

Dialogue between the third-world writers and their western audiences: delineating the influence of English Literature in the Urdu love poetry of Perveen Shakir in *Khushboo* (Fragrance) (1977)

The title of this paper is, 'a dialogue between the third-world writers and their western audiences: delineating the influence of English Literature in the Urdu love poetry of Perveen Shakir in her first collection *Khushboo*' (Fragrance) (1977). As Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* states, dialogic work carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors, even all language and all thought appeared dialogic to Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981). In this paper, the short poem 'Ecstasy', selected from the first collection, has been chosen for primary analysis. The poem written by Shakir in the twentieth century, under the influence of John Donne's poem 'The Exstasie', written in the seventeenth century, gives Shakir a chance to have a dialogue with her own culture on the one hand, and with the English culture on the other. The paper is an effort to translate to English audiences how Shakir, in her role as a teenage lover, borrows a voice, such as John Donne's, to express the deprivations of a young girl in the Pakistani, male-dominated Muslim society depicted through the poem. The paper will look at the intertextuality used by Shakir to examine how it connects the east with the west and bridges the invisible divide of cultures, framing, what Mary Louis Pratt terms as transculturation (1999). The concept of hybridity, as framed by Bhabha, will also be applied as Shakir merges the western thought into eastern thought in the poem 'Ecstasy'.

Perveen Shakir a 20th century Pakistani poet was born in 1952 in Karachi, Pakistan. She has four collections to her credit: *Khushboo* (Fragrance) (1977), *Sadburg* (Marigold) (1980), *Khud-Kalami* (Talking to Oneself) (1985), and *Inkaar* (Denial/ Refusal) (1990). She died in a road accident in 1994, when she was 42.

Quintessentially, Shakir is a romantic, or more specifically, a love poet. But her 'individuality lies in how she alludes to the subtle and delicate layers of feminine sensibility in her love poetry' (Arif 1995, p.201). The poetry of *Khushboo* goes

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beyond romance. Perveen Shakir in an interview said: 'the theme of the poetry of *Khushboo* is herself (Shakir) and her beloved' (Shakir's interview (1994): quoted in Abbas, p.8). Desire to love and be loved is seen more explicitly in her poem 'Ecstasy', 'we can taste that experience' of a desire for physical love (Abbas 1994, p.8). Shakir in a letter of 6 July 1978 to her fellow poet Nazir Sidiqqi writes, Donne hated 'clichés', he was open and direct (Shakir, 1978, p.34). She further states, 'John Donne, because of his uniqueness and playfulness has always been my favourite poet'. In the letter, she quotes her favourite line from Donne's poetry, 'For God's sake hold thy tongue and let me love' (Shakir's letters to Sidiqqi, 1978, p.34). We see a similar expression in Perveen Shakir's poem 'Ecstasy'. In Donne's poem, 'The Exstasie', there is the image of the souls leaving the body of the two lovers, which literally means ecstasy: 'Our souls – which to advance their state, / Were gone out – / ... And we said nothing all day long' (The Exstasie, line, 15, 16; 20). In Shakir's poem the souls do not leave the body, but there is a desire to: 'Let these moments stay for a while' after the 'playful moments' (tr. Bakht and Lavigne, p. 22). Then the device of a conversation is used in different ways. In Donne's poem, we have a silent listener who watches the couple making love. Shakir does not employ this device of an imaginary listener and observer, but she does summarise the conversation between the two souls: 'Whispers of love in shy tone; / One shared sound beating in two hearts' (tr. Bakht and Lavigne, p. 22). The concluding part of Shakir's poem does not put forward reasons for the souls to return to their bodies as in Donne's poem 'The Exstasie', but both reflect the desirability of sexual love, and the duty to 'reveal' love to those who would be too 'weak' to believe in love without such sign (Donne, The Exstasie, line. 57). The logical development can only be understood through a sense of the ecstatic union of souls, which is achieved through

