third heir apparent to the throne of Hindustan, and Mirza Khurshid Alam her son with him. All



these encounters are discussed for understanding the identity and third space enunciations of Wazir Khanum for cultural and gender equality reclamation. These two marriages prove the social status of Wazir Khanum. How high she is esteemed in social circles, except William Fraser, no one never thought low of Wazir or approached her disgracefully as William Fraser did whereas Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan is the ruler of Loharu and Firozpur Jhirka and Mirza Muhammad Sultan Ghulam Fakhruddin Fathul Mulk Shah Bahadur – the third heir apparent, none less in social status and power than William Fraser. This proves the stereotyped discursive construction of brown woman in colonial discourse which is reflected through the discourse of William Fraser – the Resident Bahadur of Delhi, the Company Sahib.

Faruqi presents Wazir Khanum as a strong, intelligent, spirited, and beautiful woman in her mid-twenties. Unlike passive or mourning female characters in earlier novels, she shows real agency through her beauty, mind, independence, and determination and a will to live her life. The novel opens with a dramatic rescue scene that immediately establishes Wazir Khanum's vulnerability and the beginning of her hybrid journey. During the dust storm returning from the Mehrauli fair, Wazir Khanam and her father are stranded when their bullock cart's axle breaks:

“. . . The girl would surely end up as a maidservant or in a brothel and the father's grave was to be nowhere else but in that wild and lonely place.”(p. 5)

The description of the scene is a setting where it is already established that what will happen to the girl and her father if dacoits arrived at the scene. Her father resigns himself to fate, fearing his daughter will be reduced to servitude or prostitution.

The rescue description and the start of the novel at the top of page number 03 are very notable and apt here to describe how colonizer and colonized contact zone established and developed in the novel and how in this contact zone identity is established and represented.

“Captain Edward Marston Blake, the Company Sahib, rescues some travellers on the road to Delhi while returning from the Auspicious Fair at the Noble Village of Mehrauli.” Here the story of colonial encounter begins – the saviour company Sahib arrived but the land and Wazir have to pay the price of this rescue from local brown dacoits. The colonial masters make the matters plausible with some adjustments as was done by Edward Marston Blake and Yusuf Sadakar – Wazir Khanum's father,

The contact zone is represented as a rescuer (Edward Marston) and the one rescued is colonized female should later turn out to be Wazir Khanum - the Chhoti Begum. The generic name – without specific identity. The Wazir Khanum is not only rescued but discovered also like Roshan Pur which is discovered and named as a prize to Roshan Agha – the local informant – Azra's father. Hence, story of naming begins with colonialism, but starts not with knowing but renaming as with no history at all. Colonialism takes the land and the colonized subjects as ground-zero of history. This moment could easily fit Orientalist stereotypes of the helpless Eastern woman needing rescue (Said, 1978). But Faruqi uses it to introduce Captain Marston Blake, whose arrival marks Wazir Khanum's entry into the colonial contact zone. The text explicitly raises the question of how a secluded Muslim girl becomes “attached” to an Englishman:



“A Muslim girl living her life in seclusion behind closed doors and a veil, and who wasn't apparently a nautch girl or a courtesan: how did she come to be available to and appropriated by an Englishman?”

From a Spivakian perspective, this highlights the subaltern woman's structural invisibility and vulnerability as start is with “*A Muslim girl*”. The answer to the last lines is how colonialism made available land and body and appropriated these for the colonial masters' benefits and joys. Faruqi appropriated this contact-zone and shifted this in the secure space of home to provide a safe negotiating space to the colonized female subject. From Bhabha's lens, it initiates her positioning in the third space — a site where colonial rescue simultaneously opens possibilities for hybrid negotiation.

“Then it was Marston Blake who took the first tentative step. Not saying anything, he looked at Wazir Khanum with meaningful, quizzing eyes. Judging that there was a responsive hint from the other side too, Blake and Yusuf drew quietly aside and conducted a whispered conversation (p. 08)”

This is a clear description that first The Englishman himself assumed the silence of the subaltern as her willingness and then two men (Wazir Father and The Company Sahib – Edward Marston Blake) decided the fate of the subaltern and her future life set on a pattern which can never be undone wholly. Wazir Khanum is sent with the Company Sahib without anyone paying any heed to her wishes or any cultural or religious rites, and obligations. So, the subaltern cannot speak and cannot be represented especially in a colonized patriarchal culture.

