

Power in Madness:
The Representation of Madwomen in Contemporary Bangladeshi Web Series and Films



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Summer 2022

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The Representation of Madwomen in Contemporary Bangladeshi Web Series and Films.

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Humanities
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
MA in English

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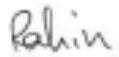
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Summer 2022

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

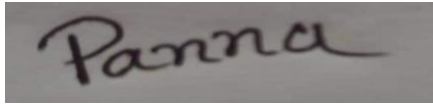


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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussions.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in dark ink. The signature appears to be the name 'Panna' written in a cursive, flowing script.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my MA dissertation to my mother, Nur Nahar Begum who has given me her immense love and support.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to take the blessing of Almighty Allah into account for giving me the strength to complete my dissertation.

Next, I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor, Mohammad Zaki Rezwan, for his valuable comments, guidance, and encouragement throughout this whole dissertation. He has given his valuable time and he has also provided every kind of help and advice during this whole journey. He has given me the insight and direction that I needed for this thesis.

Lastly, I would also like to acknowledge my siblings and friends who have helped and supported me during this hard time. I am also thankful to all my teachers.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Chapter 1: Introduction	1-6
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	7- 20
Chapter 3: Defining the Characters of Madwomen	21-26
Chapter 4: Madness and Curiosity as the Power of Women's Empowerment	27-37
Chapter 5: Conclusion	38-40
Works Cited	41-43

Abstract

Madness is often considered as ‘feminine’. Women are often portrayed as mad to force the idea of instability or unreliability, and madwomen challenge the conventional gender standard which also transgresses the norms and values of society. This paper will explore the depiction of madwomen in contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films by focusing on one film *Rehana Maryam Noor* by Abdullah Muhammad Saad and two web series *Taqdeer* and *Sabrina* by Ahmed Shawki and Ashfaque Nipun. The purpose of this study is to show how these films and web series have used the concept of madwomen to give women agency and empowerment. However, it is important to understand the representation of madwomen in popular culture, particularly in contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films. Hence, this paper will be a feminist study and it will give an insight into the representation of madwomen in contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series. This paper will analyze three characters of madwomen from this film and web series. To explore these three female characters, this research will use Gilbert and Guber's idea of monster women. In this study, Mulvey's concept of curiosity will be used to examine how their transgressive curiosity has turned them into madwomen and helped them to resist sexual violence and sexual harassment in a patriarchal society. This paper will show women's curiosity and madness work as power and assist women to gain empowerment in the patriarchal structure.

Keywords: Madwomen, curiosity, sexual harassment, rape, patriarchal society, monster, stubbornness, empowerment, resistance.

Chapter One

Introduction

The concept of madness has been gendered as a female illness for centuries. Insanity, anger, irrationality, hysteria, fury, and excessive emotion are considered different forms of madness in women. This socially constructed concept is used to villainize or invalidate women. Phyllis Chesler asserts that madness in any form is a breakaway from traditional roles. According to Chesler “What we consider ‘madness,’ whether it appears in women or in men, is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one’s sex role stereotype” (Chesler 93). The cultural construction of madness shapes the viewpoint where the default madness is feminine. This association of women with madness has categorized women as ‘madwomen’. This concept of madwomen has been used widely in literature and films. Lilian Feder claims madness is an important motif of literature as she describes “the nature of madness itself as an incorporation of the very values and prohibitions it challenges” (Feder 4). In contemporary films and web series, women play a very vital role. Traditionally, in Bangladesh women are portrayed on screen as docile, submissive, inferior, and the epitome of beauty. Al Sire mentions “the image of women portrayed as a good wife or a virtue of sacrifice” (Al Sire 5747).

However, contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films are redefining narratives of women. These web series and films are using the concept of madwomen that challenges the conventional gender standard. In this research, I will examine how the concept of madwomen has been used in contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films.

The concept of madwomen has a deeper connection with religion and myth. To understand the concept of madwomen, it is important to know its historical roots. In religion and mythology, women have been associated with irrationality, anger, evil, and madness. It can be seen in myths and in different religious stories. This view of women is highly patriarchal which creates the concepts of madwomen or dangerous women. In Greek mythology, Pandora is known as a dangerous woman. According to Hesiod, Pandora is the first woman given to mankind as a punishment for the titan Prometheus's treachery in giving mankind fire. Hesiod describes Pandora as "the beautiful evil," and he also writes, "Zeus made women be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil" (Hesiod 590). Pandora was completed by other Gods, and each of them gave her a gift like beauty and grace. Pandora is also gifted with "a shameless mind and a deceitful nature" (Hesiod 60) by Hermes. When Pandora is gifted to mankind, she unleashes all the evils and plagues of the world as she opens the forbidden jar because of her curiosity. This myth illustrates women as guilty like Pandora caused evil to enter the world, and inflicted it upon men. Hence, this myth links the origin of evil to the origin of women. Similarly, in Christianity, Eve is the first woman and the wife of Adam. Eve has been tempted by the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. She also gives Adam this fruit as Adam says, "The woman whom you gave to be here with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate it" (English Standard Version Bible, Gen.3.12). God punished both Adam and Eve for disobeying his order as they ate the forbidden fruit that contains good and evil. Therefore, Eve becomes the reason for

the downfall of mankind and for bringing evil to the world. Furthermore, this story once again cites the indistinguishable origin of evil from the origin of womenkind.

Moreover, according to Jewish folklore, Lilith was the first wife of Adam who was created from the same dust as Adam. They were equal. She does not want to submit herself to Adam's authority. According to the Alphabet of Ben Sira, “‘She said, ‘I will not lie below,’ and he said, ‘I will not lie below, but above, since you are fit for being below and I for being above.’ She said to him, ‘The two of us are equal since we are both from the earth’” (“Alphabet of Ben Sira 78: Lilith”). Adam can not impose his own wishes on Lilith. For this, she is considered rebellious and radical. Lilith herself left the garden of Eden, she was not thrown away. She becomes a demon herself and refuses to return to heaven. Lilith demands power and equality. Therefore, she becomes the most well-known demon. The myths of Pandora, Eve, and Lilith present the connection of women with evil. Pandora and Eve have been villainized for their curiosity which caused them to take violent actions. Lilith has also become a demon for being too masculine in her independence, dominance, violence, and sexuality. Women in society are considered as mad when they do not act according to the social standard.

For this paper, I have chosen three characters of madwomen from contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series, from the film *Rehana Maryam Noor*, Rehana, from the web series *Taqdeer*, Afsana Anjum and from the web series *Sabrina*, Sabrina. In this research, I will analyze these three characters as madwomen to show how their curiosity, anger, ambition, and stubbornness have transformed them into madwomen. Besides, how these madwomen have been empowered in this web series and films.

The Bangladeshi film that I am going to analyze in this paper is *Rehana Maryam Noor*, directed by Abdullah Mohammad Saad. In this film, Rehana is a single mother and the sole

breadwinner of a family. The story of this movie revolves around the character Rehana. She is seeking justice on behalf of one of her students who has fallen victim to sexual harassment at the hands of one of the professors. This movie portrays the picture of a madwoman who is ready to take any step to punish the perpetrator. *Taqdeer* is a Bangladeshi web series that I have chosen for this paper and this series is directed by Syed Ahmed Shawki. In this web series, Afsana is a famous journalist and she seeks justice for a rape victim. Afsana is also depicted as a madwoman as she is ambitious, stubborn, and ready to do anything for justice. Besides, *Sabrina* is also a Bangladeshi web series directed by Ashfaque Nipun that I am going to analyze in this research paper. In *Sabrina*, the story revolves around two characters named Sabrina. One is the patient Sabrina, who is a rape victim and also has been burnt. The other is a doctor, Sabrina, who is seeking justice for her patient. In this series, doctor Sabrina is the madwoman who is fearless and brave enough. She is determined to bring justice to patient Sabrina. Sexual harassment and sexual violence like rape are present in all these primary texts. In this research, I am going to examine how these characters of madwomen are resisting sexual harassment and sexual violence in a patriarchal society. From the introduction of the primary texts of the movie and web series, the basic knowledge about the text and the motive behind choosing these texts can be learned.

