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Abstract

Mary Louise Pratt, in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, states that marginal groups select and absorb ideas and materials transmitted from dominant culture (1992, p.6). What she defines as marginal are those groups who were once under the British Imperial rule, and which were later separated due to geographical and historical reasons. She further states that, in order to progress and develop marginalized groups borrow ideas and develop them in their own cultural setting. This explores Bhabha's postcolonial theory of Hybridity (1994) where he says diverse cultures when meeting deconstruct, what Said calls binaries of colonial discourses (1978; 1993). Bakhtin calls it "dialogism" by "re-accentuating" or rewriting different borrowed ideas (Bakhtin 1981, p.417). This, on the one hand, identifies the interdependence of two diverse cultures, and, on the other hand, it deconstructs and diverts the supremacy of the dominant culture (Bhabha 1994). This theoretical framework will be used to explore the poem "Ecstasy" written by Perveen Shakir, a twentieth century Pakistani Muslim female poet, which was influenced by "The Ecstasy", a poem by the seventeenth century poet John Donne. This paper aims to show how cleverly Shakir incorporated European culture into her own in order to educate her English readership about the role of women in Pakistani culture. The intertextuality (Allen 2000) of transforming canonical text into something new (Nasta 2000) is not uncommon with postcolonial writers. They take from classical texts and give them a twist, which is what Shakir is doing, and which will be analysed in this paper. She is using canonical text and the theme of sexuality, and is giving her own contemporary perspective in order to bring across her own political agenda of depicting male-domination and the question of female suppression in Pakistani Muslim society.

The poem also frames Bakhtin's concept that dialogue is not only a matter of influence but a matter of individual talent as well (1981; Eliot 1992). Informed by Pratt's concept of contact zone and transcultural phenomena this section will look into how Shakir initiates a dialogue, in de Certeau's terms by "poaching" (borrowing) "others" (western) ideas in order to invent and create, alongside framing Bhabha's concept of hybridity, a term which identifies the interdependence of two diverse cultures. It not only softens the cultural difference but it also gives the "cross-cultural space for survival" (Nasta) which Bhabha calls "Third Space" giving diverse and exotic international cultures a place to survive (Pratt 1999, 1992; de Certeau 1984, p. xii; Nasta 2000, p. 10; Bhabha 1994, p. 29).

The poem begins with a visual image of the act of physical union. We quickly reach to the melting of the two bodies, suggesting urgency of the desire and a desirability of its permanence as well. The "delicate one" refers to the girl and the strong arms to the masculinity of the male. The words like "delicate one", "soft hand", "silky hair", "red lips", are important as it refers to her beauty as a young girl and also as an object of pleasure. Shakir pre-empts this theme of sexual desire and the feeling of being oppressed and controlled in her earlier poem "Only a Girl"; here it can be read as if she has broken the chains and has gone beyond dreams to realities, flowers and petals to body and spirit, and has freed herself (temporarily) from conventional bonds. The comparison between a "shimmering scarf" and "veil in disarray" is a very significant point in the poem, which is the crux of crossing the traditional "feminine" *nisvani* boundaries. "Scarf" can be taken as a piece of cloth used as a fashionable item of dress, which is not meant to cover you fully; something secular.¹ A veil, on the contrary, if taken as a reflection of religious and cultural dress code (Yaqin 2011; Mernissi 1991, 2003; Sabbah 1984), is a symbol of modesty and shame in Islam. Her veil is in disarray, an indication that she is flouting her religious and cultural norms. There is already a suggestion that the two bodies are joined together in the sexual

¹ For further reading on 'Secularism Versus Religion' with reference to scarf see Dominic McGoldrick's book *Human Rights and Religion: The Islamic Headscarf Debate in Europe*. Hart Publications, 2006, p. 301.

act. Bearing in mind the writer's position as a young unmarried Muslim girl, even writing about such subjects would be considered sinful (Farid 1994, p. 51-52). Peter Murdock writes that women in western society are given "maximum personal freedom" "to prevent abuse of their liberty". However, he states that other "societies" [Muslim] "attempt to preserve premarital chastity by secluding their unmarried girls by such external devices as veiling" (Murdock 1965, p. 273 quoted in Mernissi 1985, p. 30). In Donne's poem, the soul becomes "purer" (line 27) after the physical union, whereas in Shakir's religious perspective the body becomes sinful if it is in a relationship other than a legal marriage (Mernissi 1985). Mernissi argues that it is ironic that both Muslim and European theories have a similar conclusion: for Muslim theologians, "women are destructive to the social order because they are active, for Freud because they are not" (Ibid., p. 40).²For Freud, Mernissi writes, a woman's sexual aggressiveness is suppressed and diverted inwardly towards her truly feminine role before it turns destructive (Mernissi 2003, p. 496-497; 1985, p. 27-45; Friedan 1963, p. 105-106). Uncontrolled sexuality is condemned in both Christianity and Islam, but Islam is different, she argues, as 'what is attacked as debased is not sexuality but woman' (Mernissi 2003, p. 498). She states that Islam allows "contended and harmoniously lived sexuality" as it reduces tension and relaxes and pacifies hearts. However, she strongly attacks the concept that Muslim women should be treated as an object of emotional investment, or devoted to the spiritual aspect of prayers and meditations "alone" (Ibid., p. 499). Therefore, I am establishing through this poem and the chapter that Shakir's desire for sexual need is expressed in her voice as a radical poet and as a woman who wants to have personal freedom and who wants to have control over her own body, but she cannot; as the French feminist Lucy Irigaray put it, because her "pleasures are trapped", "cut into pieces", "split" and "torn""between herself [unmarried girl] and the system [Islam]" (Irigaray 1980, p. 74).

