

## **Gynocritical Analysis of Parveen Shakir's Translated Poems in *Talking to Oneself***

### **Abstract**

*In Pakistan, patriarchal structures remain the most dominant and overpowering hierarchy that starts with men and ends with them, also women, either have no role to play in this hierarchy or they are reduced to a submissive level whose purpose is either to satiate the libido of men or to work as a homemaker. Writing becomes a source of catharsis in societies like Pakistan where women still face suppression. Parveen Shakir emerges as a poet who questions patriarchal oppression and addresses the preexisting stigmas surrounding the rights and independence of women. This study highlights the feminine perspective of Shakir's poetry from the angle of gynocriticism as explained by Elaine Showalter. It also evaluates feminist notions in Shakir's poetry and how they are contextualized in Pakistani society.*

**Keywords:** *Parveen Shakir, Gynocriticism, Feminism, Poetry, Patriarchy, Pakistan*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Even in the twenty-first century, Pakistan still contains overpowering and dominating patriarchal structures. In its extreme form, cases of domestic abuse become life-threatening. Women are killed in the name of honor, based on values and traditions which dictate their existence. Those who desire to raise their voices against atrocities face the dilemma of either being vulnerable to the patriarchs who control social institutions or submitting to male-dominant hierarchies. In order to survive such circumstances, many women transform their traumatic experiences and express their grievances in the form of literature. In doing so they find themselves isolated and abandoned to an estrangement due to the lack of an adequate support system. Furthermore their writings are heavily censored as the subject of feminism is still not appreciated by a majority of Pakistanis. Many books are shunned altogether to ensure

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no feminist or anti- patriarchal sentiments are voiced out in public. Regardless of the resistance, female writers continue to articulate their opinions and fight for their rights.

There are two sturdy male citadels that women have to stand up to: bureaucratic dominance, and social-religious suppression, bureaucratic dominance, and social-religious suppression, which have far-reaching penalties, as often these two work hand in hand (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 664).

Parveen Shakir broke new ground in 20th century Urdu poetry in stylistic and thematic terms through her strong voice. She was inspired by T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 664). Her poetry covers a wide range of topics including the story of Cinderella, the firsthand experience of a working woman, and views about the people who endure hardships under industrialization and capitalism (p. 665). Tejaswani (2013, p. 665) discusses Shakir's work through Klages' (2006, p. 107) perspective of feminism:

Parveen Shakir's ghazals are based on love, women power, restrictions on women, social atrocities, etc. The poet's verses talked about her cynical beliefs on eternal love and restrictions placed on women in the name of gender, religion and law.

Shakir was a resilient, independent, romantic, and free woman living in a society that did not appreciate such characteristics in a woman. After marriage, she struggled with the exertion of her partner's power and the qualities of her own personality. This can be seen in her poetry as it unveils the roots of Pakistani patriarchy. Her words voice what many women still face on a daily basis. This is reflected in poems in *Talking to Oneself* (Shakir, 1995).

Shakir was a renowned poet, a professor and a civil servant, and her multifaceted personality is reflected in her poetry. Shakir's writing career began at a young age under the pseudonym of "Beena." Among her many poetic publications are *Khushbu* (1976), *Sad-barg* (1980), *Khud-Kalami* (1990), *Inkar* (1990), and *Mah-E-Tamam* (1994). She won the Adamjee Award for her first book *Khushbu*. "Parveen Shakir pioneered the use of feminism in poetry," (2009). Posthumously, Shakir's significant contribution to Urdu literature was acknowledged and she was awarded "Pride of Performance" and ranked among the best modern Urdu poets (Hassan, n.d.).

Shakir wrote her first book as a young, unmarried and unhindered girl, but then she gradually transitioned through her life struggles, like many other Pakistani women. She endured a difficult and oppressive marriage, motherhood at an early age, hovering in-laws, and a consequential divorce, all while balancing her work-life

responsibilities. She felt misunderstood by her family, in-laws, and husband – specifically regarding her passion for poetry. The inescapable patriarchy seeped its way into Shakir's life regardless of her reputation as a poetic genius (Ahmad, 2015). After divorce she shifted her focus and gave central importance to her son Murad. As a single mother she was culturally and professionally competing in a male-dominant atmosphere, which raised her consciousness of gender bias and the problems women face (Piracha, 2014).