In order to obtain more understanding of the representation of women in Bangladeshi films and other relevant topics which are important for this research like sexual harassment, rape, the concept of madwomen, and women's curiosity, have been examined in this paper. This study has observed the role of women in Bangladeshi films and how it is changing along with social transformation. This paper collects information about sexual harassment in Bangladesh, the relationship between patriarchy and sexual violence, and the social and mental situation of a victim. It is observed in this research that the concept of madwomen has been used in literature

and in films. Again, madness is used as resistance against patriarchal dominance. Moreover, this paper has also inquired how women's curiosity is connected with psychoanalysis and how women's curiosity can be connected to epistemology. While researching, I have found a gap in research on contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films. There is no extensive research on these texts and the representation of madwomen in these films and web series has not been studied by any scholar. It is relatively a new field where these contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films are redefining narratives of women. That is why this research is important because it is a new area where women have agency. These women characters are not submissive, docile, inferior, or the epitome of beauty. Rather, they are strong, mad, and empowered with their agency as they are resisting sexual violence. Therefore, it is important to research this field.

The intention is to explore how the concept of madwomen is used in contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series. This paper also inquires how these films and web series have been used the characteristics of madwomen in female characters. How can the female characters be considered madwomen in this film and web series? What is the purpose of including madwomen in this film and web series? How the concepts of madwomen and curiosity are used in this film and web series to empower women in a patriarchal society?

As my paper examines three characters of madwomen in contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series, it mainly explores the characteristics of madwomen in these characters and how we can consider them as madwomen. It also studies how women's curiosity works as a transgressive force and also works as resistance against sexual harassment. The main objective of this paper is to show how women's madness and curiosity assist them in gaining empowerment in a patriarchal society. All these women characters are able to resist sexual violence and sexual harassment. It also implies the contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series which are

portraying women with agency as they are able to raise their voices against patriarchal dominance.

In this dissertation, the first chapter gives a brief overview of madwomen and their origin which is connected to social culture, myth, and religion. It also offers the introduction of primary texts which are Bangladeshi films and web series and also the research objective. The second chapter is a literature review and theoretical framework. In this chapter, I have included different theories and ideas of research to support my arguments. This chapter also offers a background of the primary texts of *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Taqdeer*, and *Sabrina*. “Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity”, from Laura Mulvey’s book *Fetishism and Curiosity* and “The Queen’s Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity” from Gilbert and Gubar’s book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, have been discussed in this chapter as I have used these theories as my theoretical framework. The analysis part of my research involves the third and fourth chapters. The third chapter is titled “Defining the Characters of Madwomen” which demonstrates the three characters of madwomen Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina. The characteristics of these three madwomen have been analyzed in this chapter by using Gilbert and Gubar’s idea of a female monster. The fourth chapter is titled “Madness and Curiosity as the Power of Women's Empowerment”, which tries to reveal how women’s curiosity works as a transgressive force against sexual violence. This chapter also argues that madness and curiosity help women gain empowerment in a patriarchal society. The last chapter is the conclusion, which assembles everything together and concludes by suggesting the possible scope and how it can be expanded more.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films are portraying women in challenging professions. In Bangladesh, conventionally women on screen are shown as submissive, passive, or the epitome of beauty and sacrifice. This conventional construction of women is the outcome of the social, cultural, and political structure of this patriarchal society. The contemporary Bangladeshi web series and cinema are redefining women's narratives that challenge gender standards. Bhowmick makes an attempt to make a study on women's representation in mainstream and independent films. He observes that "in most of the documentary films women's non-traditional images have had more importance than their traditional roles in society" (Bhowmick 7). He also observes that in documentary films "women have been trying to discover themselves

in a new special environment with new forms of identities” (Bhowmick 8). In his study, he also observes that “among all the mainstream films, only K. Sarwar’s “Ayna (2006)”, women have been portrayed in a way that challenges the traditional roles of women in society” (Bhowmick 9). He also discussed the objectification of women on screen and the roles of women given on screen by the women directors of Bangladesh. Al Sire argues that women's roles in Bangladeshi films “were changing along with the social transformation” (Al Sire 5747). He analyzed the movie *Agnee* and showed how this movie represented women. He shows in this movie that women are presented as strong and able to do anything if they want (Al Sire 5758). Shaha in his studies mentions that women on-screen “are seen to be not just physically inferior to men but also intellectually inferior” (Shaha 3). He also observes that “on-screen women’s representation works in favor of patriarchy” (Shaha 4). He argues that women are shown from a male point of view in Bangladeshi films, and it “not only portray the passive role of women in society but also works as a catalyst to continue the dominant ideology of patriarchal society” (Shaha 37). In this research, two Bangladeshi web series (*Sabrina*, *Taqdeer*) and one film (*Rehana Maryam Noor*) have been analyzed to show the representation of women in contemporary Bangladeshi media.

Rehana Maryam Noor is a 2021 Bangladeshi film which is being analyzed in this research. This film is directed by Abdullah Mohammad Saad. In this movie, Rehana Maryam Noor is the protagonist and she is an assistant professor at a local medical college. This film revolves around the character Rehana who is living a difficult life as a mother, daughter, sister, and teacher. She is a single mother and the sole breadwinner of a family. One of her students, Annie, is harassed by a professor, doctor Arefin. Rehana witnessed this sexual harassment. She demands justice for this illegal act. In this movie, Azmeri Haque Badhon played the character Rehana. Rehana Maryam Noor is not a submissive or conventional woman character; rather she

is a very strong and inquisitive person. She has her agency and is able to talk against all the wrongdoings which are surrounding her.

Sabrina is a 2022 Bangladeshi web series which is also analyzed in this research. In this web series, the situation of women in Bangladeshi society has been depicted through the two main characters named Sabrina, and Sabrina. This series is created by A N. In this web series, Mehzebien Chowdhury plays the role of a doctor Sabrina and Nazia Haque Orsha plays the role of a victim Sabrina who has been raped and burnt. Sabrina is a housewife. She lives a simple life with her family. Her husband is a journalist. He is suffering from a financial crisis as he wants to open his own press. Though Sabrina is an orphan, she wants to help her husband in this crisis. Sabrina had a piece of land that she got from her grandfather. Sabrina thought she could sell this land and give the money to her husband. However, she found that this had been occupied by powerful politicians. Sabrina wanted back this land; her husband helped her to collect documents so that they could claim their rights over this land. The powerful politician tried to stop them by giving them money. At one point, that politician abducted her. She has been burnt and raped by him. When Sabrina has been admitted to the hospital coincidentally, a doctor named Sabrina has been appointed for her treatment. Doctor Sabrina becomes very attached to the patient Sabrina and tries to find out what happens to her. Before going into coma, patient Sabrina tells doctor Sabrina that she has not just simply been burned, but also been raped. Doctor Sabrina starts to investigate who has done this to patient Sabrina. She starts to collect information though the police officers tell her not to do anything. On the other hand, doctor Sabrina had an elder sister who had been raped earlier. Doctor Sabrina's parents did not take any steps when her elder sister was traumatized by this incident. They remain silent and her elder sister committed suicide. That incident affected doctor Sabrina emotionally. Now, doctor Sabrina wants to help patient Sabrina

so that she gets justice. She starts to receive threatening calls from unknown numbers. Everyone tries to stop her.