There is a sense of fulfilment when the body is sexually satiated which in Donne's terms advances and sharpens the mind and spirit. Cixous in the "Laugh of the Medusa" says that the way to have freedom from patriarchy is that a woman should write in her own voice and of her own pleasurable experiences. "Ecstasy" is Shakir speaking as a woman, about a woman, but of course not going as far as Cixous, who speaks of bisexuality in "Laugh of the Medusa"; as she states it is a strategy to eradicate phallus governance in language. What Shakir, however, is projecting is a natural desire for sex, which, of course, disrupts the ideal image of a Muslim woman and would bring drastic penalties (Russell 1969), which she does get as she is "forced to write poetry quite different from that of *Khushboo*[Fragrance]"(Shakir's first collection) (Shakir interviewed by Salim 1994, p. 87). "Sexuality per se" Mernissi states, is not dangerous; on the contrary, she writes, there are three positive and vital functions. It gives a feeling to the believer that he/she exists as part of the earth; it serves as a "foretaste" of Paradise so encourages them to obey Allah's laws to strive for Paradise; and finally she states it is necessary for intellectual creativity (2003, p. 498). What Shakir has "invent[ed]" (Pratt 1992, p. 6) anew by re-writing the poem "Ecstasy" is the importance of her physical existence; that she is not an object silent and non-existent but has her own sexual needs. She wants control over her body and also to engage in physical union in order to "advance" or sharpen her spirit or the creative abilities which reflect her individual talent. This, in her Islamic cultural context, goes against the ideal concept of the female body, a symbol of religious purity which she "decode[s]" by criticising it through her poetry (Sabbah 1984, p. 3). Her radical poetry then is a voice which in Moghissi's words "crosses all confinement of shame, compulsion and anxiety" (Moghissi 1999, p. 20). This shows the difficulty of using western influences such as applying Cixous's theory of the feminine as a celebration of feminine *jouissance* (writing of sexual pleasures)when placed in a conservative third-world Muslim country like Pakistan.

Shakir was influenced by Donne's direct and open poetry. In a letter of 6th July 1978 to her fellow poet Nazir Sidiqqi, she writes that Donne hated "clichés"; he was open and direct (Shakir's letter (1978) quoted in Sidiqqi 1997, p. 34). She states that Donne has always been her favourite poet and quotes her favourite line from Donne's poetry, "For God's sake hold thy tongue and let me love" (Shakir's letter (1978) quoted in Sidiqqi 1997, p. 34). We see a similar expression in Naim's words, of "openness" and "playfulness" (1995, p. 9) in Shakir's poem "Ecstasy". In Donne's poem, "The Exstasie" there is the image of the souls leaving the bodies 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" lines 15, 16, 20). In Shakir's poem the souls do not leave the bodies, but there is a desire to stay: "Let these moments stay for a while" after the "playful moments" (tr. Bakht and Lavigne 1995, p. 22).Then the device of a conversation is used in different ways. In Donne's poem we have an imaginary listener who is there while the couple are making love:

If any, so by love refin'd
That he soul's language understood,
And by good love were grown all mind,

² In Muslim culture if a woman has control over her body for sexual purposes it is seen as active energy (Merinissi 1985); similarly, Freud's theory denied sexual freedom to women. Freud's definition of the sexual nature of woman gave them a conventional image of femininity (Friedan 1963, p. 92). In this sense Muslim and European theories are similar.

Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knew not which soul spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take
 And part far purer than he came.
 (Donne, 'The Exstasie', lines 21-28).