Gifted with a sensitivity about the social and political atmosphere her writing embedded the issues and circumstances at the time, while adding female insight. She set a precedent that encouraged future female Urdu writers to foreground and present their abilities (Kiran, 2015, p. 302). Through ghazal and free verse poetry, she addresses the social issues faced by women, their experiences of love, conflicts and emotions. She incorporates various literary techniques including personification, similes and metaphors to enhance the poetic value of her work ("Parveen Shakir pioneered the use of feminism in poetry," 2009).

The current research elucidates the ideas that Shakir presents in her poetry from a feminist standpoint. The translation of her work into English liberates her themes from linguistic barriers and allows a wider range of readers to understand her work. The democratic message of gynocriticism—for women, by women—allows readers to decipher texts' meanings without the barriers of male-dominant thoughts. This research highlights the importance of her feminine perspective through the paradigm of Showalter's gynocriticism (1986). Through the paradigm of gynocriticism, the female discourse is analyzed by women, instead of being viewed in relation to or from the perspective of men.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Kishwar Naheed, a prominent Urdu poet describes the struggles Pakistani women made in the past when it came to publishing their work. She reiterates the emotional struggle and toil endured by female poets in order to attain freedom of expression and writing. There are numerous poets like Mah Laqa Chanda, Rabia Pinhaan, Ada Jafri and Parveen Shakir who undertook their struggles as a challenge at a time when poets like Shabnam Shakeel were unable to get their work published for several years after their marriage (Khalique, 2017).

Shakir incorporated novel stylistic choices in her poetry that had rarely been used before. Her distinct narration presented the use of the first person feminine pronoun in Urdu poetry for the first time. This feminine syntax had not been used before (Khan, 2014). It can be argued that in the dominantly male scene of Urdu poetry, Shakir is the first female Urdu poet who uses the word *larki* [girl] in her poems. It was previously used in the masculine syntax in the sense of a 'lover'. Furthermore,

even though the use of feminine first-person pronoun had been used in prose frequently, Shakir's usage in poetry is a rare practice, even by preceding female poets. "Parveen Shakir pioneered the use of feminism in poetry," (2009) For instance, "Pink flowers blossomed in the season I met you. With your attentions they are opening again, though these wounds had healed already."<sup>2</sup>

Shakir centralizes love through the sensual longing, affinity and reciprocity. She gives insight from a female standpoint and poetic receptivity while integrating distinct matters such as pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, divorce, and most importantly the existence of a woman amidst patriarchy. Her poetry conveys the painful end of her first love - enforced by family pressure - her failure in marriage due to its demanding nature, and her post-divorce affair that also came to an end due to pressure from the society. In the ever-growing conformist regime of Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, she articulated her anguish in her poems as a desolate and deserted lover. She was an alluring mystery, candid, secluded, and eloquent with poised femininity and sincere dissent. Her poems are not baroque, but lucid. She refers to herself as a 'girl', not a woman, using both first and third-person which was seldom used in Urdu poetry for women (Ahmad, 2015).

Listen, girl, these moments are clouds: you let them pass and they're gone.  
Soak up their moist touch. Get drenched. Don't waste a single drop.<sup>3</sup>

Shakir conveyed a much more intimate, blatant and direct feminine aura that separated her from the previous generations of women. She personified the self-proclaimed title of a 'misfit', deserted lover who expressed her inmost yearnings, catastrophes, and weaknesses (Ahmad, 2015):

Where am I in your life?  
In the morning breeze or the evening star, ... deep thoughts or casual  
tunes?<sup>4</sup>

Shakir was praised by Iftikhar Arif for influencing the younger generation with her realistic and thematically wide-ranged poetry. She added a new element to traditional love themes by expressing her emotions in a style that is pellucid and simple. Her uniqueness is seen in her diversity of expression to convey different degrees of thoughts and emotions "Parveen Shakir pioneered the use of feminism in poetry," (2009).

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<sup>2</sup> Parveen Shakir "Pink Flowers". Translated by Alamgir Hashmi.

<sup>3</sup> Parveen Shakir "To A Friend". Translated by C.M.Naim.

<sup>4</sup> Parveen Shakir "Where Am I?". Translated by Alamgir Hashmi.