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the union of their bodies. This leads to a fuller understanding of the relation between body and the soul in love. 'Body is his booke' is Donne's message in his poem 'The Exstasie'. (Donne: The Exstasie, line, 56). And this is what Shakir borrows from western culture, from Donne – the emphasis on the combination of love with the physical. Shakir wanted to show that her culture is in contrast to the western culture. She wants to show that one aspect of women's life, that is her body, is controlled by the patriarchal culture in the guise of religion. In an Islamic environment or a South Asian culture, where women's bodies are perceived to be *'fitna'*, meaning source of chaos or chaos (Mernissi, 1985, 31), clothing or veiling them is a sacred act (Sabbah, 1984). By keeping the women behind the four walls and *purda* (veil) Shakir informs the reader of the social construction determined by biology and controlled by patriarchal ideology (Shaheed, 1991). It is significant to note that in a male dominated Muslim society, Shakir insists on the fact that one aspect of love is sex, but sex is not the other aspect of love. Love does not only want the physical, it needs the spiritual as well, and those who possess both, only they understand *this* logic of love.

Bakhtin's dialogic concept is not merely a matter of influence, but as T.S.Eliot said, it is a matter of 'individual talent' as well (Bakhtin, 1981; Eliot, 1992, p.1). This echoes Eliot's ideas in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' where he says that 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past' (Eliot, 1992, p.1). If we closely examine the poem we will realize that Shakir has neither improved nor changed the original. But she has used the original theme presented by the English poet Donne in the seventeenth century about the necessity of the union of body and soul, by applying it in the twentieth century, in a Muslim context, by a Muslim woman poet (herself) writing in a conservative male-dominated

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Muslim society; and by reworking it which is for her own poetic purposes. Donne's poem 'The Exstasie' emphasizes that sometimes, a spiritual force requires a physical medium through which to work; in the same way the spiritual union of the souls may require the physical union of the bodies. In other words, Shakir borrows the idea to emphasise the need for a sexual union. And the way to the soul, according to Donne is the body. The selected text in this sense, as a whole, lacks an explicit Islamic environment.

Perveen Shakir felt deeply for the women of her society who were deprived of this feeling. She borrows from the west to show how much she owes as 'it has helped [her] a lot in expressing [herself]' (Shakir, 1994, 'Sukhanwar', TV Serial, Part Two, 1994). She might be accused of stealing, but in terms of Michel de Certeau it is 'invent[ing]' by 'poaching' on others [Donne's] 'property' (Certeau 1984, p. xiii). What Shakir has stolen from Donne is the bold image of Ecstasy, which has given her, in Helen Cixous's terms, the freedom of language from patriarchal dominance (Cixous, 1981).

Mary Louise Pratt, in 'Arts of the Contact Zone' (1999) states borrowing 'does not simply mean to imitate or reproduce it, but select and adapt it along [your] lines, to express [your] interests and aspirations (Pratt, 1999, p. 9). Pratt further says, 'ethnographers have used the term transculturation to describe such processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant culture' (Pratt, 1992 p.6). She says, transculturation is a term to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures (Pratt, 1999). Like ethnography, it is a phenomenon of the contact zone, she adds. A contact zone, Pratt states, is a term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in context of highly asymmetrical

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relations of power such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today (Pratt 1992). By marginal groups Pratt means, those who were once under colonial rule and now have lost this connection due to historical or geographical reasons (Pratt 1992, p.6). Shakir, representing the postcolonial age, is representative of the marginal group, and as such, has benefited from the material transmitted from the west. Shakir has worked in a similar fashion, as theorized by Pratt: she borrows the ideas from the west, and presents them in her cultural setting, in her context as Muslim woman in the twentieth century, living in a conservative male dominated Muslim society.

But this borrowing involves another factor, and that is the literary capability in order to communicate or contact. As Pratt in 'Arts of the Contact Zone' states, writing and literacy are important in the contact zone (Pratt 1999). If we analyse, we see that it was Shakir's basic education, and her personal interest in English, which educated her about the poet such as John Donne. It was Shakir's literary background and education, which made it possible to initiate a dialogue and connect with both her own culture and with the western one. Shakir's initial training in English at school and college, her interest in English Literature, her two masters in English Literature and Linguistics, and her nine years of teaching English Literature place her in a position where she was adequately literate, educated and competent to understand the English canon and adapt it to her own means. She chose Donne therefore, as she knew he was open and direct in talking about passion (Shakir's letters to Sidiqqi, 1978, p 34). Thus, her education along with her talent helped her to pick an idea from the west, from a poet who had inspired her throughout her educational career, and whose ideas and philosophy she thought would help her now, as a poet, to address the significance of both the physical and the spiritual in her society; a