Taqdeer is another 2020 Bangladeshi web series which has been analyzed in this research. This series is directed by Syed Ahmed Shawki. In this web series, Chanchal Chowdhury plays the role of the protagonist, Taqdeer. Taqdeer is a freezer van driver. He finds an anonymous dead body in the freezer in which the whole story revolves around it. In the subplot of this web series, a woman has been raped in social violence. Afsana Anjum (Sanjida Preeti) who is a famous journalist wants to investigate this incident. She collects documents through which she will be able to take the necessary steps. She also meets with the rape victim. She assures her that she can say everything without any fear. She wants to bring out the true incident to everyone so that the perpetrator gets punished. The people who are involved in this rape case all are connected with the powerful politician so they try to stop Afsana and kill her. I have chosen these two series and one film where women are not weak and vulnerable. Rehana Maryam Noor, Sabrina, Afsana Anjum all these women characters have their own agency which is redefining narratives of women on screen. In all these web series and films, women are resisting sexual harassment. These women characters are curious to find out the truth and want to bring justice to the victim. These women characters can be considered as mad as they reject the male authority. They are eager to find out the true nature of the patriarchy through which they have dominated women.

Sexual harassment and physical abuse in Bangladesh are the most recurring problems that women face frequently. In this research, some contemporary Bangladeshi popular web series and cinema have been analyzed where sexual harassment and physical abuse against women have been shown. There is an extensive body of scholarly work that interrogates sexual harassment in

Bangladeshi society. Banarjee defines, “Sexual violence against women is considered a gender specific human rights violation, and is a form of discrimination” (Banerjee 4). These scholarly works on sexual harassment will help to understand the Bangladeshi context as how these contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series have used it.

Bangladesh has a dominating patriarchal society. “In Bangladesh, men dominate, oppress and exploit women through private and public patriarchy” (Chowdhury 599). Chowdhury shows that women in Bangladeshi society are considered as the private property of their husbands. Here, the misinterpretation of religion also works to contextualize women's subjugation in this patriarchal society. Moreover, “in Bangladesh, men's attitudes towards women are shaped by advertisements, films, beauty contests and pornography where women are used as sexual objects to accumulate capital” (Chowdhury 616). Nahar states, “violence against women is a social mechanism confirming women’s subordination in many societies” (Nahar 78). Khan and Israt point out that, “patriarchal attitude, disorganized social system, unplanned settlement and lack of social control” (Khan and Israt 73) are provoking the offenders to involve in such repugnant activity as sexual harassment. In addition, “sexual harassment in the workplace negatively affects both genders prominently women (Yie and Ping 29). According to Yie and Ping, “sexual harassment in the workplace may cause victims short-term and long-term negative effects. It leads to depression and post-traumatic stress. Individuals may feel humiliated, lose self-esteem, and more.” (Yie and Ping 30). All this information about sexual harassment will help to understand the context of the film and web series that this paper is going to analyze. This will also support analyzing the characters and to perceive their motif.

Sexual violence like rape is common in Bangladeshi society. Rahman points out, “there is a relationship between patriarchy and rape incidences in Bangladesh” (Rahman 67). In his

studies, he describes the reason for rape in Bangladesh. He also examines, how a rape incident “can influence society, state, and psycho-physical conditions of the victims” (Rahman 59). Besides, rape “is the most common and vicious form of violence against woman in Bangladesh” (Ali, et al .31). The finding of this study shows that the majority of the victims are unmarried, and more than two-thirds of the assailants were known to victims (Ali, et al . 33). Besides, “a total 94 (29.0%) cases were gang rape participating by two or more assailants” (Ali, et al .33). They also describe that most of the time the victim and the family remain silent because of the lack of protection, inadequate investigations by the police and prevailing patriarchal attitudes. They also suggest that “public awareness about rape would be effective to report in due time with preserving the evidence of the crime and modern techniques like DNA diagnosis may be of help to detect the assailant” (Ali, et al . 31). Khan has made an investigation to gather information about the rape case in Bangladesh and India. Their finding shows that “there is no uniform service provision protocol to follow for managing rape survivors at health facilities in India or Bangladesh” (Khan, et al. 1). They also show clearly that “most police and medical providers were not sensitive to the needs and care of rape survivors” (Khan, et al. 2). Moreover, Huda examines how ‘the sign of rape’ is required “to verify the truthfulness of a rape complainant’s testimony with other evidence” (Huda 4). He also shows that medical evidence can be used to contradict the complainant’s own testimony and it also largely restricts the right of the victims to seek justice. He also mentions that “rape complainants have been subject to disbelief not just by society at large, but also by the legal system that is meant to be the impartial forum for attaining justice” (Huda 11). These figures will be used in this research to apprehend the actions of the characters.

Sexual harassment and sexual violence like rape are present in all these web series and

films which have been analyzed in this research. Patriarchy constructs women in such a way that they become victims of sexual harassment. However, feminist studies are not organized in Bangladesh in all disciplines and it is almost absent in popular culture although little has been done. This paper will try to find out how women react to sexual harassment and physical violence like rape. It will discuss how women's curiosity works against sexual harassment as well as patriarchy. Moreover, it will also try to show how women's curiosity turns them into madwomen and give them agency.

Pandora, in Greek myth, was a beautiful woman created by God to seduce and bring mischief to men. She was sent to earth with a box that was forbidden to be opened since it "contained all the evils of the world" (Hesiod 53). Pandora could not restrain her curiosity and opened the box. As a result, all the evils are released into the world with destructive consequences. In Greek mythology, Prometheus tricked Zeus by stealing fire from him and giving it to humans. Zeus created Pandora to take revenge on Prometheus. Hephaestus the God of smith and master of crafts was charged to create a dazzling woman with enormous beauty and charm. Pandora had been adorned by Aphrodite with a graceful appearance. She was completed by other Gods and each of them gave her a gift. Pandora is the first mortal woman descended on earth and her name 'Pandora' refers to 'all gifted'. Pandora was presented as a gift to Prometheus's half-brother Epimetheus. Hermes told Epimetheus that Pandora is a gift from Zeus, a peace offer 'signifies' that Zeus had no more ill feelings toward Prometheus. Prometheus warned his brother not to accept any gift from Zeus but Pandora's enchanted beauty made him fall in love with her and Epimetheus married her. Pandora vowed never to open the box but Hera's gift of curiosity made her open the box. Hence, Pandora is considered to be responsible for bringing all the sorrow and mischief to the whole of mankind. Female

curiosity is something which is encapsulated by the myth of Pandora. This myth of Pandora has been used in this research to analyze the women characters. All these women characters act like Pandora as they are curious to know the truth and to bring out the truth in front of everyone.

Laura Mulvey shows in her book *Fetishism and Curiosity*, that Pandora's curiosity is connected with knowledge. In the chapter named " Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity", Mulvey connected curiosity with epistemology. Pandora's curiosity appears as a desire to uncover the secret. Mulvey illustrates that there is a connection between fetishism and curiosity and they are not the opposite. Furthermore, the box of Pandora has become an interesting metaphor for the connection between fetishism and curiosity. Pandora's curiosity has become a warning of the danger. Mulvey has picked up the element of curiosity and shows " Pandora's gesture of looking inside the forbidden space, the literal figuration of curiosity as looking in, becomes a figure for the desire to know rather than the desire to see" (Mulvey 59). Thus, she has become an epitome of 'epistemophilia'. A woman's look of curiosity is always associated with an enclosed secret or forbidden space. Epistemophilia, which is juxtaposed with scopophilia, is empowering because it is an active look possessed only by the woman because the woman has the courage and strength to look inside which is not possible for the man. Pandora symbolizes threat, and disguise, and her gesture of curiosity can be seen as a metaphor which is to understand the " enigma of femininity" (Mulvey 61). Mulvey argues that the female figure is driven by transgressive curiosity and it is alright for her to open the box and look at the horrors which lie inside the box that is a metaphorical representation of something which has always been repressed under the metaphorical representation of something which has always been repressed under the patriarchal structure. Hence female curiosity is "transgressive and

dangerous” (Mulvey 61-62) but this “feminist curiosity can constitute a political, critical and creative drive” (Mulvey 62). This myth of Pandora has been used in this research to analyze the women characters. I will use Mulvey’s “Pandora’s Box: Topographies of Curiosity” this book chapter to analyze three female characters to show how women’s curiosity works as a transgressive force and also works as resistance against sexual harassment. This will also help to show how curiosity becomes the epitome of epistemology and works against the structural patriarchy.