Shakir's feminine perspective on love and its implications in poetry depicts affection, parting, passion, and beauty. She pens obsession with unreciprocated love, devotion to a reciprocated love, and fascination with the depth of love after separation all through eloquent description. At the same time, there is a lifelong profound disillusionment about the notion of love. Her poetry ranges in theme from sorrow, infidelity and departure, to frequent and cynical allusions about the loyalty of men in love. This does not lead to conflicting ideas, but it mirrors a variety of human emotions. Her expressions capture a woman's eternal love that exudes unmatched passion. Her tone is not bitter, pitying or vengeful, regardless of the grief she feels, which is impressive. She portrays the realistic side of acknowledging, growing and evolving through the agony, which is relatable for any human capable of feeling (Khan, 2014). She expresses the combined pain and pleasure of love in poems like "The Surrender" as, "Someone kills and kisses me / In the same breath. / This conflict of loving and dying / Simultaneously," (Shakir 37).

Her poignant and cadenced lyrics blend simple and elaborate diction together. Sometimes she embeds English phrases in juxtaposition to her free verse in Urdu. This presents a level of novelty and ingenuity in her style. Her use of personification and metaphorical expressions make her poems more vivid and insightful (Khan, 2014). This is reflected in verses of "The Prism" such as, "A slight change of inclination / And I become / A plain water droplet, / Sans light, sans colour." (Shakir 23).

Despite the social and personal strife, Shakir made her place as a romantic female poet in Urdu literature. We can also see her, a free rational spirit, raise questions about pertinent social issues e.g. a woman's place in a man's life, laborer's status in her country and childhood that terminates in a problematic adult life. Shakir conveys the controversial idea that women are suppressed because of the predetermined notions of the society. Her voice is not that of a subdued woman and she expresses her uninhibited, innermost emotions in her poetry (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 672). Furthermore, the appeal of her poetry becomes even clearer when she presents such feminist ideas in the subcontinental patriarchal backdrop. The translation of her works brings a new perspective of the feminist approach in women's literature, distinct from Western English literature and feminism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Showalter's "Towards Feministic Poetics" which provides two categories for feminist criticism. The first category is 'The Woman as a Reader or Feminist Critique'. This involves the female readers modifying how they analyze a particular text while inculcating realization of sexual codes; exploring the ideological assumptions in a historically grounded inquisition of literary occurrences, examining subjects like stereotypes and images of women in a

literary text; analyzing the cracks in the literary history construed by male writers, and gaps and fallacies about women in criticism; reviewing the manipulation and exploitation of women in popular film and culture while examining ‘woman-as-sign in semiotic systems’; political and polemical errors of the past. We are unable to understand the feelings and experiences of women when we scrutinize male critics’ sexism, female stereotypes, and restricted female roles in literary history (Showalter 128).

The second category is ‘The Woman as Writer’ or ‘Gynocritics’ (La Gynocritique). This defines the feminine perspective of literary criticism. Gynocriticism instigates where we emancipate ourselves from male literary history’s linear fundamentals, put an end to the need to fit women within the confines of the male tradition, and emphasize on a world of female culture that can be seen by everyone. This does not entail erasure of male and female differences in writing; Gynocriticism will not lead us to a land where gender is powerless, but it strives to comprehend the particularity of women’s writing as a basic element of female reality, not a mere result of sexism (Showalter 129).

The major concern of Gynocriticism is to view ‘woman as a producer of textual meaning, with history themes, genres, and structures of literature by women’. It is open to the ‘psychodynamics of female creativity’ and examines the linguistic and literary aspects of the text written by a female writer. It evaluates the course of the collective or individual career of female literary figures and suggests the construction of the female paradigm to study women’s literature and formulate new models based on the experiences of women. This perspective of studying centralizes the professions, communications and awareness of women; the newly emerged world of female culture; and premises of female sub-culture. It displays how the values of women seep through and emasculate male-dominant systems and in its extremity, it involves the Amazonian myths, and the dream of a self-sufficient female society (Showalter 129).

Women’s literature presents a metaphorical representation of the world through reading and writing. Therefore, Showalter considers these books as social and political substitutes in academia through symbolic representations. The intellectual approaches do not provide a holistic view of women’s work. Thus it is essential to include the patriarchal, male-oriented experience in the ‘imaginative maps’ of women. We need to comprehend the historical background of hegemonic patriarchal powers that led to female subservience. Only then shall we be able to decipher, weaken and ultimately expand that power. Therefore, we should expand our horizons to consider literature written by women in order to study both gynocentric and androcentric aspects of the literature (Auerbach, 1984, p. 156).