Arthur L. Clement states that for Donne, soul has a language, a language which can be understood by only those who have reached a refined state after making love (1990). 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 tones; / One shared sound, beating of two hearts" (tr. Bakht and Lavigne 1995, p. 22). We do get the two-in-one image in Shakir's poem as well through number: where "one" implies the spiritual union and 'two' refers to the two bodies. Clement terms this, with reference to Donne's poem, a celebration of true love's paradoxical union of two souls into one (1990, p. 27). 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": "To'our bodies turn we then, that so / Weak men on love reveal'd may look" (lines, 69-70); but reflects the desirability of sexual love: "Let these moments stay for a while". Donne's poem ends with a message: the duty to "reveal" love to those who would be too "weak" to believe in love without such a sign (Donne, "The Exstasie", line 57). The logical development of Donne's poem can only be understood, Clement states, through a sense of the ecstatic union of souls, which is achieved through the union of their bodies. This three phase journey is the symbol of "that abler soul" that "lovers through love become" he states (Clement 1990, p. 32). Thus, we can look back at the lover in *Aaina* (Mirror) (another poem of Shakir) as a weak man who is overwhelmed by the love of the beloved but does not kiss her. He only kisses the "shadow" which can also be in Zaidi's words "betray[al] of men" in Shakir's poetry (Zaidi 2008, p. 1). One of the readings of Shakir's "Ecstasy": is that physical love is what Shakir yearns for and voices through this borrowed voice. It is interesting to note here that, in Janel M. Mueller's terms, Donne's poem is a dialogue which intends to remove male dominance, and settle sexual differences reflected by dominant words like "we" and "both spake same" (line 26). Her reading of Donne's "The Exstasie", from a "post-Freudian feminist critical perspective"³ can be theoretically applied to Shakir's poem as well as the overall political message of equality (Mueller 1985, p. 40). What I have established through this analysis of two poems is firstly, the need for a three phase body-spirit-body experience which refers to the equal status of woman; secondly, a phase which is incomplete because the emphasis on the body is restricted in Shakir's cultural construct, and which then, thirdly, does not help Shakir to sharpen her creative self.

The poem is analysed in the frame of Cixous's theory of the feminine language, a strategy to subvert patriarchal dominance. Once again Shakir "select[s]" and "absorb[s]" the idea of the Ecstasy and re-writes with her "own" political slant to criticise cultural and religious suppression (Pratt 1992, p. 6). Language for Cixous presents a major obstacle to her as a feminist because she perceives it as the root cause of patriarchal dominance. Cixous urges women to locate their identity using their feminine *jouissance*, (enjoyment, sexual pleasure) a strategy opposed to the philosophical method of inquiry appropriated by de Beauvoir (Cixous 1981, 1996; Kristeva 1980, 1986). Talking about women's writing, Cixous says a woman must write herself: writing about herself as a woman and bringing women to writing, from which she has been driven away so violently, as from her body (1981). Cixous states that when a woman writes herself, she "must" make sure that her body is heard in her "text" (1996, p. 79; Kristeva 1980, 1986), because, she argues, "female desire, what women want, is so repressed or so misinterpreted in a phallogocentric [male-dominated] society, its expression becomes a key location for deconstructing that control" (Cixous 1981, p. 246; Eagleton 1986, p. 205). Shakir has written about herself as a female, bringing her "most intimate feminine touch" and "experience" (Naim 1995, p. 7) very openly, and there may be very few (Baksh) in her culture who can write so boldly (Naim) about such a prohibited topic as female sexuality (Baksh 2007; Naim 1993).

This desperation for the physical in *ghazal* love themes is seen by Ralph Russell as a prelude to marriage. Of course Russell speaks with reference to Pakistani and Indian Muslim women, where he states "with me [western] courtship precedes marriage; with you [India and Pakistan], courtship follows marriage" (1969, p. 117). It is either, he states, because it is a romantic love which is generally assumed to be before marriage and it is revealing a state of desperation because of the "purdah [veil] society" or the beloved is either married or betrothed to another man or woman who can never be hers. The desperation of the lover portrayed in the conventional *ghazal* is therefore desperation founded upon all the real life experiences of love in modern poetry (Ibid.). In another poem "Wasteland" adapted in Urdu from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland" we see Shakir's desperation because of the restrictions of "purdah society"; keeping in mind Shakir's position as a young unmarried girl there is a sense of desperation, and also the desperation of lost love. She cannot marry the man she loves and she knows he can never be hers. This is signified through the unavailability of the pitcher

³ Because for Freud woman was 'never' an 'equal', but was always 'biologically inferior' to man (Friedan 1963, p. 101-102)