Wazir Khanum is doubly marginalized and is made invisible from the most important decision of her life which has set the directions of her future life. But when Wazir Khanum faces herself the issues which require her intervention she speaks and claims her agency. Wazir Khanum's agency becomes most visible in her direct confrontation with colonial arrogance. When Marston Blake disparages Indians as “bastards,” she responds sharply to this and said, “So you mean to say that we taught them to steal?” Marston Blake would retort angrily. “You may not have taught them,” she would cry out, “but god will be our witness to say that our servants are not thieves. True, you did not teach them to steal. But did you ever stop to think from whom they contracted this vicious habit?”. “There is nothing to think about. All bastards, these Indians. They are all the same.”

“It is you, the English, who don't believe in marriage or legal wedding, and you describe my people as bastards! *Don't let such words ever pass your lips again, or I ...*” (Faruqi, 2013, p. 312). How much her people and customs are valued by Wazir Khanum is quite apparent here. What a strong claim upon traditions and customs of a lived culture and how actively her agency of rightful claim can be discerned from the above episode of safe space of a home. She is her own self and makes herself visible and heard wherever she has chance to assert herself.

This dialogue powerfully illustrates Spivak's concern with subaltern speech. Wazir Khanum does not remain silent; she appropriates the colonizer's moral language and



turns it back against him, exposing British hypocrisy. From Bhabha's perspective, this is mimicry with a difference — “almost the same, but not quite” — creating ambivalence that unsettles colonial authority from within the third space.

Faruqi repeatedly links Wazir Khanum's beauty to pre-colonial Indo-Islamic aesthetic traditions. When the lantern light reveals her face during the rescue:

“Her face, full of fear and shame, felt dark and hot below her large brown-black eyes, like a deer's whose forehead had been burnt brown and black by a harsh sun. And the lantern's thrilling, trembling flame highlighted her body just a bit more (p. 3).” Faruqi elevates her beauty as “the mirror of beauty of Indian civilization”, an intertextual metaphor that revives Mughal aesthetic philosophy. Her beauty becomes hybrid cultural capital — rooted in tradition yet strategically deployed in colonial encounters. As a female, she moves fluidly between the zenana world of traditional refinement and the emerging colonial public sphere, using her aesthetic presence to negotiate power rather than merely submitting to it.

Wazir Khanum's role as mother further deepens her hybrid subjectivity. She bears two children with Marston Blake (Martin/Amir Mirza and Sophia/Badshah Begam) and later transmits cultural knowledge to them despite colonial disruption. The text traces her descendants' literary and cultural pursuits, including Salim Jafar's scholarly work on Nazir Akbarabadi and Ghalib, positioning Wazir Khanum as the origin of a hybrid Indo-Muslim intellectual lineage that survives colonial fragmentation.

Her transgressive desire and refusal of conventional domesticity challenge both colonial stereotypes and indigenous patriarchal expectations. She remains “fiercely independent, wilful and proud” (Faruqi, 2013, as cited in Roy, 2013), choosing relationships and managing her life on her own terms. This creates a subversive femininity that is simultaneously traditional in its cultural depth and modern in its assertion of autonomy.

According to Stuart Hall (2015) Identity is not a fixed essence but a fluid ongoing process.

Wazir Khanum's gender identity emerges as a dynamic process in the third space. Spivak draws attention to the mediated nature of her voice — Faruqi, an elite male author, still speaks through her. Yet Bhabha illuminates how her hybrid femininity enables assertive resistance. Said helps us see how Faruqi counters Orientalist representations that reduce the Eastern woman to either victim or seductress. Through direct speech, strategic beauty, and cultural transmission, Wazir Khanum reclaims agency and turns her marginal position into a source of strength.

Wazir Khanum's encounter with William Fraser after the death of Edward Marston Blake in a rebellion is analyzed here to understand how colonial masters think of colonized women. The invitation to The Mansion of William Fraser who has now fully adapted the Indian ways and is fully fluent in Persian. It means that Fraser knows the customs and culture of Delhi very well. He lived like Indian nobility in Delhi. He had six or seven bibis and also number of boys as his lovers (p. 265).

Wazir Khanum's reflection upon the receiving of the invitation is quite revealing of her denouement of this event.