**Gynocritical Analysis of Selected Poems by Parveen Shakir**

The intent of the heart  
 Is written between the lines.  
 Explanations of words can't be found  
 In the forewords of books. (Shakir, "Talking to Oneself", p 119)

In these lines, Shakir directs the reader to seek a deeper understanding of love that delves beyond the surface, and that is the aim of the current analysis as it explores excerpts from poems written during various points in Shakir's career and which reflect the evolution of her feminist insight over time.

**Against Patriarchy**

At the beginning of Shakir's poetic career, as written in *Sad Barg* (1976-1980), she depicts patriarchal society. She declares that she is a woman of few words who dwells in silence. She addresses a dominant presence, identified through the second person pronoun, who enjoys being the "soul of conversation" and complains about her reticence. Rather than speaking, she communicates through the expression on her face when she looks at her beloved. The glow of her face says it all ("Have you seen me, seeing you?", p. 41). Here, Shakir mirrors the silent, shy and inexpressive nature of women in her society. Men are usually the ones to speak. In Urdu literature, the male writers openly express their amorous passions and feelings for their beloved and seem to expect the same from her. But that is not what women have been taught, as Shakir shows when she describes the upbringing of girls in her society in "The Insight" (p. 48-49):

Girls of raw years and tender minds  
 Have the virtue  
 Of water,  
 Ready to take shape  
 Of the pan they are poured into!  
 And  
 Brim or boil or evaporate  
 If their master wishes so!

In these verses, Shakir describes the social norms regulating girls' upbringing to be subordinate, to cater to their master's desires, adapt to situations and be the 'virtuous' one to obey as he commands. Yet simultaneously, her temperament is volatile as she reaches the brim, boils or evaporates in resistance to this ethic. But her resistance and reactions are also subjected to the wishes of her master. Shakir establishes the binary of master/servant where his wish is her command. But that is not how all girls need to be as she further says:

And here I am:  
 Stubborn and rebellious.  
 Instead of being just contained in an empty bowl,  
 I want to strike against it  
 With all my might  
 To expose its shallowness  
 By its echo.

Shakir exhibits resistance in these lines. She rebels against the stereotypical demeanor of the obliging subservient of her master. She exposes the emptiness to which patriarchy confines women. She raises her voice against the atrocity of social values where women constantly must change to satisfy men. Even though Shakir claims to be a rebel here, she also finds herself inevitably imprisoned in the empty bowl of her master. Her spirit compels her to react against the limitations imposed on women in order to expose its shallowness.

### **Liberation from Oppression**

Shakir invokes femininity in her poem “The Insight”. She speaks out against the tyranny of social hierarchy and claims independence. In this pursuit she does not detach herself from her femininity as she says, “I’ve never disputed with the mirror. / Yes, I too look nice in jewelry” (48). In the subcontinent, married women wear jewelry to signify their marriage so Shakir reminds herself of the price she has to pay to be a wife. The bracelets that she wears are compared to scorpions and the anklets are compared to shackles since she is condemned to stay within the orbit of her master’s limitations.

The poem highlights the common practice in Pakistan of bringing up girls with the intention of marrying them off as soon as families consider it ‘right’. The lesson of obedience and submission is embedded in their personalities. The future in-laws and husband have more power over a girl’s life than she has on her own. Shakir expresses the fear of a young girl who cannot confide in people like her in-laws because they sugarcoat their words to hide their real ‘poisonous’ intentions. The idea of being condemned to spend her whole life with such “congenital hypocrites” (“Insight”, p. 48) is terrifying. She describes them as wolves who have their eyes fixed on the bloodstains on her sheets—proof that she is a virgin on her wedding night--because virginity and chastity are given immense importance in patriarchal societies where the burden of virtue is placed on women. She ends the poem with a plea to God, “I want to tell His Lordship, Providence: / Sir, I too have brains.” (p. 49). Shakir condemns objectification or reduction of women to a malleable substance that men mold. She is compelled to say that she has a brain and does not require others to think for her.



When women face social restrictions like this and others, they console themselves as Shakir does in "Consolation" (p. 36). She dreams "beyond the forbidding walls of the prison" and seeks a little window "still opens in my name". But freedom is a dream for a woman that she buys from sleep, as Shakir writes in "Epitaph" (p. 60). She spends the night awake, in strange anticipation of her rendezvous with loneliness, "pawing the whole city / To the Shylock of fate" in the pursuit of a mere "half-lit casement". Some women are only able to dream about the freedom that many men enjoy without the struggle. Shakir laments her condition but also aspires to free herself from oppression.