The Greek myth of Pandora’s box is interconnected with psychoanalysis. According to Blum, “the Pandora myth, inextricably related to psychoanalysis, represents the repressed, the return of the repressed, curiosity, and censorship” (Blum 18). He has shown how the myth of Pandora has been presented and interpreted in art, literature, and drama by different writers and artists. Furthermore, he has analyzed clinical examples from Freud to understand the complex meaning of Pandora’s myth. He focuses on Pandora’s box specifically on its symbolic and metaphorical aspects. Pandora’s dilemma to conceal or reveal is interconnected with her repressed unconsciousness. He states, “the lid must be kept on Pandora’s box and the unconscious must be kept out of conscious awareness” (Blum 25). Moreover, secrets are determined by different cultures. His study shows, that family secrets are associated with shame and guilt and there is a threat of revealing the secret. In his study, he claims that Pandora’s box represents familial secrets or the conscious or preconscious personal secrets that have been repressed within the box. He also shows how Pandora’s box can represent “impulse control, self regulation, and hopeful optimism” (Blum 29). This myth of Pandora will be used in this research to explore women’s psychological condition and to find out their repressed desire.

Pandora’s box has been generally used to denote any form of uncontrolled disaster.

Elfving-Hwang argues that Pandora's box "can also act as a creative, life-affirming force that can be productive, generative and even redemptive" (Elfving-Hwang 243). She has re-examined the myth of Pandora by using some twentieth-century's works and her main focus remains on cinema. This study tries to find out how the figure of Pandora in those films has challenged the conventional interpretation of the myth. In her interpretation, Pandora is not a derogatory stereotype rather she presents her as a transformative force. She also shows Pandora's curiosity as a positive attitude. She shows how Pandora's box can offer positive potential in a form of hope which has been neglected. Furthermore, curiosity has been defined differently according to gender. Traditionally female curiosity is "portrayed as transgressive or dangerous, and it is presented as a potential threat to the stability of existing social order" (Elfving-Hwang 446). In contrast, Men's curiosity is considered as a "positive trait and as evidence of a heroic desire for knowledge" (Elfving-Hwang 446). Women have an incurable desire for forbidden knowledge. Elfving-Hwang in her studies shows that female curiosity is portrayed in Korean folktales in such a way that leads to a negative outcome. By analyzing modern Korean fairy tales, she tries to present female curiosity as a positive potential. She argues that patriarchal society is anxious about female curiosity as it can threaten the social order. By comparing old and contemporary Korean folktales Elfving-Hwang shows that female curiosity is not dangerous or destructive as it is believed. This research will help to show how women's curiosity works as a positive potential as it helps to seek justice for women.

Curiosity means looking beyond. Benedict defines curiosity as "the mark of discontent, the sign of a pursuit of something beyond what you have" (Benedict 2-3). Curiosity is a desire to know the forbidden and it is transgressive. During the seventeenth century curiosity "was considered an impulse that was thrillingly if threateningly out of control" (Benedict 25). Curiosity

is also portrayed as feminine as it is a force that operates outside the world of law and order. Many writers and social thinkers resemble curiosity as madness or “the hubris of Eve” (Benedict 25). In early modern literature, curiosity is depicted as “the pursuit of information” (Benedict 23). Curiosity is praised in literature as it is considered a sign of free intellect. On the other hand, curiosity is also despised in society because of its association with vice, and corruption. Curious people’s ambition to know the hidden things makes them violate the rules of society. It also challenges social law and order. Thus, curious people “appeared as monsters” (Benedict 2). Women’s curiosity is considered a monstrous act as it becomes a threat to patriarchy.

Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* point out that the male engendered female characters in such a way that they are imprisoned by their own image. These female figures are limited because they are created out of this assumption that women are created by men, for men, and from men. In the first chapter named, “The Queen’s Looking Glass: Female Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity”, Gilbert and Gubar show that the male-engendered female characters can be bestowed in two types, one is angel, another is monster (Gilbert and Gubar 8). According to Gilbert and Gubar, women who are presented in the literature as angels are the submissive women enshrined within their houses. An angel woman is celebrated because she is submissive. She follows all the traditional norms and her main responsibility is to satisfy the men (Gilbert and Gubar 10-11). Angel defines as wholly passive and completely selfless as Gilbert and Gubar state that, “to be selfless is not to be noble is to be dead” (Gilbert and Gubar 16). Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar point out in their essay, that the monster woman is the antithetical mirror image of the angel. She is raw, untamed and a threat to this male autonomy. While an angel is associated with spirit, a monster woman is associated with flesh. Gilbert and Gubar have used the story of “Snow White”, which is a story between angel

and monster women. In this story, all the actions are done by the monster woman or the stepmother. In contrast, snow white is passive, sweet and an ideal angel of the house. Snow white does not have her own story as she does not take any actions. Queen or the monster woman does not rely on anyone and she does not give up. Gilbert and Gubar describe her as “a plotter, a plot-maker, a schemer, a witch, an artist, an impersonator, a woman of almost infinite creative energy, witty, wily, and self-absorbed” (Gilbert and Gubar 38-39). She will not yield to male authority. They demonstrate Snow White as “childlike, docile, submissive and the heroine of a life that has no story” (Gilbert and Gubar 39). But the queen wants a life of “significant actions”. The Queen is not selfless rather she is a woman of potential and that makes her a monster. Besides, Gilbert and Gubar show how Lilith’s rebellious actions turn her into a monster woman. Lilith does not want to submit herself to Adam rather she wants a life with significant actions. She does not want to be an ideal of contemplative purity and she does not want to be silent. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write of Lilith, “What her history suggests is that in a patriarchal culture, female speech and female presumption’ that is, angry revolt against male domination are inextricably linked and inevitably daemonic” (Gilbert and Gubar 35). I will use Gilbert and Gubar’s this idea of a female monster as the primary framework for excavating three female characters as they are depicted as madwomen in the movie *Rehana Maryam Noor* and the web series *Sabrina* and *Taqdeer*.

Caminero- Santangelo observes that “ the figure of madwoman as the redemptive and revolutionary force of the female ”(Caminero- Santangelo 123). She also mentions that in the figure of madwoman the signs of “subversion and resistance” are present. L. Schulz and Youn in their studies show that “ Gilbert and Gubar’s principal argument is that the image of the female monster describes powerful women who reject male authority and its prescriptions of feminine

docility, silence, and submission” (L. Schulz and Youn 2). They have also argued that “the terms ‘monster’ and ‘madwoman’ are semantically similar in that they both constitute the language of misogyny designed to denigrate women who rebel against the strictures of patriarchal society” (L. Schulz and Youn 5). In this research, they have used three popular films featuring female lawyers. They have tried to show how the “female lawyers channel the ‘madwoman/monster’ metaphor” (L. Schulz and Youn 1). Throughout their analysis, they have argued that “the madwoman metaphor can be understood to offer new ways for women to negotiate their identities as lawyers” (L. Schulz and Youn 20). Furthermore, Nushrat Azam in her study shows the representation of madwomen in postcolonial literature. Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, told the untold story of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* through the character Antoinette. Azam shows that Antoinette’s madness helps her to liberate herself from Rochester’s prison. Azam states that “in a patriarchal society, men assign features of madness to women when they do not act and behave according to one’s sex-role stereotype” (Azam 240). Rochester considers Antoinette mad because of her untamed and raw behavior. Azam argues that “Antoinette’s rage is her own way of rejecting and resisting Rochester’s dominance”(Azam 242). Women’s madness is a form of women’s resistance against patriarchal dominance.