“An uncomfortable feeling, something like a thrill, rose in Wazir's body if Fraser Sahib wants me ...But will it be



acceptable to me to be one of his servants? Marston Blake Sahib's home was quite a different matter. There, I was the sole woman. And her (p. 266)"

These are initial reflections of Wazir Khanum about William Fraser which demonstrate that world comfort and security are never the prime factors of her choices during her life. And further states, "And if he [William Fraser] displeased or annoyed? So what? Let him be displeased, I could not care less. (p. 266)". This shows the absolute will and agency of Wazir Khanum which cannot be molded in front of the power. Her agency and decision are resolute and firm, and her conditions cannot dictate her to choose a disgraceful position. She is like Azra in *The Weary Generations*. Azra chooses Naim despite the will and decision of her father, but she returned to the same class after getting weary of Naim's class. Wazir's firm resolute is 'there might be others, sightless and shameless, who sell their honour for two square meals. Well, I am not like them'. And it is substantiated in her story that she is not like anyone else, she stands apart from the rest in her dignity and her choices and her way of life in a colonized patriarchal culture. On return from the Fraser's party, Navab escorted Wazir Khanum to her house as it was late in the night but instead of imposing himself upon Wazir, the Navab has sought permission to see Wazir on the next day.

"There is a message from the Presence, Navab sahib. May I submit, if not deemed impertinent. Wazir's heart knocked hard against her ribs, 'please command, she said. The Honourable Navab Dilawar-ul Mulk commands. Could it be possible to find a way for him to see you again over the next day or two?

I would be proud of my good fortune. At what time does the Honourable Sir have the notion to trouble his noble self?

Tomorrow should it be possible?"

This way of getting permission was the norm of the day and never violated even by the most tyrant and violent rulers of the day as is admitted by William Fraser himself. Whereas William Fraser imposed himself upon Wazir's mansion without any prior permission or even information whereas Wazir has not refused him only out of courtesy. And when William Fraser taken Wazir as granted and as a nautch girl, Wazir has rebuked and shoe him the door.

The second encounter of Wazir Khanum with William Fraser is quite astonishing as it was not mediated by a colonial patriarch subject as was done by Wazir's father where two men (Yusuf Sadakar – Wazir's father and Edward Marston Blake) who agreed and decide the fate of Wazir Khanum but now Wazir Khanum is at her own to treat an English man – the most powerful man in Delhi in her own way:

"Fraser was unable to decide upon the strategy about Chhoti Begum: success should be assured, and there should be no loose talk in the city about the Resident's high handedness. Otherwise, it was no problem to have her picked up from her house; or she could be invited for dinner and then detained regardless of her wishes. (As if he



was confident that if invited, Chhoti Begum would not refuse the invitation) p. 431”

From the first meet-up of Wazir, Fraser was thinking about her but it was not an easy – go for the Resident Bahadur the most powerful officer of the company at Delhi. Hence, Fraser inner thoughts are revealed in the above passage. And in this attempt, Fraser summoned Hakim Asad Ullah Khan to convey a message to Navab Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan about Wazir. The metonymic equation of Fraser personal greed with that of the company is quite apparent here.

“You should warn Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan that Chhoti Begum has been chosen by another’s eye. So, he should give up thoughts of wooing her. You may tell him in plain words: this is my message to him and you have been given this message without any intermediary.

I am grateful to the senior Sahib Bahadur for the confidence that he reposes in me, but I can have no pressure or influence to bring on Shamsuddin Ahmad Khan, nor it is my station to be the bearer of the message to him’

Why? Why is it not your station? Fraser was now openly infuriated. Are you not loyal to the Honourable Company Bahadur? I beg your pardon, but I do not imagine that this matter has any on the question of one’s loyalty to the Honourable Company,’ Hakim Asadullah Khan answered coldly. An even if it had, I ate the King’s salt, not the company’s salt.

And you king eats the Company’s salt, Umdat-ul-Mulk Hakim Asad Ullah Kan.

It is a matter of point of view, Navab Resident Bahadur.”

This encounter of William Fraser with Hakim Asad Ullah Khan is also a reflection upon the way people think of the King and the Company. And how the colonial rule is thought of when Fraser suggests that King is eating at the Company’s salt to which it is stated quite astonishingly that it is matter of point of view suggesting thereby that company has usurped the state otherwise has no legal and moral authority over the Indian subcontinent. And King and Company are thought of in quite different paradigms.