### **Independent Identity, Resilience and Professionalism**

In "The Working Woman", Shakir sketches a character that emerges from harsh circumstances more resilient than before. She is a working woman, a professional, who is not guilty for taking care of herself. In "The Working Women" (p. 44) Shakir knows that people call her egocentric for nurturing her personality as if she nurtured a garden with her own blood. The poem depicts how a woman is considered selfish if she professionally establishes herself and becomes independent. Shakir does not allow anyone to take credit for her own hard work and she does not owe anything to 'any rain', meaning that no one can claim their contribution to the fruits and flowers she bears.

The lines, "I can bloom whenever I wish / My beauty is my own discovery." (p. 44) reflect feminist sentiments where women are encouraged to be self-sufficient and beautiful on their own. Furthermore, she is proud to have cultivated herself as a strong and tall tree, 'alive with...full potential', one who holds her head high, regardless of the changing seasons or violent winds. Sometimes the opposing winds become overwhelming, so she admits that she still yearns to hold on to something like 'the trunk of a very strong tree'. This implies her desire for a relationship or a marriage where she is anchored by the stability and presence of a man. Where Shakir takes control of her own discourse, she also invokes the harmonious coexistence of men and women in the society.

### **Social Status and Place of Women in the Pakistani Society**

Gradually Shakir exposes the hypocrisy of the Pakistani society in Part 3: *Nazms* (1980-1985) in *Talking to Oneself*. She breaks down the structures of patriarchal households in "The Misfit" (p. 64). Shakir writes the "entire household / enjoys my womanhood". With the passage of time, the burden only increases forming a visible "hunchback of good-for-nothingness". Shakir says that no matter how much effort women put in the society, her family and men, in general, will continue to take her for granted. As a professional, Shakir wishes to be seen as a strong, independent working woman but the "very first condition of appointment was / to resign from self-respect." She tries to educate the 'barren minds' at work but it proves to be futile.

This is something she subtly condemns as it also indicates how women are ignored and their creative work is neglected solely because she is a woman. She feels like a misfit who does not belong or is placed on the wrong planet. (p. 65)

### **Behavior of Men**

In “Part 4: *Nazms* (1985-1990) from the collection entitled *Inkaar* (Denial)”, Shakir reveals that the people around her are like wolves with bulging eyes and lolling tongues of a seasoned hunter waiting to pounce on the prey as soon as she makes a mistake. They wish to tempt her and want to entrap her but she sees through their plans and lies and creates a ring of fire to keep the beasts away, because she has to protect herself.

The poem with the strongest message is “Tomato Ketchup” (p. 101) in which Shakir tells the story of Sarah, an autobiographical avatar of Shakir, who is a poet. Shakir shows her efforts to be included in the literary circle and her struggle to share her poetry with other literary writers (mostly men). But she is demeaned and reduced to insignificance. The poem suggests that whenever women write about their feelings towards a man, every man assumes and then concludes that she is talking about him in particular. He assumes that he is so significant that she must be writing about him. This shows men’s egocentrism—. Even when a woman is writing about her own feelings and thoughts, they assume that they are the subject matter. Shakir debunks such mentality and underscores how readily such narcissism can become antagonism toward the female poet. Shakir subtly reveals the fragility of the male ego as these men need and want to be the center and the focus of women’s discourse. In this regard, she mentions in the poem that she is smart enough not to make these men her enemy but she also “didn’t believe in giving explanations” or defending herself (p.101). These pseudo-intellectuals roam around her like flies. Most of them did not have jobs, but those who did would leave behind their “stinking (work) files”, their domestic responsibilities such as bills and children’s fees, and even wives they deem unworthy of their time. She calls Sara ‘the gullible’ because she enjoys the false support she gets from people who make her drink Kafka’s words and eat Neruda’s verses. Their compliments are dipped in saliva but at least she is fed once a day. Men attempt to control women’s discourse but in this poem Sarah endures for a long time and eventually develops the spirit to free herself “from the clutches of wolves”. The only way out is to “leave the jungle itself” because as long as she is alive all the self-proclaimed art enthusiasts continue to nibble at her and she is reduced to a delicious snack or in death to “Tomato Ketchup”, a common condiment.

