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# Mother, Motherhood and Motherland: Identity and Conflict in the Poetry of Perveen Shakir.

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## Abstract

Perveen Shakir (1952-1994) a Pakistani female Muslim poet, identifies her motherhood in her motherland (Pakistan) as a site of struggle in her third collection *Khud-Kalami* (Talking to Oneself/Soliloquy). In this paper, the short autobiographical poem "Misfit" selected from Shakir's third collection has been chosen for primary analysis. The paper will explore the concept of freedom for a modern Pakistani Muslim woman, looking at how it conflicts with the influence on her of western feminist ideas, and her own Islamic nationalistic identity as a traditional mother. The underlying significance is to emphasise the traditional identity of the Pakistani mother which is always part of who she is. However, she also develops and discovers her other identities or selves at different stages of her life. Jane Bryce-Okunlola's framework of looking at "Motherhood as a metaphor for creativity and examin[ing] women's source of creativity in the communal story-telling tradition of their foremothers" will be the primary framework for the analysis of the selected text (1991, p. 201). Partha Chatterjee's framework presents the role of woman, "as highly nationalist[ic] spiritualism" demonstrated by the "adulation of women as goddess or mother[s] represent[ing] the essence of eastern culture" (Chatterjee is critical of this national ideology) (1999, p. 248; 1993). The feminist concept of motherhood is a "new creative vision" (Ash 1991, p. 153). Ranjana Ash's modern Asian (Indian, Muslim) feminist perspective on woman frames "the development of women's self-awareness and identity; women's search for freedom in the family; the question of women's relationship to their "motherlands" and the resolution of problems and conflicts which this relationship generates [and resolves] (1991, p. 158). The "new creative vision" is the unconventional vision of Shakir as an educated self-aware Pakistani Muslim woman who develops and progresses; this development conflicts with her conventional and spiritual identity, because of her unconventionality. These multiple identities are looked at positively by French feminist Julia Kristeva as from a "schizophrenic" "split" she says, emerges a "new", "refashioned" "infinite" "body", deconstructing the fixed image of a woman (1980, p. 187). I shall establish that in Pakistani Muslim culture the concept of self or individual identity for a mother is not a simple issue. This paper focuses on various stages of Shakir's biographical journey employing the theoretical framework of dialogism which reveals the development of feminisms, and how they balance in the end. No critical study on Shakir from a third-world postcolonial Pakistani perspective, analysing her poetry within a theoretical framework, has been written so far, and therefore this study is an invaluable contribution to current scholarly knowledge of the discipline. This study also contributes in another way, as it is the first work in English at this level.

## Key Words: Motherhood; Culture; Conflict; Identity; Dialogue.

The poem, "Misfit" is an autobiographical writing, written in a new idiom Shakir uses as a mother to describe herself: that is, loneliness and isolation are the price Shakir pays for self-awareness. "Misfit" pursues the theme of conflict and tension with a more personal reflection on Shakir's own life, focusing on multiple selves of motherhood: mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law and working woman, and questions that concern women as individuals in their own right. The question of identity is never simple in the Pakistani cultural context. According to Rainer Emig (1995), in modernist poetry the "interchange", the "tension" between the "inner" and the "outer" aspects is what constitutes the subject of modernist poems, which, he states, are analysed through the theories of psychoanalysis. This "inner restlessness", Hameed Zaman says, is also "the hallmark" of Shakir's modernist poetry (Emig 1995, p. 1-10, Zaman *The News*, Dec 28, 1994; Zeno *Dawn* Jan 26, 1995; 1996, p. 251-256). Shakir is not silent as she is telling the story of the lived reality of her struggling motherhood. She is the subject of her tale, disclosing openly the "his-[s]tory" of "the people around [her]", the history of the Islamic nationalism of her motherland imposed on her and how she is turning it to "her-story" of an entrapped struggling motherhood. The liberal mother (Shakir) of Pakistan, I am arguing, has a voice, anger, aspirations, and her own life on the one hand and her cultural restrictions on the other. Above all, her identity as a writer shows that in the "communal history" of storytelling where the "foremothers" (Bryce-Okunlola 1991, p. 201) tell the story of the great achievement of male heroes (sons), Shakir is equal to these nationalist sons, because she is not only the writer but also the subject of her writings (Boehmer 1991, p. 19). Through writing a woman subverts the fixed nationalist narratives where men dominate (Kristeva 1980, p. 160; Nasta 1991; Spivak 1987). It voices Spivak's ideas presented in *The Other Worlds* (1987) where she says that "when" third-world