It was practice not to use canopy while riding an elephant in the city premises and rode upon an elephant in the city was not allowed to anyone except the King, and using a canopy is out of the question. Ochterlony – the former Resident Bahadur of Delhi used to ride an elephant in the city area but never used canopy in the Indian King style but molded it British style. Hence, hybridity is utilized as strategy to make a dent in the power structure. Ochterlony bent the rule by using not a canopy in the Royal style, but an English-style umbrella held over his head by a servant who stood behind the howdah (p. 433). Whereas Willima believed that he is equal to Aurangzeb if not in power, might and splendour. He also believed that Company’s Abstract Being was shortly going to be elevated to the same rank which Aurangzeb has occupied for half a century.



“Wazir, although surprised at the news of Fraser’s advent, did not feel apprehensive or anxious. It was certainly an insult to her dignity that Fraser should inflict himself upon her without notice; for, it meant that in Fraser’s eyes Wazir counted as mere nautch girl, to be made available to an appropriate patron at any time of the day and night. Wazir was not unaware of the nuances involved here but preferred to attribute Fraser’s action to the characteristic arrogance of the English and their disdainful, tyrannical demeanour towards Indians. She could not think of a suitable excuse to deny Fraser’s request. (p. 438)”

Hence, it is well-known among the natives that British are arrogant and how never cared about values, norms and tradition of a culture and civilization and what are the courteous norms for visiting a woman in a civilized Indo-Islamic tradition. In the next passage, it is evident how Fraser approached Wazir, discourse is reflecting the practice common among the colonial master or perhaps in Fraser’s conception of women and their manners. How haughty Fraser thinks of himself when he equated himself with the Company and now it is out of question for him that an Indian woman can refuse The Resident Bahadur. But here is Wazir Khanum – the most beautiful, fiercely independent woman. How Fraser was conducting himself at Wazir’s house is quite revealing of how the British thought of independent Indian women.

“Fraser half rose from his place and extended his hands, perhaps desiring to get hold of her arm and gently pull her next to him. (p. 440)”

Wazir was well aware of the discursive placement of women in her own society – she categorically describes being treated as a commodity in her own patriarchal culture. She refused to be a commodity but her own world was adamant to assign her commodity space and place – this is marginalization in two ways – which double marginalization.

“... her world insisted on seeing her as a commodity. And who is this abominable Englishman – let death take him – to have expectations from me? Do I owe him money or am I his subject? And what kind of civilized conduct is this? Why should anyone from bazars, or wherever, feel empowered to push his claim over a woman and the woman be not permitted to open her mouth even in protest? Are women goats and sheep to be driven wherever one listeth?”
(p. 441)

Indians never consider themselves subjects to the company. Again, and again refused to accept this subjective position tried by the colonial masters. Never owe any moral or legal obligations to the company.

“Fraser, according to his lights, had said something profound and unanswerable. But he had never dealt with a girl like Wazir. Nor had he ever seen an Indian girl so quick to take offence and whose



mood could change so quickly from soft to hard, even when she faced an Englishman. He was flabbergasted. The veneer of Indian sophistication, of oblique speech, of refinement, all this was wiped away from his face as if destroyed by acid. He struck his fist on the occasional table, upsetting the table and what was on it. He stood up, erect and rigid, as if inspecting a parade.”

Chhoti Begam, this bargain will cost you dear.

Here, like other discursive categorisation by the colonial discourse, Fraser instead of calling Wazir by her name, uses the generic Chhoti Begum for Wazir Khanum to remind her place and position in her own home by reinventing these names as classifications instead of using these names just a way of respect and only used by own family members or when elders talk about them in way of referring publicly. But the use by William Fraser is neither out of respect nor for reference in the public, he is using this to threat and commodify her.

"There is no bargain between me and you. I do not believe in cheap bargains anyway. I assay and judge the buyer's seal and stamp of temperament in the first place.' Wazir drew herself to her full height. waved towards the door, and said. 'There is the door. Senior Sahib Bahadur.

She then bent low, made the salaam with correct formality, then smiled and then paling and then reddening like red-hot copper. He clenched his a proud and derisive smile. Fraser stood motionless, his colour darkening jaws so hard that the cheekbones became exceedingly prominent.

quietly went out and beckoned to the senior cudgel-wielder and another one to come inside. Both stood alert and at the ready in Wazir Khanam's hall. Fraser's staff had been kept engaged by the other cudgel-wielders in idle chat and exchange of news, so they were not at Fraser's immediate call Fraser's dilemma grew by the second. If he could, he would chew up his own body or bring the roof down with shouts and harangues and threats. Within a few moments, the temperature of hospitality inside the house had plummeted from cosy warmth to very near freezing. Vafadar had stopped plying the fan and was looking at Wazir intently, as if expecting some unusual order. Fraser made up his mind and took a couple of steps forward and stood at the edge of the carpet. In spite of what had happened between him and Wazir a minute ago, he still expected some maid to come forward and help him put on his shoes. But there was not the slightest movement from any of those present.

