

Biren Shome, *Woman*, relief print, 2013.

make people, both men and women, go delirious with pleasure. "If I want to knock a story off the front page", she said not long ago, "I just change my hairstyle." Which only reinforces the idea of how women still add colour to our world through the glamour inherent in their hair. As twilight descends around you, a woman of fiery beauty you love to distraction tells you in a whisper she misses you all day. You are on top of the world. You watch the breeze rush through her hair. You remember Kahlil Gibran, who once said famously, "And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair."

Feminine beauty is not the preserve of long-haired women alone. When women crop their hair rather short, it is the grace of the neck, indeed of the shoulders, that comes alive. Seduction is in the air, in a meaningful way. The difference between women with long tresses and those with cropped hair is fundamentally one that separates tradition from modernity. Long hair in women has always been reason for poetry; short or cropped hair is more often than not symbolic of the career woman whose understanding of the world marks her out as an independent being. But, of course, Martin Luther was certainly not thinking of women of short hair when he noted that "hair is the richest ornament of women."

And then there is the exotic in women with curly hair, especially if you are thinking of women in Africa. Women in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea are often an underpinning of poetry because of their slim figures, their long necks and their curly hair. Mary Ann Shaffer was wrong to think that naturally curly hair was a curse. It is not. Sometimes it is a challenge, for one who craves some rich African romance.

A woman's long hair is always an invitation to beauty arising out of the dark. Submerged in its perfumed lushness, you are ready to push the world of the mediocre and the banal out of your life and succumb to the call of profound romance, unless of course it is the actress Bette Davis you have in your arms. Remember what she stated once? "I'd love to kiss ya, but I just washed my hair."

That is not how Rapunzel would have looked at it. She did not let her hair down, sure, when her Prince Charming expected her to. But she knew, and so did her prince, that sooner or later the hair would loosen out of its bind and dance its way down to the waiting lover. Promise of union was all.

Ah, woman and her (sometimes riotous) beauty! Ask Mirza Ghalib. He enlightens you thus:

"... even in bondage, there is fire under my feet, Ghalib / the chains that bind me are merely curls of singed hair."

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.