women speak for themselves [through autobiographical writing] they urge with conviction that the “personal is also political” (Ibid., p. 179); it starts to “efface” and “change[s]” her fixed image represented by first-world theories (Ibid., p. 180). So, Shakir’s autobiographical poem “Misfit” in that sense start effacing that rigid image of the third-world woman, who is represented by the west as being without a voice. Spivak in *Imaginary Maps* (1995) writes that “When the subaltern “speaks”, in order to be heard, and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance [he or] she is or is on the way to becoming, an organic intellectual” (Spivak 1995, p. xxvi). Shakir’s poem focuses on the women issues that tell of a different female experience from that represented or documented in male discourses. Biographical and autobiographical writings by women, Spivak states, help to show how women are imagined and how they came to imagine themselves (Spivak 1995). In the book *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow state that feminine literature produces feminist dialogics, just as black can talk of blackness, they write, so ‘woman’s writings feminine *être*’, can be placed where women talk about what it is to be a woman in a masculine world’ (1994, p. xv). Thus, a feminist, they note, tends to find dialogue within and without. Hohne and Wussow note that dialogue is a release (in the form of psychoanalysis), but it also entails a struggle (1994, p. xiii).

The important pronouns “I” and “my” are very dominant and give the poem a personal and autobiographical touch. It voices Ash’s concept of “re-creating” “her story” of a “struggl[ing]” mother who is performing her duties as a daughter, a mother, and a working woman, but empty as an individual soul (1991, p. 201). Autobiographical details, according to Chatterjee, reveal the “personal” and tell the “truth” (1993, p. 153), a truth which gives her text in Yaqin’s words, “reality” (Yaqin 2007, p. 384). In the poem Shakir explains how the entire environment is so different from her views that it makes her think of herself as a “misfit”.

The main focus of the poem is a Pakistani woman’s realisation that her life is centred on her family responsibilities, echoing Adrienne Rich’s critical view about the universal idea that “woman has no name, she is recognised through her relationships as one’s mother, daughter and wife” and the question Rich puts is, “Does a woman have a self of her own?” (2003, p. 29-42; see also Yaqin 2007, p. 397). Talking from her western feminist perspective she argues that this is a universally approved fact about women. The conflict throughout the poem is between “I” and them: “the people”; which includes her mother, her son, her office where she loved someone but could not marry because of cultural pressure, and the circle of poets she calls “my tribe”. These aspects of her different selves are focussed on in this poem which analyses and explores why Shakir calls herself “misfit”.

The poem begins by questioning why “some people” are not happy with her poetry and its “tone”. She wonders why she does not “have the knack of keeping people happy”. She uses the word “people” in a nonspecific way, but when using “words” and “tone” she implies that these “people” are her critics; as Naim writes, “her patronizing senior poets both male and female and predatory critics and intellectuals” (Naim 1995, p. 13). This can therefore be a reference to her contemporary poet Fahmida Riaz and others who have criticised her love poetry as being shallow and without depth. However, it is ironic that in one of her essays on Shakir, Riaz praises Shakir’s poetry, writing that “this type of poetry is essential for us in our society”, calling Shakir, “queen of *ghazals*” (love poetry), and admitting that “her poetry refreshes us” (Riaz 1991, p. 73-74). Rukhsana Ahmad, another critic in the diaspora, in her pioneering book about Pakistani feminist poets *We Sinful Women* (1990) looks very critically at Shakir’s work but excludes her from the category of feminist poets (p. 6-7). However, Ahmad provides no theoretical framework in her book. The accusation is that Shakir writes openly about female sexuality without any social reference. It is interesting to note that Ahmad is reflecting her own scanty knowledge of feminism because the basic canonical theory of feminism is that personal and political is indivisible (Cixous 1981; Kristeva 1980; Moi 1986). In that sense Shakir’s work is feminist writing as she is presenting her personal problem of female suppression which is also political. So when the personal becomes political it also makes the patriarchy “unhappy” because Shakir’s unconventional love poetry endangers the Islamic culture which structures woman as silent, submissive, an object of male pleasure, veiled and within four walls. Shakir, of course, was conscious about all these critical attacks on her work. Ironically the reference to ‘some people’ turns out to be a major reference, as along with poets and critics it also refers to the patriarchy and Islamic rulers who are unhappy with her poetry. She uses a satirical ‘tone’ because her poetry is criticising her patriarchal culture.