“Wazir’s whole bring throbbled with delight. Such subtleties were way beyond Marston Blake’s capacity. But the very next moment



she trembled with fear. What is happening here? Where am I going? Am I going...or am I being taken? (p. 326)”

A striking contrast emerges when comparing Wazir Khanum with the female characters in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), particularly Begum Nihal. In Ali's novel, women like Begum Nihal are largely passive symbols of a dying Mughal culture. They embody loss, confinement within the zenana, and quiet endurance as the old aristocratic world crumbles under British rule. Their lives are marked by nostalgia, resignation, and cultural mourning. The novel's tone is elegiac; women remain trapped in domesticity, their agency limited to preserving tradition within shrinking private spheres.

In sharp contrast, Faruqi's Wazir Khanum represents assertive reclamation rather than lament. While Begum Nihal mourns the fading glory from behind the veil, Wazir Khanum actively negotiates her place in a changing world. She is not confined to the zenana; as a courtesan, she moves between private and public spheres, using her beauty, intellect, and speech as instruments of power. Where Begum Nihal's identity is defined by loss and domestic duty, Wazir Khanum's hybrid femininity allows her to challenge colonial arrogance directly and transmit cultural knowledge to the next generation. Faruqi thus shifts the postcolonial narrative from passive elegy to active resistance. Wazir Khanum does not simply survive colonialism — she reclaims pre-colonial aesthetic and intellectual heritage on her own terms, offering a model of hybrid agency that **Twilight in Delhi** does not achieve.

This comparison underscores Faruqi's innovation: while Ali mourns the death of a culture through its women, Faruqi revives that culture through a woman who refuses to be merely a symbol of loss.

Faruqi's novel stands apart from earlier works like *Twilight in Delhi* by offering active reclamation instead of passive lament and narrative reclamation. Wazir Khanum does not simply remember the past — she lives with intelligence and independence and with bravery to face and struggle with the world out there.

The novel challenges Said's Orientalism by refusing to portray the Eastern woman as exotic or helpless. It also addresses Spivak's concern about silencing by giving Wazir Khanum real voice and depth, even while acknowledging that her representation is still shaped by a male author. Bhabha's hybridity explains how she creates a new form of femininity that is both rooted in tradition and boldly modern.

The *Mirror of Beauty* does more than tell the story of one remarkable woman — it fundamentally reimagines what postcolonial female agency can look like. In Wazir Khanum, Faruqi creates a character who refuses to be defined by colonial stereotypes or confined by traditional expectations. She is neither the helpless victim of Orientalist fantasy (Said) nor the permanently silenced subaltern (Spivak). Instead, she inhabits Bhabha's third space with remarkable confidence, weaving pre-colonial Indo-Islamic cultural depth with bold, hybrid modernity. Her beauty is not passive ornament but living heritage; her speech is not mediated complaint but sharp resistance; her motherhood is not quiet duty but active transmission of a rich literary tradition.

By giving Wazir Khanum intellectual sharpness, emotional autonomy, and cultural rootedness, Faruqi moves beyond the nostalgic mourning of earlier postcolonial novels



— most notably Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, where women like Begum Nihal remain trapped in elegiac domesticity — and offers something far more powerful: an assertive reclamation of voice, desire, and dignity. Where Ali's women symbolize cultural loss, Faruqi's Wazir Khanum embodies cultural revival.

In doing so, he demonstrates that the subaltern can speak — when a writer is willing to listen deeply, represent ethically, and allow her to emerge as a complex, desired, and culturally confident subject. In our own time, when questions of gender justice, cultural identity, and colonial legacies continue to shape global conversations, Wazir Khanum stands as a radiant and resilient mirror — not only of beauty, but of the enduring human capacity to negotiate, resist, and remake one's world on one's own terms.

With her head bent and her body fully wrapped in a chador behind the palanquin's heavy drapery, Wazir Khanum could see nothing.

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