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society where the concept of love and physical intimacy, prior to marriage, for a young girl is Un-Islamic and therefore unacceptable. Her education probably is one of the tools with which she could contact the other world, and at the same time have a dialogue with her own culture. 'Imaginary dialogue', Pratt says, is one of the 'literate arts' of the 'contact zone', which one can say theoretically makes room for another art, and that is 'transculturation' (Pratt 1999, p. 4). By use of this intertextuality Shakir had access to the other world and also formed a relationship, reconnected herself with her colonial past, with whom she lost connection due to historical and geographical reasons (Pratt, 1999 ; Bhabha, 1994). As Pakistan was disconnected with its colonial past, when it became an independent Muslim state in 1947, and appeared on the world map with a new geographical space and a new history.

Moreover, dialogism has helped Shakir to deconstruct the binaries of the colonial discourses, which formulated the idea from Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) and 'Culture and Imperialism' (1993). Boehmer's interpretation of this idea of Orientalism and Imperialism is: 'to assume control over a territory or a nation was not only to exert political or economic power; it was also to have imaginative command' (Boehmer 2005, p.5). This is a development of Western thought which sees the world in terms of binary oppositions that establish a relation of dominance (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994). So this transcultural merging of western thought into Eastern thought, which Bhabha terms 'hybridity', subverts the narratives of Colonial power and dominant cultures (Bhabha, 1994). The post-colonial theories of hybridity (Bhabha) and transculturation (Pratt) break the certainties of colonial and imperial logic of dominance (Bhabha, 1994; Pratt 1993; 1999). The concept of dialogism is situated alongside the application of Bhabha's concept of cultural difference which

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addresses the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority (Bhabha, 1994). Since the paper is structured around two diverse cultures, east and west, therefore Bhabha's theory of 'hybridity', which results from borrowing ideas and themes from the west and merging them into one's own culture, signifies the interdependence, and the mutual construction of the colonized and colonizer, and helps to understand the logic of 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'Third Space of Enunciation' (1994, p.37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha, makes the claim to a hierarchical purity of cultures untenable (Bhabha: 1994). For Bhabha 'the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural differences may operate' (Bhabha, 1994, p.38). Hybridity can thus be seen, in Bhabha's interpretation, 'as a counter- narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) (Accessed 1/12/08). It is ironic that on the one hand Shakir's 'dependence on the dominant culture to invent and create', is 'the migration of yesterday's savage from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their masters'; but on the other hand it 'deconstructs the dominance of the dominant culture', and suggests 'that the colonialist discourse's ambivalence is a conspicuous illustration of its uncertainty' (Bhabha, 1994: Mimicry, Mimicry, Ambivalence and Hybridity: <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/1WEBPAGE.HTML>. (Accessed 1/12/08).

Dialogism therefore provided a new perspective to the study of Urdu love poetry, as it translated to the English audiences how Shakir influenced by canonical

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poet like John Donne provides an original voice of the suppressed and oppressed Pakistani Muslim girl, one which has hitherto been silenced under the male dominated culture and the strict Islamic laws against women. Using an English poet as an influence in her Urdu love poetry, this paper attempted to provide to the English audiences a brief analysis of the scepticism and the disenchantment of a third-world writer towards her male-dominated society.

It also analysed the concept of transculturation informed by Mary Louis Pratt in 'Arts of the Contact Zone', to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. It elaborated upon transculturation to describe how the members of the subordinate or marginal groups invent from the material transmitted from a dominant culture, and in doing so connect with other cultures. The theory of Hybridity was discussed as the theme of poem 'Ecstasy' by Perveen Shakir relates to the influence of the English love poetry (west) on the Urdu (east) love poetry of Perveen Shakir. In that sense this merging of the colonial and the post-colonial, dominant and the marginal, on the one hand gives a space to the diverse culture to survive, while on the other it deconstructs the canonical discourses of dominance.

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