The word “knack”, is a crucial word in the poem as it helps us analyse Shakir’s shifting position between feminism and patriarchy. She asks herself this question: “Why don’t I have the knack / Of keeping people happy?” and in her own self-analysis, we discover a conflict, a fluctuation. She is writing poetry with a challenging “tone”, in that sense a feminist poet, but she is also burdened under patriarchy in her conventional roles, where everybody is “enjoying” her “womanhood” except she herself. This state between the traditional “feminine” and “feminist” positions can be one reason for the self-analytical misfit status she appropriates for herself, because the patriarchal society expects her to be an ideal perfect mother. Making everyone happy means to fit in their frame: to compromise,

to give up her radicalism, (self-identity) and to speak their language. There is a sense of victory there but it is very short lived; in Bryce-Okunlola's terms it is a "temporary mechanism" (1991, p. 210), because Shakir ultimately falls into the patriarchal trap. Therefore, in the poem, when male critics "discover" no "light" in her work, Shakir is fully aware of why it is, because the "light" Shakir has, which she refers to towards the end of the poem is a voice which is outspoken, and it disrupts their "light", their patriarchal order.

With reference to 'light' in her work, female critical perspective is different from that of male critics. The contemporary female writers and poets already mentioned are very critical about lack of depth in her poetry ("Unfathomable words"), and lack of depth in 'thought' because of the love themes, which they think do not generate light and wisdom (*Khushboo* 1977, p. 121). There are other female critics like Baksh, who finds "light" in Shakir's work, a light which can guide a whole new generation of women poets. Baksh finds a new woman in Shakir's poetry, with a new identity and a new literature. The projection of a confessional feminine self in Shakir's poetry, Baksh states, was not seen in the works of the older generation of women poets (Baksh 1996; 2000; 2007). There are others who "gather pearls of wisdom from her poems" (Bano 1995; *Dawn* 1994). The confessional feminine self is the unconventional love poetry, the overt depiction of female sexuality. Thus Shakir is aware that there are "some" who are critical of her, Shakir "the poet", and some who are critical of her work "the poem[s]".

This reinforces the ruthless criticism of her work. One can refer to the absence of Shakir's work in Ahmad's book *We Sinful Women*, as an example of the prejudice that many poets both male and female, held against her (Khan 2009, p. 26). Reference to 'more eyes on her than her work' in the poem is also significant as it draws the reader's attention to Shakir's physical beauty, and the major reason for the male community of poets to admire her. Imran Hameed Khan explains "that many poets were patronising towards her because of her good looks and chose to disregard her as a serious poet due to the fact that men were especially drawn to her performances" (Ibid., p. 26-27). Naheed in her autobiography, *A Bad Woman's Story* (2009), is critical about such men and their petty minds who look at a woman's body as her only text, an object of physical pleasure. She observes that even when women mix with men on such occasions as *mushairas* (mixed poetry recital sessions) it is taken as flirtatious and provocative, reflecting questionable morality (Naheed 1993; 2009). In her society such women are taken as objects of physical pleasure only and their poetry is not taken seriously, or alternatively, all eyes are on her critically because she is a woman poet in a male dominated society and has to prove herself equal to men. However, seen from a creative aspect, and thinking of Shakir as a romantic poet, it can be taken as a romantic quality, as physical beauty has always been a source of inspiration. Therefore, the eyes "on the poet" can be a reference to beautiful young Shakir herself. Thus, there are multiple ways of looking at the "light" in her work by her "tribe": the poets she refers to towards the end of the poem.

From poets and critics she moves to "my" "mother", "my son", and their "complaint[s]" in the poem. These mother-daughter and mother-son relationships help to explore Shakir's story. It is important to note that in the poem she uses the words "earlier on" for her mother, and "now" for her son. The "same complaint" gives us a chance as readers to look at Shakir's 'earlier', younger days as a daughter in order to explore how Shakir reveals herself and how she has "now" reached this stage of being a "misfit". It also reveals the conflicts and tensions she experienced then; how her identity was crushed and she was forced to compromise where social and cultural norms were concerned and how her defiant streak developed over the years.