(“pots of raw clay”) later on in the poem “Wasteland” and the projection of inclement weather. In that sense, in Russell’s words *ghazal* poetry is a “licensed form of protest” against the world in which the poet and reader alike are confined (Ibid., p. 120). Shakir’s radical love themes therefore touched the hearts of all her young male and female readers as they shared her protest against cultural oppression. *Khushboo* is something “new” (Naim), a “changed perception” of woman (Naim 1995, p. 11; Mohsin 1995, p. 172) in Urdu literature and was in Shakir’s own words greatly loved by all, especially “my” younger readers, she said, who identified with her. “Either they find themselves like that girl in *Khushboo* or they want to be like her” Shakir stated (Shakir quoted in Salim 1994, p. 87). She intentionally chose this age *larki* (girl) because she knew there was a need among the new generation to receive her poetry, as no other female poet had written about female desire from such a personal perspective. It was her ground breaking collection, attracting large audiences (Farrukhi 2004), winning many awards (Agha 1995), and going for second prints within six months, “a rare honour” for any book in Urdu literature (Naim 1993, p. 182) which gave her status as one of the poets of the post Faiz era (Hameed 1995; Naim 1993, p. 185). To speak of sexual pleasure from a personal confessional feminine perspective was not only new but totally absent in the older generation of poets (Baksh 1996, 2007; Mohsin 1995; Naim 1993, 1995) though she was ruthlessly and bitterly criticised by her “senior poets (male and female), predatory critics and intellectuals” for openly exposing female sexuality (Naim 1995, p. 12-13). Such poetry, Russell says, disrupts the social order and brings drastic penalties (1969). Shakir received her penalty as she was criticised for being openly sexual in her *ghazal* poetry in *Khushboo* and compelled to change her poetic style.

C.M. Naim states that, “admission without shame”, of the desire for sexual relationships and the emphasis on this in Shakir’s love poetry of *Khushboo*, makes her contemporary feminist poets “[un]sympathetic” towards Shakir (Naim 1995, p. 14). Shakir has been ruthlessly targeted by both feminist and male critics for bringing themes of open sexuality into her love poetry of *Khushboo*, not that the feminists find that the open sexuality disrupts the image of pure and submissive Muslim woman, but because sexist values make her un-feminist; male critics, on the contrary, feel inhibited by her openly sexual poems as they think it taints the Islamic image of woman as pure and modest and also disturbs the male order of power. Amina Yaqin in her comment on the poem “Wasteland” says that Shakir has used a “new way of writing” having been influenced by western poets (Yaqin 2001, p. 113). Elsewhere Yaqin states that Shakir is a representative of a “new” generation of female poets who have brought a modern approach to classical love poetry with “ease” (Yaqin 2001, p. 65).

What irritates her contemporary feminist poets is that Shakir is always seen in relation to man; this, however, is critical and an important point for Shakir’s poetry: the beloved is always unfaithful, and cruel, and Shakir, the poet-lover, is always subject to that cruelty, but still keeps sacrificing everything for him. This, of course, is a classic theme of *ghazal* which Shakir brings in her modern poetry; one of the reasons is to satirise the nature of men. Rubina Shabnam states that Shakir looks at man (beloved/husband) as cruel, unfaithful, hypocritical and disloyal, and her work should also be seen in this context (Shabnam 2004; 2005, p. 47; 2006). The poem suggests her desperation as well as the absence of her lover. Keeping in mind that Shakir had already experienced love, which did not lead to marriage, that love, that she had once cherished, was always a source of inspiration of the love poetry in *Khushboo* (Agha 1995).

Re-writing John Donne then, is meant to acknowledge Donne’s theme of sexuality, where Shakir’s world is a wasteland without sex. Re-writing John Donne the western canonical poet from her eastern perspective as a suppressed Muslim girl is to emphasise the importance of sex and that all roads in her search for her identity in love are controlled by patriarchy. This theoretically helps her to make contact (Pratt 1999; Bhabha 1994) with her historical past, and it also gives her a chance to deconstruct Edward Said’s concept of binaries formulated in his work, “Orientalism” (1978) which established a relation of dominance. This intertextuality subverts the dominance of western thought by bringing in the theory of hybridity (Bhabha 1994) through this poem.

Dialogically, Donne as a poet from the west has a commonality here as he too does not write about ideal, but real and true, and that seems to be the reason Shakir picked him to support her voice: a combination of western influence and a local theme. But the local, in Pratt’s terms “invent[ion]” (1992, p. 6), is politically charged, criticising her socio-cultural and religious boundaries which confine woman to a silent and pure role. This individual talent of merging western thought into eastern culture, which Pratt calls transculturation, also reconnects her with the historical past when Pakistan was under colonial rule. In that sense she has used the material transmitted from the “dominant cultures” (Pratt 1992, p. 6; 3-4) (western) for her own contemporary reasons: to depict male-domination and the question of female suppression in Pakistani Muslim society. This intertextuality also implies the interlocking (Bhabha 1994) of the two diverse cultures that were once connected (under colonial rule) but separated due to historical and geographical reasons: Pakistan’s creation (Talbot and Singh 1999; Harrison et al, 1999). Ironically, this also implies that Pakistan is still, in Bhabha’s terms, not independent from the colonial influence (Bhabha 1994).

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