Furthermore, Latumeten in her research shows the depiction of madwomen in two novels, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. She has given a comparative analysis to illustrate women's resistance in these novels. Latumeten, in her studies, shows, Rochester’s illicit relationship with Amlie, and “Rochester’s action triggers the anger in Antoinette ” (Latumeten 6). Rochester starts to call Antoinette Bertha as “he perceives this anger differently by assuming that his wife has gone mad just like her mother” (Latumeten 8). Moreover, she also shows that, in *Jane Eyre*, “Bertha Mason is seen as a mad woman who savagely plunges

her teeth into the arm of her stepbrother and attacks him with a knife” (Latumeten 7). Latumeten argues that, in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is only present as a mad and lunatic woman. She does not have a voice in this novel. In this novel, Bertha is “an insane woman who has placed Rochester into such an unfortunate situation” (Latumeten 8). On the other hand, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's madness is shown as resistance and her “winning against the domination that has imprisoned her and had been causing her mental illness for years” (Latumenten 9). In this study, she shows that in *Jane Eyre* madness is shown from a different perspective as Bertha's story is not told. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette has her own voice and background that shows the reasons behind her madness. In this paper, I will try to find out the characteristics of a madwoman in Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina from *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Taqdeer*, and *Sabrina*. This paper will also describe how women's madness and curiosity assist them to gain empowerment.

Chapter Three

Defining the Characters of Madwomen

To understand this concept of madwomen in Bangladeshi web series and films three characters of madwomen, Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina will be scrutinized in this chapter. These three characters will be examined to understand how contemporary films and web series have used the concept of madwomen.

Rehana Maryam Noor is depicted as a strict assistant professor of a medical college and she is a madwoman in *Rehana Maryam Noor*. Rehana is very principled. The beginning of the film shows her strictness towards unjust actions as she expelled Mimi for cheating in the exam. She is not an agreeable woman, but an anxious woman who is working hard to maintain her family and children. When Rehana finds out something suspicious in her colleague's office she can not ignore it. Women's curiosity is considered a monstrous act as it violates the law. Rehana hears a voice from doctor Arefin's office when she is passing the corridor. Her curiosity shows when she goes back to doctor Arefin's office and stands in front of the door. Rehana understands Annie has been sexually harassed by doctor Arefin as Annie seems very afraid, anxious, and uncomfortable. Rehana becomes very angry at doctor Arefin that turns her into a madwoman. Gilbert and Gubar show that monster women encapsulate all the qualities that men do not want in women. Madwomen embody "intransigent female autonomy" that threatens male authority and they must therefore be called "bad names: witch, bitch, fiend, monster" (Gilbert and Gubar 30). In *Rehana Maryam Noor*, Rehana is very stubborn and her stubbornness is shown when is ready to do

anything to make a complaint against doctor Arefin. She continuously tells Annie to make a complaint to the principal. When she realizes Annie won't make any complaint she herself decides to make the complaint. Doctor Arefin tells her that only girls like Rehana become victims of sexual harassment. This indicates that patriarchy considers stubborn women as evil and monsters. Besides, Rehana's brother Rony also says Rehana is stubborn that's the reason her daughter Emu has become stubborn. Women are supposed to be innocent, docile, and calm to maintain the characteristics of an angel. However, Rehana is stubborn and anxious which portrays her as a monster woman. Furthermore, Rehana's student also calls her a mad woman when she continuously asks them to open the gate of the college. Rehana's rage is shown as she screams in front of the gate. Rehana's student says that Rehana has 'gone nuts' after seeing her rage.

In *Rehana Maryam Noor*, Rehana is a madwoman as she doesn't have the quality of an angel. According to Gilbert and Guber, the angels of the house do not take part in any significant work. Politeness and softness are considered women's virtues and these ideas are ingrained in their minds. Angel is defined as wholly passive as it doesn't have any active role. She can not do anything by herself. Rehana is the only earning member of her family and that shows she is taking part in significant roles just like a man. She is working and bearing the expense of her daughter's education, giving the rent of the house, giving money to buy the daily necessary stuff, and also buying medicines for her father. Moreover, Rehana is also a bad mother as she can not take care of her daughter like an angel. In this film, Emu's school teacher says she doesn't care about her daughter at all. Even Emu's classmate's parents also believe that Rehana isn't conscious of her daughter's upbringing. In the parent meeting, Russell's mother calls Rehana egoistic. She considers Rehana abnormal for her straightforward answer. Rehana is not a soft woman, rather she is very tenacious and strict. Women shouldn't have any ego as it is considered a vice and

monstrous characteristic. Hence, Rehana is a madwoman.

In *Taqdeer* Syed Ahmed Shawki portrayed Afsana Anjum (Sanjida Preeti) as a madwoman. In this web series, Afsana Anjum is a famous journalist of Dainik Noton Aalo newspaper. Afsana's strong personality is depicted in the whole series. In *Taqdeer* in the episode "Radbadaal", Afsana comes to know from her colleague about a rape video from Shriatpur. Afsana becomes very much curious about this incident and her curiosity is displayed through her actions. Benedict states, "curious people showed a perverse desire- the desire to know the forbidden -so curiosities commodified a perverse pursuit" (Benedict 3-4). Afsana becomes very much curious about the incident and asks different questions to Mehrab that show her curiosity. This curiosity turns her into a madwoman. Moreover, in the episode named "Gandham", Afsana's conversation with Azwar shows her determination. Azwar warns her that she must not do anything without telling her and Afsana replies she has already done so. Gilbert and Gubar argue that a female monster or madwoman is a powerful woman who rejects male authority. Afsana is a madwoman as she is too ambitious and she is not ready to listen to male authority.

According to Gilbert and Gubar female 'madness' in literature often describes a condition of internal disconnect between opposing desires, whereas a woman's "monstrous" impulses threaten to overtake her "angelic" leanings. In the episode named "Ranakhetra", the detective asks Shaizad about Afsana. Shaizad is Afsana's husband and he tells the detective that they have been separated for two years. He shows the reason for their separation is Afsana's stubbornness. He also says that Afsana is not careful about her responsibilities. He also thinks Afsana is selfish at some point. That shows Afsana is not the angel of the house as she is not fulfilling her responsibilities. Gilbert and Gubar in their essay say that women are presented as decorative pieces of a house. They are completely devoid of generative power and they can't do anything on

their own. Shaizad tells Afsana to sign the divorce paper but she does not sign it and Shaizad calls her stubborn. Angel is defined as wholly passive and completely selfless. Afsana is 'selfish' and she is not a decorative piece of her house. This angel is the submissive woman enshrined within her house. She is celebrated because she is submissive. She follows all the traditional norms and her main responsibility is to satisfy the men. Purity, chastity, modesty, gracefulness, delicacy, compliancy, politeness all these virtues should be present in a woman's character. In Afsana's character, these qualities are not present; rather she is ambitious, stubborn, and selfish. Hence, she is a madwoman. Patriarchal society has constructed rules for women so that they can control them. The detective says to Shaizad that, Shaizad is calling Afsana selfish because he is not able to manipulate her. Afsana is raw and she is not untamed by the patriarchal structure. She has her own agency for making decisions. Besides, Sakib the local journalist also thinks Afsana is stubborn in the episode named "Barafkal". He tells Rana to convince Afsana not to go against Simon's chairman but Rana says in episode 7, that Afsana is ready to listen to them. Furthermore, In the episode named, "Radbada", Simon Chowdhury addresses Afsana as a 'madwoman' because she does not give the memory card rather she fights. Patriarchal society wants to subjugate women and women need to follow their orders. They consider a woman as mad when the woman does not follow the order. Therefore, Afsana is a madwoman in the standard of patriarchal society.