### **Feminism Meets Romanticism**

In “Part 5: (1972-1990) A Selection of Ghazal Couplets”, many couplets romantically contain poignant feminist ideas. Her ghazals focus on female empowerment, atrocities inflicted on women, social constraints, and of course love. Shakir expresses

her cynicism about everlasting loyalty in love and laments the limitations imposed upon women in the name of law, religion and gender. She insists that women should strive to overcome these manmade barriers (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 665).

He holds  
All my reins  
But wants me  
With my consent. (p. 115)

In this couplet, the male counterpart has the authority to control her and her discourse. He wants her to act upon his wishes and also wants her to give her consent about it. In another couplet (p. 115) Shakir contemplates whether she should appease him or listen to the voice of her own ego. In this situation her tenacity, which she metaphorically represents as “silken threads”, is entangled. Some women willingly submit to subordination, while others like Shakir face this dilemma. She wants to give in and be a part of this relationship, but she realizes it cannot be maintained without sacrificing her self-respect because sadly, the one to compromise here is the woman. She can speak the truth about an abusive and toxic situation, but she inevitably loses the fight to maintain agency in the relationship. On the other hand, “he” will get away with telling a white lie and win the argument, leaving her defenseless in the process (p. 116). This show of patriarchal control over discourse devalues the significance and validity of female discourse in society.

### **Response to Male Dominance**

Gradually, such social structures take their toll on the personality, mental state and emotional well-being of a woman. Patriarchal oppression leads to circumstances where Shakir says she is startled by her own laughter. This is because she endures much pain and still finds the strength to artistically hide her pain behind her laughter (p. 120). One may question why she does not just walk away from this situation. Shakir responds in a ghazal where she uses the metaphor of “chains” that pull her back to where she started to describe the impossibility of leaving the relationship. It is a vicious and poisonous cycle, and it is extremely difficult to break out of it by leaving the home that is the source of such pain (p.121). Home is supposed to be a safe space and refuge for a woman, but, of course, in many cases of domestic abuse and painful relationships, the woman does not have anywhere else to go, so she does not leave. Her toxic home, thus, is her only safe space.

Shakir's poetry depicts the hopeless surrender of women for the sake of love and their pursuit of affection from their male lovers (Tejaswani, 2013, p. 671). Regardless of the abuse, emotional turmoil, struggle, and social oppression, her poetry also depicts resilience and determination. She maintains her identity and resists patriarchal power structures, but does not deny her own existence. She is not immune to her surroundings yet she lets her rebellious spirit grow uninhibited.

I am a part of the garden  
 But my being  
 Is not so green  
 And also grows wild. (Couplet from Inkaar (Denial) (1985-1990),  
 124)

## CONCLUSION

Urdu poetry up till the 1970s was dominated by men. Some feminists assumed that when women write about men they reify their patriarch which does not seem true. Writing about their containment and subordination allows women to reclaim and regain power that they have surrendered to the patriarchal hegemony. Writing shapes consciousness and language by dismantling oppressive power structures and dispelling stereotypical binaries (Auerbach, 1984, p. 156). Writing for and by women has always been imperiled by patriarchal structures. The hegemony of patriarchal binaries subjects female writing to many issues that do not apply to men. Especially in Pakistani literature, women's writings in Urdu have a much stronger impact on cultural values because indigenous readers can understand and criticize these texts more easily than literature written in English. On the other hand, translations of Shakir's Urdu poetry allow readership to expand from the local to international scope, which, in turn demonstrates that feminist thought from the Subcontinent parallels Western feminism and women's literature in English. Among pioneering female Urdu poets Shakir sets the standard for feminist perspectives in Urdu women's literature. Shakir's poetry covers a wide span of themes and issues. Employing gynocritics to analyze selective verses by Shakir, translated in English, reveals the particular problems that women face in Pakistan. Regardless of social limitations and personal hindrances, she created and set a high benchmark for future female poets writing in Urdu. Even though she is a romanticist, Shakir did not limit her work to verses about love. Her free spirit and determination seeps through her poetry showing her abilities as a scholarly, diligent and rational woman who raises questions about prevailing social norms and values. Her tone is anything but submissive as she vocalizes her feelings without any inhibitions. Shakir's poetry reclaims the ideas, feelings and words that women deserve to have and articulate. She makes her ideas clear and does not let any patriarchal notion threaten her ability to speak her mind. The manner in which she describes and contends predetermined and prejudiced social values is brilliant. Shakir successfully takes the female discourse back into her hands and unveils the overbearing control of patriarchal structures that try to regulate women.

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