Parveen Qadir Agha in her biography of Shakir talks about the defiant streak Shakir had from early childhood. Her father though was a source of inspiration for her but stopped her from attending *mushairas*. He also did not want her to write love poetry, as in her Muslim culture it was not acceptable. However, as Agha writes, she "refused"; because of her defiant nature there was no stopping her (Agha 1995, p. 57). She also had a love affair when she was a young girl but could not marry the person due to family and cultural pressure (Agha 1995). This story of "constant nagging", (*Dawn*) in Shakir's own words, between her inner urge for freedom and the outer pressures of "religion", "social status" "family bonds" and "everything" that controls her had a "traumatic affect" on Shakir (Shakir *Dawn* Dec 1994, p. 1; Agha 1995, p. 24-25). It made her question her own existence, and as she says in the poem "I wonder" "why [?]" Agha also writes, "Why was she a woman not free to make her own decisions, to lead her own life?" (Agha 1995, p. 24). Shakir has remained the "same": on the one hand a defiant, strong-headed girl and on the other succumbing to cultural pressures and speaking in the voice of patriarchy. Shakir's mother is a traditional "feminine" *nisvani* woman and wants Shakir to be the same, therefore her daughter's liberal ideas are not acceptable to her.

Her mother's "complaint" continues because Shakir's radical streak also continues. Later on, as a married woman she struggled for eleven years with her unhappy married life trying to fit into the traditional "feminine" *nisvani* role, what Friedan calls "feminine" "adjustment", until she finally decided to divorce her husband (Friedan 1963, p. 18; 1985). This struggle to adjust in her traditional role is an indication of her traditional "feminine" *nisvani* side where she is accepting, in Chatterjee's frame, the nationalist construct of the "new woman"

(Chatterjee 1993, p. 151). Shakir was asked to give up her roles both as a writer “her identity” (Paracha 1991; Khan 2009, p. 29) and as a working woman, and to stay inside four walls, using her education only to look after her son and her family (Agha 1995, p. 27). This, in Chatterjee’s terms, is a story of “betrayal” of the “new woman”, where a woman, he states, is “made to believe about the emancipatory claims” on behalf of her education as a “new woman”, but she is “marginalized and alienated” and never “given a place of respectability”; for patriarchy this is “nationalist emancipation”, reflecting that a woman is free to get education. The betrayal lies in the fact that she is not allowed to leave the four walls and must use her education inside the house only for the betterment of her husband and children as an ideal woman (Chatterjee 1993, p. 151-154). It is this, as Chatterjee puts it, “liberal paradox”, which traps women in nationalistic ideologies, and in which Shakir is also trapped. “The nationalist”, Chatterjee states, “reads it as a movement from bondage to emancipation; the feminist critic of nationalism will read it as a movement from one kind of bondage to another” (1993, p. 151). What I am establishing here, framing Chatterjee’s theory of the “betrayal” and “liberal paradox”, is that when Shakir feels that she can enjoy her personal freedom influenced by western culture she only then realises that such influences stigmatise her as a “misfit”; such is the paradox of her cultural ideology. Amrita Pritam in her autobiography writes that in her own case “freedom from an unhappy marriage encompassed getting a divorce and living with those she chose to love” (Pritam quoted in Nasta 1991, p. 165). However, her freedom speaks from a different location; as an Indian poet she lives in a secular culture whereas Shakir is placed in an Islamic culture. In the poem the circle of Shakir’s responsibilities becomes bigger; intertwined and complex, one layer after another of identity. This illustrates that Shakir is not an easily defined person. Marriage links her with another set of people, the in-laws. There is Shakir’s own mother, Shakir as a daughter-in-law, a mother, and a wife and now we have a mother-in-law as well whose complaints are not recorded in the poem; however, her presence is felt through the biographical information elsewhere. Knowing the fact that we are looking at Shakir through her cultural norms, it is assumed that her mother-in-law is not happy as Shakir has, by getting a separation, not proved to be an ideal daughter-in-law.