In *Sabrina*, doctor Sabrina is demonstrated as a madwoman while patient Sabrina is totally her opposite. In the web series *Sabrina*, doctor Sabrina is a courageous doctor. She is giving treatment to the burn patient Sabrina. In the episode named, "The Maze" doctor Sabrina learns that patient Sabrina has been raped before burning into the fire. After hearing this doctor Sabrina becomes curious about this incident as she wants to get justice for the patient. Her immense curiosity turns her into a madwoman. In *Sabrina*, patient Sabrina is portrayed as an

angel of the house while doctor Sabrina is a madwoman. Patient Sabrina is an idle housewife as well as the angel of the house. Gilbert and Gubar in their essay say that women are presented as decorative pieces of a house. They are completely devoid of generative power and women have to become like the virgin Mary's selfless love. Patient Sabrina is very much submissive towards her husband and all she wants is to fulfill all the desires of her husband. Sabrina's husband Showkat doesn't want to share his problem with Sabrina as he believes she can't help because she is inferior to her. Even when Sabrina's husband accuses her of an illegal relationship with her cousin Sabrina remains silent. Gilbert and Gubar show that angels of the house can think beyond their own needs and humiliation and in the case of Sabrina, the scenario is the same. She doesn't have her own agency and her existence is like death as she is passive, devoid, and selfless. Sabrina is also docile and meek. In "The Irony of Fate" and "The Confusion" in these two episodes, Shabbir uses different abusive language towards Sabrina and tries to harass her at different times but Sabrina remains silent and does not raise her voice. Sabrina is not a fearless strong woman; rather she is docile, meek, and devoted to her family. Hence she is an angel of the house. On the other hand, doctor Sabrina is a fearless woman. She does not carry any characteristics of patient Sabrina. Doctor Sabrina is not docile rather she is stubborn which demonstrates her as a madwoman. In the episode named "The Cash Cow", doctor Sabrina says she is angry as she is unable to do anything to help patient Sabrina. This shows her determination. Moreover, in the episode named "Cat and Mouse", Doctor Ishrat considers Doctor Sabrina's behavior as impulsive because of her stubbornness. Doctor Sabrina is a madwoman as she is fearless, stubborn, and strong, not docile and innocent like patient Sabrina.

Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina all these madwomen are characterized by their apparent anger, excessive ambition, and stubbornness. Rehana's anger toward Arefin and her

stubbornness to give him punishment makes her insane and she is ready to take any steps. She is a madwoman as she is able to take significant actions that challenge the traditional gender standard. Similarly, Afsana's excessive ambition and determination make her a madwoman in the eyes of the patriarchy. She is not ready to follow the norms and her stubbornness violates the social norms as she is not submissive or docile. Sabrina is also a madwoman as she is also courageous and fearless. Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina are madwomen as they are stubborn, ambitious, and fearless and they are not submissive, or docile. In the next chapter, I will analyze how these characters of madwomen are taking action against sexual harassment in a patriarchal society. I will also show how the transgressive curiosity of women becomes a threat to the patriarchy and will assist women to gain empowerment.

Chapter Four

Madness and Curiosity as the Power of Women's Empowerment

The redefining narratives of madwomen in contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films are giving women a voice and empowerment. These films and web series have portrayed women characters as madwomen to empower them in a patriarchal society. In this chapter, *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Afsana Anjum*, and *Sabrina* these characters of madwomen from *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Taqdeer* and *Sabrina* will be analyzed to understand how their actions have empowered them and given them agency.

In *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Rehana* is taking action against sexual harassment. *Rehana* finds that her colleague *Arefin* has tried to sexually harass one of their student *Annie*. In Bangladesh, women are considered inferior to men and *Chowdhury* says, “a patriarchal society always considers women as sexual objects, not human beings” (*Chowdhury* 616). *Rehana* becomes very much anxious after finding out about this incident. She tells *Annie* to make a complaint against doctor *Arefin* to the principal. *Chowdhury* displays that, “many female university students were the victims of sexual harassment by their male teachers either directly or indirectly”(Chowdhury

615). Most of the time, “female students are generally too intimidated by the power dynamics of the student-teacher relationship to lodge a complaint” (Chowdhury 615). Annie is also not ready to make any complaint against her teacher, as she believes that this will make everything more complicated. Annie thinks that no one is going to believe her instead everyone will believe that she has bad intentions. In society, sexual harassment can be used as a way to control women. Rehana continuously encourages Annie to make a complaint. She assures her that she will be the witness but girls like Annie always refuse to take any legal steps. As, in the case of Annie, she is ready to commit suicide instead of making a complaint. Yie and Ping state in their article that, after sexual harassment, “victims expressed feeling upset, threatened, frustrated including self-blame, humiliation, decreased self-esteem, loss of self-confidence”(Yie and Ping 30). Annie is humiliated and blames herself for this incident. Annie’s condition makes Rehana angrier. However, Rehana’s obsession with this incident transforms her into a madwoman. Her madness helps her to raise her voice against sexual harassment as she decides to make the complaint by herself. Rehana’s curiosity about this incident is shown when she sees another female student in front of doctor Arefin’s office and she enters his office by force. Rehana wants to make sure no other girl becomes a victim of sexual harassment like Annie. Rehana wants to give justice to Annie and she believes Arefin should be punished. Arefin tells Rehana incessantly to withdraw the complaint and he also considers her weird and naive for her actions. In a patriarchal society, men consider women as mad when they don’t act to their command. Rehana’s rage against Arefin is her resistance to patriarchal dominance.

Moreover, Rehana’s curiosity about this incident and her desire to reveal the truth is almost like Pandora’s as it is transgressive. As Mulvey shows, Pandora looks into the forbidden space and “becomes a figure for the desire to know rather than a desire to see” (Mulvey 59). Like

Pandora, Rehana looks into doctor Arefin's office and she wants to uncover the secret of Arefin. Mulvey states that, women's curiosity is considered as dangerous. Rehana's desire to uncover Arefin's truth also becomes a danger. The principal of the medical college forbids Rehana to make the complaint because it is going to harm her private life. Yie and Ping examined that sexual harassment in working place "affects the private lives of workers" (Yie and Ping 31). The principal reminds her that she is the only earning member of her family and that her complaint will affect her private life. Besides, most of the victims have quit their current job due to serious sexual harassment in the workplace (Yie and Ping 30). Arefin also warns her that she must be more careful about her decision. Arefin makes a conspiracy by using Mimi's expel incident and turns the students against Rehana. The students protest against Rehana and her position in the medical college falls in danger as they demand her resignation. Arefin wants to stop Rehana because it will end his reputation and his career. Mulvey says women's transgressive curiosity can be utilized to decode the enigma that is repressed under the patriarchal structure. Rehana's transgressive curiosity about the incident and her desire to give punishment to Arefin is portraying her as a madwoman. It is also empowering her as she is able to bring out the hidden truth in front of everyone. She remains strong in her position when the principal offers her a salary increment or when Arefin continuously creates pressure on her to withdraw the complaint. She is not ready to overlook this incident rather she is raising her voice against sexual harassment.

In *Rehana Maryam Noor*, Rehana is a strong female character and she has her own agency. She is also conscious of women's rights. Rehana's opinion about the game shows her concern about gender identity as she believes there is no such thing as a girl's game or a boy's game, rather a game is just a game. She ensures her daughter Emu that she can play any kind of game she wants. Furthermore, when Emu's classmate's parents accuse Emu as violent for biting Russel,

Rehana denies that accusation. Rehana says her daughter has defended herself. She does not even give Emu permission to perform in the school program because she needs to apologize to Russel. Al Sire in his research shows that, in the movie, *Agnee* “women have given the impression that women can create them as complete human beings” (Al Sire 5759). In the contemporary film *Rehana Maryam Noor*, Rehana is depicted as a brave female protagonist and she does not compromise with any wrong action. Moreover, Rehana is a madwoman as she is not passive and she is taking every decision by herself. She has her own agency and Arefin can not dominate her. Rehana also tells Ayesha about Arefin’s incident and encourages Annie to make a complaint and also gives her support. Rehana’s actions describe her as a courageous and empowered woman.

