

Significance of the presentation:

The paper that I presented was about the linguistic strategies used by Kamila Shamsie in her novels ‘Salt and Saffron’ and ‘Broken Verses’. The paper focused on the ways Shamsie has enabled language as a tool to elaborate on Pakistani food, culture and society, and how she exploits English language, politicizing and exploiting it for her own ends. She molds English language to narrate the peculiar experiences of Pakistani nation and infuses it with a cultural and traditional sensibility to which she herself belongs. Her language is a mosaic, polyphonic and the bits and pieces of Urdu that she uses in her narrative show her desire to remain affiliated to a culture she originally belongs to, as she brings out the exotic nature of east through it and also confirm her effort at somehow abrogating the former colonizer’s language.

My paper emphasizes that the contemporary fiction writers, writing in English from Pakistan, are writing about an existence and post-colonial survival in Pakistani society that is essentially hybridized in nature, where dangers of perishing while “wrestling with multiple spirits” is always looming large. Shamsie’s Karachi is the contact zone of multiple ethnic classes, all retaining their complex yet peculiar identities under the roof of one country and both her novels that I have chosen for this paper are about Karachi. In *Salt and Saffron*, Aliya, while sitting on Clifton beach in Karachi, observes (Shamsie, 2000, p.212): “Between my jeans and the black *burkha* of the woman climbing gingerly down the rocks to the sand beneath, between Sameer’s pin-striped shirt with French cuffs and the bright pink *kameez* of the man selling kites, there was a whole range of styles and colors and materials.” Shamsie’s novels are an acceptance of difference on equal terms. This is evident in Shamsie’s deployment of polyphony of voices that the society has incorporated. She brings to consciousness and articulation a richly tessellated society which is subsisting under the weight of destructive cultural encounter, i.e. the encounter between East and West. This encounter has led to cultural plurality within the same nation, resulting in class fissures and ethnic feuds. However, Shamsie’s alchemic response to the crisis and confusion in the country is impressive exploration of linguistic permutation in her narration. She resolves the pull between native and imported or received language by hybridizing her discourse. Shamsie seizes and replaces the borrowed English language so to adapt it to her own usage and so to negotiate the gap that exist in different nations in the world at large.

Language has a creative potential which constructs culture by capturing the very essence of it. A civilization combating the threat of imminent erasure may try to retrieve or reconstruct its culture through linguistic syncretism and thus aim at the consolidation of crumbling identity. My paper underlines how Shamsie aims at the same in her narratives. She makes language a means and tool to consolidate the identity of her nation through her syncretic linguistic strategy of appropriation and abrogation of English. She combines her poetic English prose with Urdu words and phrases and gives her readers a foretaste of her native culture and tradition. She shows that a writer may reconstitute a particular experience by using the tools of language of one society, while still remaining faithful to the experience of one’s own culture. The un-translated words of Urdu that she has frequently incorporated in her novels force the reader into the culture and tradition from which they have been gleaned. Syncretic and subverted language helps Shamsie in embellishing her revisionary historiography and making it more authentic and genuine. Thus she shatters the myth of fixed language and experience, and de-hegemonises the whole notion of hierarchy over them.