Divorce in her society is not a respectable act. Shakir, by opting for a divorce, gave a bad name to the family, which resulted in disconnection with her father who “stopped communicating altogether”, and her “mother [was] very sad”, “as divorce was looked upon as shame in her [Muslim] society” (Agha 1995, p. 44). However, from Shakir’s perspective she was empowered, it gave her a sense of freedom, she was victorious; in that sense “misfit” could be a term of celebration as this fits in with her re-created individual new vision of a woman, her new vision to see herself the way she wants to be, not the way the traditional ideal picture is presented in national discourses. It voices what Kristeva says, that a woman has a fluid self, and moves in different identities, and should not be taken in just one stereotypical traditional role (1980). However these are “fragmented and episodic victories” according to Spivak; because she says, when women “rebel and rise-up”, it is not “permanent” as they are disrupted by patriarchy, the “ruling group” and “social prejudices” (Spivak 1995, p. xxvii). Hence, Shakir paid a heavy price for her rebellious ideas, in the form of complaints which make her feel guilty and which lead to her compromise in the end. Theoretically, as Irigaray says, “complaints” are a way of making women feel “guilty” about “ignoring their traditional task”. Irigaray writes that “when a woman wants to come out of male possession, and therefore transgresses their laws, she feels guilty, because male strategy - deliberate or not - is meant to make [women] feel guilty” (1980, p. 74). This whole argument of the poem “Misfit”, is about making women feel guilty and pressurising them through complaints and it also helps to establish how men in “patriarchy”, in Chatterjee’s words, “have always laid down the ways in which woman should behave”: they should be obedient and submissive, which Shakir is not (1993, p. 135); she has her unconventional and liberal views.

In the poem “Misfit” her “mother’s” “complaint” illustrates how Shakir lived her life. This not only helps to explore autobiographical elements but also helps to highlight the multiple problems and issues related to the word “woman”. Such personal poems also emphasise that women, through their feminist writing, are illustrating the problems they face in their society. The poem reveals that Shakir was struggling to adjust in her own maternal home, the control and suppression affecting her “mentally and physically” (Agha 1995, p. 25). Later there were personality clashes between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law because of Shakir’s unconventionality which could not be suppressed. However, she knew that she “could never” be the “simple housewife” she was expected to be (Ibid., p. 35). There was also fear of the social pressure which does not accept a divorced woman as respectable in Pakistani society.

A constant dialogue within her and with all the social, cultural, and religious pressures outside her make her a so-called radical Pakistani poet, neither a feminist nor a traditional “feminine” *nisvani*. Instead she is caught between two cultures, a split, torn personality who has crossed social barriers and won the political battle through “word”, her poetry, and has also won her personal liberty through a divorce. Ironically, she could still not win the personal battle of her emotions, because family responsibility is an essential part of her Asian culture. Shakir’s complaint, to use Kanitkar’s words, is “of her non-functioning as an individual in her own right” (1991, p. 183). She struggles to

offload that burden of responsibilities through expressing her own complaints, when her individual freedom is under pressure.

The poem helps to show the English speaking readership a cultural construct where a woman is struggling to reclaim her individual freedom, as Shakir in the poem complains that “her” “womanhood” is “burdened” with “responsibilities”, which are “increasing every day”, and she gets no reward for all her hard work; her womanhood is for all the family members to make use of except herself. Shakir very skilfully uses the word “hunchback” in the poem, so the reader can literally visualise the bundle of responsibilities on her shoulder. It shows how a Pakistani woman is fragmented and split in different directions. As an unmarried daughter she has to compromise on the cultural restrictions imposed on her by her family. When she is married, the cultural norms, in Nasta’s terms, are “imposed” on her and it is her responsibility to look after her in-laws (1991, p. xx). In Shakir’s case she has to look after her widowed mother-in-law, her husband’s three unmarried sisters, her husband and their son. She is living in a society which expects a mother to use her education and skills inside the house and for her children; that is, in Nasta’s words, “her proper identity” (Ibid.).