In *Taqdeer*, Afsana Anjum is an ambitious journalist and her excessive ambition and curiosity have made her the madwoman in this web series. In *Taqdeer* in the episode “Radbadal”, Afsana comes to know about the rape video which has become viral on the internet. Afsana becomes very much curious about the incident and her curiosity is shown as she starts to collect information about this incident. She becomes more curious when she finds out that no one is going from Dhaka to cover this story. Afsana collects different information about the incident from her colleague Mehrab and her stubbornness is shown when she demands a follow-up story of this incident. Mehrab is not able to cover the story because of the election and this makes Afsana angry. In a patriarchal society, sexual violence against women is a common scenario. Ali states, “rape is the second most commonly reported form of violence against women” in Bangladesh (Ali, et al . 31). According to Rahman, “the main reason for rape is the long-lasting ineffective laws of the political system and the observation of rapist in the eye of law insignificantly”(Rahman 60). Afsana is angry towards Mehrab because he is not giving importance to the rape incident but he has covered the incident of Shraitpur which has happened because of an anti-religious status

on social media. Afsana's queries about police and journalists show the ineffective laws of the political system. Afsana discusses the rape incident with Azwar but he seems annoyed and he is not ready to permit Afsana. Afsana wants to go to Shariatpur to make a report but Azwar insists that this report will be handled by the local representative. However, Afsana's determination is shown as she decides to cover the report by herself. Women's curiosity is often considered a monstrous act. Afsana's curiosity about this rape video is shown as transgressive as she decides to go to Shariatpur along with Rana. In the episode named, "Gandham" she goes to the local police station to find out about the incident. Khan describes, "rape cases are meant to be considered high priority cases. Unfortunately, most rape survivors waited at police stations for the same length of time or even longer than other cases" (Khan 7). Afsana continuously questions the policeman about various issues which are related to this incident but the policeman does not give any proper answer, rather he tells that they have begun their investigation but they have not found any lead. Rahman argues that "Bangladesh is gradually becoming a safe zone for the rapists. There is a relationship between patriarchy and rape incidences in Bangladesh" (Rahman 67). Afsana shows the police the picture of the rapist but he says he does not know him. The policeman does not give any information as he is enclosed within the power of patriarchy. Banarjee states that "patriarchal social structure, cultural practice, barriers in access to justice are the main factors of sexual violence in Bangladesh" (Banarjee 4). The policeman, Azwar and Mehrab are not concerned about the rape incident. Their unwillingness to consider the incident as a serious issue shows the social and political structure of Bangladesh where violence against women is considered as a petty issue. They are not taking any proper steps against the rapist though they have evidence. Benedict states that curious people have "the ambition to know, to know the hidden truth" (Benedict 2). Afsana is eager to know about the hidden truth. When the police officer does not give any proper information

Afsana says that she will find out on her own and it shows her strength. Afsana is also like Pandora and her curiosity resembles Pandora's curiosity. Afsana wants to find out the truth and she wants to give justice to the girl who has been raped on that day. In the episode named, "Barafkal", Afsana finds out the information about the victim girl from a local police officer named Kabir, he also reveals the hidden truth about this incident. Rahman describes that "there is a clear link between the patriarchy and rape in Bangladesh. Through the arrangement of patriarchy, the victims are subjugated and ruled, and the perpetrators are given immunity" (Rahman 66). Afsana discovers that the local politician Simon Chowdhury is involved in this rape incident. This discovery demonstrates the connection between rape and patriarchy in Bangladesh.

Ali mentions, in Bangladesh "many women never report the rapes" (Ali, et al. 31). In the episode named, "Barkhelap ", Afsana meets with the victim girl, Jyostna. Afsana gives Jyostna the courage to tell everything that had happened to her on that day on record. Jyostna describes how she has been brutally raped. Joystna has not reported this incident because in a patriarchal society women do not have a voice as Joystna says that women don't have any right to speak. She is alive because she has kept her mouth shut. Joystna also reveals the truth about Simon Chowdhury and his people as she describes how they have chased them away. Rahman mentions that "There are a lot of sociological reasons behind the rape incidences in Bangladesh" (Rahman 60). All social diseases originate from social decay. Gradually the disease is growing in the society of Bangladesh (Rahman 61). In *Taqdeer*, the social instability between the Hindus and Muslims in society has become the reason for the rape.

In Pandora's box, Pandora opens the forbidden box. In *Taqdeer*, Afsana Anjum tries to find out the truth which is forbidden. It is also like opening Pandora's box. Laura Mulvey argues that female figures are driven by transgressive curiosity. Afsana's curiosity about this incident is

also transgressive and dangerous. In episode 5, Sakib considers Afsana's action as impulsive because it could be dangerous for her. He thinks Afsana should not do anything against Simon Chowdhury and he also tells Rana to warn her. Joystna also tells Afsana that these people are very dangerous. She does not go to make any report because they could have killed her. However, Afsana collects information about Simon Chowdhury and Khan Corporation for which they kill her. Blum describes that "the biblical myth of Eve is a modified version of Pandora" (Blum 19). Eve is warned against eating the apple from the Tree of Knowledge. She is too curious, and cannot resist the temptation of the forbidden fruit as a result Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden. In the last scene, Taqdeer compares Afsana to Adam. Adam ate the forbidden apple and God sent him to the world in the same way Afsana left the world because she had swallowed the memory card which contains the forbidden truth.

As Laura Mulvey has shown, women's curiosity is connected with epistemology. Afsana wants to know the truth and this truth is connected with knowledge. Afsana finds the truth that Khan Corporation is a new company that does not have any legal permission to make a cement factory. Simon, the political leader and the owner of the Fk group, has made a conspiracy of anti religious posts on social media by stealing the master's phone. By using religion, they seized the local people's land by force and constructed a cement factory illegally. Pandora's box is a metaphorical representation of something which has been always repressed under the patriarchal structure. Afsana brings out the truth of the patriarchal society that they have been hiding from reality. Afsana's transgressive curiosity also works against sexual harassment. In episode 4, Afsana tells Rana that she is going to publish the follow-up report of the rape report no matter what. She wants to get justice for Joystna and she reveals the truth behind the violence and the rape. Till now one knows about Joystna but Afsana finds out about her and she also finds out her

true story. In *Taqdeer*, Afsana's madness and curiosity make her a strong woman. Her madness makes her a rebellious character and she talks against patriarchal structure and her curiosity finds out the hidden truth of patriarchy. Afsana has her own agency and her courage makes her prepared to take every action. Hence, she is an empowered woman.

In *Sabrina*, Sabrina is a courageous doctor. Sabrina's fearlessness and stubbornness have made her the madwoman in this series. In *Sabrina* in the episode named, "The Maze", Sabrina finds out that patient Sabrina has been raped before being set on fire. Sabrina becomes curious about patient Sabrina's incident. Blum states that "the myth of Pandora is further elaborated as representing basic human ambivalence, and universal unconscious fantasies related to individual and familial secrets and secrecy" (Blum 18). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Pandora's box refers to structurally distinct symbols and metaphors, conscious and preconscious secrets, as well as repressed unconscious metaphorical danger, or traumatic experience (Blum18-19). In *Sabrina*, doctor Sabrina's sister has been raped and committed suicide. This traumatic experience has been repressed in doctor Sabrina's mind from her childhood. Patient Sabrina's situation reminds her of that incident that she has been repressing for too long. Doctor Sabrina's parents do not help her sister Ruksana in that critical situation. She has seen her sister suffering alone. Rahman states that "in Bangladesh's society, a rape victim is victimized several times in different ways including harsh criticism" (Rahman 67). In society, a rape victim has blamed in such a way that the victim is the criminal instead of the rapist. The family of a rape victim also thinks about personal and social dignity. For the same reason, doctor Sabrina's parents become very serious to hide this rape incident instead of demanding justice and helping their daughter. Ali mentions, "family members of the victims remain silent due to the lack of support services or provision of protection for victims and witnesses" (Ali, et al. 32). Ruksana pleads to her parents for help to take legal

steps but her parents tell her that no one is going to believe her without proper evidence. Doctor Sabrina's family secret has become the reason for her anxiety and a burden for her. Blum describes that "family secrets are associated with shame and guilt" (Blum 28). Doctor Sabrina could not help her sister in that situation and it made guilt in her mind. Patient Sabrina's situation is reminding her of her sister. This time, she wants to help patient Sabrina by bringing justice to her.

In *Sabrina*, Doctor Sabrina wants to find out the truth behind patient Sabrina's situation. Her curiosity is shown as she starts to collect information about patient Sabrina. Elfving-Hwang argues that, traditionally women's curiosity is portrayed as transgressive but women's curiosity can offer positive potential in a form of hope which has been neglected (Elfving-Hwang 446-447). Doctor Sabrina's curiosity has become a positive hope for patient Sabrina. She wants to help patient Sabrina and she asks her different questions about the incident. She also goes to Sabrina's house and her grandparents' house to collect information about her. In the episode named, "The Confusion", doctor Sabrina encourages patient Sabrina not to give up and to be brave and fearless. Doctor Sabrina's anxiousness about this incident turns her into a madwoman. Azam shows women's madness as a weapon against patriarchal dominance (Azam 242). In the episode named "Cat and Mouse", Sabrina tells the police that patient Sabrina has been raped but they are not ready to believe her. Huda examines that in Bangladesh to find justice for a rape victim, "medical evidence is the most commonly sought mode of corroboration and can be used to contradict the complainant's own testimony" (Huda 1). The police officers are not ready to believe as there is no proper evidence. Therefore Sabrina decides to conduct a genital examination of patient Sabrina by which she can prove that patient Sabrina is raped. Doctor Ishrat regards doctor Sabrina's decision as madness. She is not ready to give her permission to conduct the genital examination as it is illegal. According to Gilbert and Gubar, monster women have the

courage to take action and she has full control over themselves. Sabrina's actions transform her into a monster woman as she has the potential energy. She is not ready to stay silent without doing anything. She does not want to wait, rather she wants to take action as she believes patient Sabrina deserves justice.

Conventionally female curiosity is present as a potential threat to the stability of the existing social order (Elfving-Hwang 446). In the Greek myth of Pandora, Pandora's curiosity caused her to open the forbidden box. In *Sabrina*, Sabrina's curiosity caused her to reveal the truth behind patient Sabrina's situation. Sabrina's curiosity becomes a threat to patriarchy. In the episode named, "The Confusion", Sabrina receives a threatening call from an unknown number. The unknown person tells her not to cross her limit and not to interfere in others' business. In a patriarchal society, women are supposed to be subjugated. In *Sabrina*, Sabrina is taking action so they want to dominate her by threatening her. Besides, the detective also warns Sabrina not to involve herself in this incident. Sabrina's curiosity and madness will disclose the hidden truth as a result she has become a threat to the patriarchy. Sabrina with the help of cartoonist Abhi finds out that the local politician Fahad Hossein is involved in the rape incident. He has forcefully taken control over the land of patient Sabrina. Moreover, patient Sabrina has been raped and burnt by Fahad Hossein because her husband Showkot has collected evidence against Fahad's power plant project. Fahad wants to hide this truth. In *Sabrina*, doctor Sabrina is willing to help patient Sabrina. Her stubbornness is shown in the episode named, "Do or Die ", when she is not ready to listen to her parent's advice. She believes herself as a fearless strong woman. Sabrina is fearless, strong, courageous, and able to take action against sexual violence. Her resistance against sexual violence has portrayed her as a mad and empowered woman within the patriarchal structure.

Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina all these female characters are portrayed as strong and

independent on screen. Rehana has made the complaint against doctor Arefin though she knows the consequences. Afsana and Sabrina also take steps to bring justice to the rape victim. Their madness and curiosity have given them the agency to raise their voice against sexual violence. All these women characters are empowered by their agency.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In contemporary times Bangladeshi web series and films are portraying women as strong and powerful. Traditionally in Bangladesh, women on screen are portrayed as submissive, docile, and

inferior. Contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films are depicting women with distinct characteristics that challenge the conventional gender standard. In my study, I have tried to show the portrayal of madwomen in contemporary Bangladeshi web series and films. My research is only focused on one Bangladeshi film *Rehana Maryam Noor* and two Bangladeshi web series *Taqdeer* and *Sabrina*. This study explores how women's curiosity and madness become the weapon of women's empowerment as they resist sexual violence and sexual harassment in a patriarchal society.

This study examines how the concept of madwomen is used in contemporary Bangladeshi films and web series. *Rehana Maryam Noor*, *Afsana Anjum*, and *Sabrina*, these three characters of madwomen have been analyzed in this study to understand the significance of madwomen. *Rehana Maryam Noor* is a strict and principled assistant professor of a medical college. She is the madwoman in the film as in her character the signs of subversion and resistance are present. This study figures out the characteristics of madwomen in *Rehana's* character as she is strong, stubborn, rebellious, and egoistic. Because of *Rehana's* curiosity, *Rehana* finds out about the sexual harassment and she raises her voice against doctor *Arefin*. In a patriarchal society, women are bound to be subjugated to men. *Rehana* is a rebellious character and she is not ready to ignore the incident of sexual harassment. Besides, she is also very conscious about her daughter's upbringing. *Rehana's* personality has depicted her as a madwoman.

Similarly, *Afsana* is the madwoman in the web series *Taqdeer* and she is portrayed as an ambitious journalist. *Afsana's* curiosity about a rape incident has turned her into a madwoman. *Afsana* is also stubborn to find out the truth behind the rape incident. She is not ready to hear male authority. She has her agency as she takes steps by herself. *Afsana* is not the angel of the house as she is not selfless rather her husband considers her selfish. The power of patriarchy is

not able to manipulate her so they consider her a madwoman. Besides, Sabrina is also a madwoman in the web series *Sabrina*. In *Sabrina*, patient Sabrina is a portrayal of an angel woman as she is submissive, docile, polite, and selfless. On the other hand, doctor Sabrina is a courageous, fearless doctor and she is not tempted by male authority. This study describes all these female characters as raw and untempted by the male authority. They are not passive or selfless rather they are filled with potential energy.

By examining these three female characters of madwomen, this study demonstrates how women's curiosity works as a transgressive force and becomes the epitome of epistemology, and also works against the structural patriarchy. Another important objective of this study is to see how the madness and curiosity of women help them to gain the power to raise their voices against sexual harassment and sexual violence like rape in Bangladeshi society. In *Rehana* Maryam Noor, Rehana encourages Annie to make a complaint against doctor Arefin and she makes a complaint by herself as she can not convince Annie. The principal and doctor Arefin warn her not to make the complaint but she remains stuck to her point. Rehana wants to ensure no other women become victims and her strength substantiates her as an empowered woman. Rehana has her own agency as she is able to make her own decisions. She is resisting sexual harassment and is not ready to remain quiet like other women. Moreover, Rehana wants to bring out the truth about doctor Arefin in front of everyone as she believes he must be punished for his actions.

In *Taqdeer*, Afsana Anjum is also an empowered woman. She decides to find out the truth behind the rape incident in Shariatpur so that the victim gets proper justice. She is determined about her decision and her curiosity about this incident caused her to find out the hidden truth. Afsana's curiosity is like Pandora's transgressive curiosity and her actions are almost like Eve's. Afsana also has her agency and she is ready to take action. When all of her colleagues are

neglecting the rape incident she herself come forward to take action. She has been warned several times not to take any action by herself but every time she has taken decisions by herself. Furthermore, Sabrina is also an empowered woman and she also resists rape. Sabrina is a fearless woman and she is ready to do anything to help patient Sabrina. Doctor Sabrina's curiosity finds out the truth behind the rape. Doctor Sabrina becomes a hope for patient Sabrina as she continuously encourages her not to give up.

This study also finds out that Rehana, Afsana, and Sabrina's curiosity becomes a threat to the patriarchy as they try to find out the hidden truth under the patriarchal structure. This study also shows that the patriarchal structure is connected with sexual harassment and sexual violence against women in society. Most of the time women do not take proper steps against rape or sexual violence. But all of these characters of madwomen are resisting sexual violence and sexual harassment. Their madness is their resistance against the patriarchal structure.

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