Through the mother-daughter and then mother-son theme we see multi-layered issues linked with the question of female identity. This becomes more evident in the poem when we explore the “son[s]” “complaint”. There are two sons; one is Shakir’s son and other is Naseer, Shakir’s husband. While Shakir, as a daughter with liberal views, upsets her mother and also her own son who feels that he is ignored due to her busy life, the “rat race”, we have Naseer’s mother, a reflection of contentment because of her son’s obedience. Shakir, however, as a mother is a cause of pain and embarrassment for her own mother. Due to her busy life and her neglect of her “dear ones”, her imperfection and in Irigaray’s terms “guilt” (1980, p. 74) is revealed in her “son’s complaint”. I am establishing here that female identity is crushed under the name of culture, tradition and religion. Here we see both genders: Shakir, being a woman, is struggling more as she demands to live her own personal life, but also has multiple responsibilities which are imposed on a mother by her culture. Naseer, her husband, also has responsibilities but is struggling less under patriarchal culture, reiterating Chatterjee’s quote here that “men are only mindful of their own interest” (Chatterjee 1993, p. 135). Their interest lies in controlling women; even if she is educated, it should be used “as a result of social policy pursued by men” (Ibid.). These “self-interested men” Chatterjee explains, “are mindful of the improvement of woman only to the extent that it furthers their self-interest; not for any other reason” (1993, p. 135). Hence, he writes, there is “no confusion” in their minds about their responsibilities as lawmakers of society (Ibid., p. 135-136). Naseer therefore does not have to fight for either his identity or his freedom. However, when a woman pursues her goals personal or otherwise, for example, to earn “bread” or to enjoy her womanhood or self-hood she is made to feel guilty by her mother’s or son’s complaints. Shakir and Naseer as children were different: their gender controlled them and continued to do so. As a modern woman, when Shakir clashes with her cultural norms to reclaim her self-hood, “nobody is happy” with her, and in that sense she is “a good for nothing”. A modern woman, who enjoys her personal life, Chatterjee argues, is seen by nationalistic ideology as “a very incomplete picture of woman who was after all also a mother, daughter, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, and mistress of the household, and had to earn credit in all these roles before she would be praised by society” (1993, p. 143). ZehraNigah, Shakir’s contemporary female poet, in her poem *Jurm vada* (Criminal Promise) feels guilty as she does not keep the promise she made to her children. The poem is based on the three-pronged theme of her work, her responsibilities as a parent and her motherhood. Such social norms are oppressive, and are as Chatterjee argues, the “undesirable aspects of traditions which had to be reformed” (Ibid., p. 143). The helplessness of a woman caught between multiple roles is further expanded in Shakir’s next role as a working woman in an office. The personal feminine “I” therefore, according to Kristeva, moves in “different directions” (Kristeva 1980, p. 186).

In Shakir’s poem “Misfit” she moves to “office” to show how her responsibilities become bigger, her circle becomes larger, and her identities multiplied. Shakir intentionally includes the word “office” to tell another story of victory and losses as a working woman, especially when working with men (as the term “office” generally gives an impression of working with men). She could have told the story of her experience as an English teacher where she taught in a girls’ college for nine years before she was married. However, when you are living in a male-dominated society and you pass a competitive exam - CSS (Civil Superior Services) and win a “high merit position” in “Foreign Services” beating your male counterparts, it is a great victory for a Pakistani woman (Agha 1995, p. 31; Zeb 2009). In medicine or education there is some acceptability of a female presence, but to be selected against men for a post in the topmost services like Foreign Services, Customs and DNG (District Management Group) was a great shock to the male ego. In one way Shakir’s success in this field won her victory as she struggled to reclaim her self-respect; in Moghissi’s words “win back, inch by inch” what [she] lost through the “re-Islamization” [of Zia’s] polic[ies]” “in” “Pakistan”, where woman is placed subordinate to man (Moghissi 1999, p. 11). The images of “stones” in the poem then signifies such people as the tyrannical General Zia, who discredited and disrespected the identity of women. A stone’s major characteristic is that it has no life, and in that sense it does not grow or change and is linked to “barren”.

At another level the metaphor of land can be used for both genders, “stones” and “barren[ness]” for men, and “green”, “rain”, and “flowers” for women. This links with the concept of “engendered nation” depicted by EllekeBoehmer in “Theorising the engendered nation”. She explains that men are conventionally presented as strong and powerful and women associated with birth, roots, nature, beloved earth and motherland, thus giving them engendered roles (Boehmer 2005, p. 27). However, she states further that these are the “remnants of the past” (Ibid., p. 27). Chatterjee argues that while women have tried to come out of these gendered roles through feminist writing, men on the other hand have not progressed or cultivated themselves out of it, rather they have made it much stronger by propagating it through, in Chatterjee’s terms, “nationalistic ideologies” (Chatterjee 1999, p. 252). “Barren[ness]” in the poem then depicts that mentality which is linked with “past” “values”, and looks at a woman as one whose place is in the home, and whose job it is to give birth just like the earth (Boehmer 2005, p. 27). In that sense the “barren[ness]” is also a metaphor for a barren motherland; a conventional society with bounds and restrictions on freedom outside of that construct. When she does not fit into that construct, she becomes a “misfit”.

Antithetically, “flowers” placed against the “stones” in the poem is an image of beauty, life, growth and, of course, woman. “Rain” too is linked with life. “[P]atches of green” in the poem refers generally to those people who have respect for women. It also gives a deeper insight into Shakir’s struggle in her love affair which is suggested by the “flowers” which Shakir is “try[ing]” to “grow in the office”. This is another untold story of love, sacrifice and conflict that needs to be told. The image of “green patches” is a personal story of Shakir’s love affair, told by Agha in Shakir’s biography, a time when Shakir, a divorced mother, “set her heart on a [junior] person [officer] working [with her] in a government office”, an affair which never materialised, due to extreme social, personal and cultural pressures (Agha 1995, p. 23; Zeb 2009; Khan 2009).

This freedom for self “may not be” a cry for “sexual” freedom, as Friedan puts it, but it cannot be denied that it is “related” to “sexual” “fulfilment” (Friedan 1963, p. 26). Keeping in mind that the time lapse in the poem between “earlier on” and “now” is about eleven years, during which Shakir got married. Now, when she writes this poem, she is a single divorced woman, but the female inside her is still alive to her urges and desires. Shakir is basically a love poet with a feminine romantic side and that strain is very prominent in her though controlled due to the political and military censorship and the Islamic environment. We cannot deny that there is hidden somewhere a cry for “sexual” fulfilment (Friedan 1963, p. 26). This is not for, as Spivak says, reproductive purposes, but a desire for sexual pleasure (Morton 2003). “Green” is a symbol of hope and life; as after divorce Shakir is in need of hope, love and a relationship, but her “self-respect” is at stake if she crosses the cultural and religious norms. From a Pakistani cultural perspective she lost self-respect by having an affair while already being stigmatised as a divorced woman. It reiterates Chatterjee’s argument, that when the modern educated woman believes that she is free, and thinks and models her life on “European lines”, she faces the difficulty of fulfilling the norms of respectability laid down for her; it excludes her from respectable society because of the stigma of “immoral living”; such are the contradictions of the new world, he states (1993, p. 151-152). These contradictions also construct an identity through Shakir’s biographical and autobiographical poems.

Shakir’s first collection, *Khushboo*, talks about her earlier affair (1974-1975) when she could not marry because of social and family pressures; eleven years later (1985) nothing had changed, neither her conservative Islamic culture nor patriarchal control, or Shakir herself. Theoretically, it is in Kristeva’s terms a significant “revelation” of that “split” in different directions as it projects that the inner desire for love and a relationship has not escaped her nature (Kristeva 1980, p. 193). Being a mother or a divorced mother could not suppress it, even though she knew she could not marry her lover due to cultural pressure. The focus here is on her natural desire for sexual freedom, the female inside her, who is struggling with outer forces and her other selves.

The conservative culture in which she lived did not accept a woman having an affair; she could not invite her boyfriend to her home, so she met him outside in restaurants, parks and sometimes in the company of other poet friends (Zeb 2009). She could neither leave him as she was in love with him, nor could she move ahead. Another fear of Shakir’s was that if she neglected her son he may have become closer to his father. She also knew where she was in her life: youth gone, son growing older, social and cultural pressures not in her favour, wanting to remarry but not being able to, and a relationship without getting married was adultery in her religious circle. Another conflict was that if she did not marry then, she might miss this opportunity too. Secondly, when her son got older, he might control his mother as in traditional Pakistani culture. Living in a male dominated society in Ash’s terms means women traditionally cannot do anything “independently even in their own house”. She states that “in childhood” a woman is “subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead to her sons” (Ash 1991, p. 158). A man can marry even in his 80s, but women getting married late in life are a source of amusement in Pakistani society. As Shakir says towards the end of the poem, “I am something else”, a “misfit”. The term “misfit” describes her relationship to all these situations. The “circle” in the poem refers to cultural conservativeness and narrow-

mindedness. The feet being too big can symbolise her liberal modern outlook, where she does not see anything bad in having a love affair, because there is a woman inside her with a physical urge, but the culture does not permit its fulfilment. The “feet” in the poem can also be a symbol of constant struggle. The conflict on the one hand is her love, and also her womanhood which demands freedom, and on the other her motherhood, her responsibilities centred on her son; her conservative society is too small to fit everything in. If she goes for her love, she loses her son, if she goes for her son, she loses her love, and the cultural pressure is that she cannot have both; a difficult path. In the poem *Che-kunam* (What Should I Do?) Shakir was in real life standing helplessly on the crossroads of these two options. The only way out was to sacrifice her womanhood; and she did - she sacrificed her love affair and compromised on her motherhood when she made her son (Murad) the centre of attention, but it was a difficult point in her life.

The significant observation to be made about this paper is that through her stories we see a multi-layered articulation of herself. In her role as a woman we see a daughter, a wife, a mother and a writer, all different identities of ‘woman’. The paper makes a pointed reference that the self is not a simple construct which can achieve freedom from all the restraints of family duties and other obligations in a Pakistani culture. Moreover, the traditional and modern ways of life are separate and yet are shown to be interlinked which qualifies the concept of freedom that no one can be completely free. Most evidently it looks into how a traditional Pakistani woman should live and fight for her rights, but not at the cost of giving up her “feminine” *nisvan* self. Overall, we have observed that while Shakir challenges the patriarchal order through motherhood as a metaphor of creativity, and projects an awareness of the conflicts and tensions that generate from the relationship between the mother and her land, in her stereotypical role as an eastern mother she submits to patriarchy under political pressure and embraces tolerance in order to survive.

These dialogues of Shakir with the contesting voices within and without culminate in her own re-adjustment and re-thinking of her feminist ideas, alongside her personal development and understanding of her male-dominated culture. This male-domination has a strong impact on Shakir’s poetry and thinking as she starts to realise towards the end of her poetic career that overly liberal feminist ideas are “foolishness” and make her a “misfit” within Pakistani culture. The cultural pressure and fear of Islamic laws, the cause of her tension and turmoil, finally force her to re-think her liberal feminist ideas, which contradict her earlier radical protests in *Khushboo* against restrictions on sexual freedom. However, she was not married then, was an inexperienced *larki* (girl), unaware of practical life, only thinking of herself and her romantic world. During the course of her poetic career she got married and experienced conflict; she divorced and suffered the pain and difficulties of living as a single woman in a male-dominated society; and through her own practical experience realised that in her conservative Muslim Pakistani culture a woman has no self of her own; it is always divided into different roles: mother/daughter/wife. What I found out was that the position she finally advocates does not require total annihilation of the self but accommodation of that self in different roles, incorporating her life as an eastern mother/woman. It is very contradictory but self-revelatory and shows a bitter realisation, incorporating on the one hand a need for, in Shakir’s own terms, a “poise” in a woman’s thoughts if she wants to survive in a male-dominated Muslim society: a restricted marginalised voiceless image; and on the other hand a powerful poetry voicing feminist concerns.

The paper aimed to explore the multiple layers which contribute to our understanding of the word “woman” in the third-world, Pakistani context: her traditional “feminine” *nisvan* role, her female romantic role, her restricted marginalised role and her open and liberal feminist role. In Shakir’s poetry, woman is a loved-one, a lover, a mother, a wife, a goddess, a poet, a writer. She is able to occupy these positions sometimes challenging patriarchy and sometimes upholding it. Shakir’s blending of both feminine and feminist positions is by no means an indication that she is giving up the struggle, but an encouragement that experiences must be recorded and stories told for the genesis of new theories and discourses accommodating other cultures and religions. What I have discovered through my research on Shakir’s poetry is new and different because I used a method of inquiry where dialogue played a vital role in the analysis, helping me to trace Shakir’s development in the context of her culture, religion and society. Likewise, although this study on Shakir has by no means exhausted the dialogic engagements of women in Shakir’s Urdu poetry, it has opened a new method of inquiry for future study of Pakistani female poetry and its representation of women.

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