

Classic Poetry Series

Parveen Shakir
- poems -

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Parveen Shakir(24 November 1952 - 26 December 1994)

Parveen Shakir (Urdu: ?????) was an Urdu poet, teacher and a civil servant of the Government of Pakistan.

Shakir started writing at an early age and published her first volume of poetry, Khushbu [Fragrance], to great acclaim, in 1976. She subsequently published other volumes of poetry - all well-received - Sad-barg [Marsh Marigold] in 1980, Khud Kalami [Soliloquy] and Inkar [Denial] in 1990, Kaf e Aina [The Mirror's Edge] besides a collection of her newspaper columns, titled Gosha-e-Chashm [The Sight Corner], and was awarded one of Pakistan's highest honours, the Pride of Performance for her outstanding contribution to literature. The poetry books are collected in the volume Mah e Tamam [Full Moon] with the exception of Kaf e Aina.

Shakir died in 1994 in a car accident while on her way to work.

 Birth and Education

Shakir was born on 24 November 1952 in Karachi, Pakistan. She was highly educated. She received two undergraduate degrees, one in English literature and the other in linguistics, and obtained MA degrees in the same subjects from the University of Karachi. She also held a PhD, and another MA degree in Bank Administration.

In 1982, Shakir qualified the Central Superior Services Examination. In 1991, she obtained an MA degree in Public Administration from Harvard University, USA.

 Early Career

Shakir started writing at a young age, penning both prose and poetry, and contributing columns in Urdu newspapers, and a few articles in English dailies. Initially, she wrote under the pen-name, Beena. Shakir was highly educated with two masters degrees, one in English Literature and one in Linguistics. She also held a PhD and another masters degree in Bank Administration.

She was a teacher for nine years before she joined the Civil Service and worked in the Customs department. In 1986 she was appointed the second secretary, CBR in Islamabad.

 Style

Shakir employed mainly two forms of poetry in her work, one being the prevalent ghazal [plural: ghazalyaat], and the other being free verse. The most prominent themes in Shakir's poetry are love, feminism, and social stigmas, though she occasionally wrote on other topics as well. Her work was often based on romanticism, exploring the concepts of love, beauty and their contradictions, and heavily integrated the use of metaphors, similes and personifications.

Arguably, Shakir can be termed the first poetess to use the word larki (girl) in her works—the male-dominated Urdu poetry scene seldom employs that word, and uses masculine syntax when talking about the 'lover'. Similarly, she often made use of the Urdu first-person, feminine pronoun in her verses which, though extremely common in prose, was rarely used in poetry, even by female poetesses, before her.

 Ghazalyaat

Shakir's ghazalyaat are considered "a combination of classical tradition with modern sensitivity", and mainly deal with the feminine perspective on love and romance, and associated themes such as beauty, intimacy, separation, break-ups, distances, distrust and infidelity and disloyalty.

Most of Shakir's ghazalyaat contain five to ten couplets, often - though not always - inter-related. Sometimes, two consecutive couplets may differ greatly in meaning and context [For example, in one of her works, the couplet 'That girl, like her home, perhaps/ Fell victim to the flood is immediately followed by 'I see light when I think of you/ Perhaps remembrance has become the moon'.

Shakir's ghazalyaat heavily rely on metaphors and similes, which are repeatedly and thought-provokingly used to bring force and lyricism in her work. A fine example of this is seen in one of her most famous couplets,

"Wo tou khushbu hai, hawaon main bikhar jaye ga/ Masla phool ka hai, phool kidher jayega?"

"He is fragrance and would waft in the air/ the trouble lies with the flower - where shall the flower go?"

where Shakir relates 'fragrance' to an unfaithful lover, 'air' to the unfaithful person's secret loves, and 'flower' to the person being cheated. Other metaphors

Shakir commonly uses are titli [butterfly] for a Romeo, badal [cloud] for one's love, baarish [rain] for affection, and andhi [storm] for difficulties.

Some of Shakir's ghazalyaat or, more specifically, couplets, have gained an iconic status in Urdu literature. One of her most famous couplets is the one given above. Another famous, Shakir couplet is "Jugnuu ko din kay wakt parakhne ki zid karain/ Bachchay hamaray ehed kay chalaak ho gaye" [They insist upon evaluating the firefly in daylight/ The children of our age, have grown clever], which is often quoted to comment on the often surprising knowledge and awareness of the 21st century child.

 Free Verse

As compared to her ghazalyaat Shakir's free verse is much bolder, and explores social issues and taboos, including gender inequality, discrimination, patriotism, deceit, prostitution, the human psyche, and current affairs. It is also much more modern and up-to-date.

Shakir is known for having employed the usage of pop culture references and English words and phrases, that have mixed up with Urdu, in her free verse - a practice that is both generally considered inappropriate, and criticized, in Urdu poetry. An example is the poem Departmental Store Mein [In a Departmental Store], which is named thus despite the fact that there the term 'departmental store' could easily have been substituted with its Urdu equivalent, and where words like 'natural pink,' 'hand lotion,' 'shade,' 'scent' and 'pack' are brought into use, and references made to cosmetics brands like, Pearl, Revlon, Elizabeth Arden, and Tulip. Other examples are her poems Ecstasy, Nun and Picnic.

Shakir's free verse also contains a few, credited translated or inspired works i.e. poems that are translations of, or inspired by, other authors. Examples are Wasteland, a poem inspired by Elliot's poem of the same name, and Benasab Wirsay Ka Bojh [The Burden of Illegitimate Inheritance], a translation of W.B. Yeats's Leda and the Swan.

 Critical Reception

Shakir's poetry was well-received, and after her untimely death she is now considered one of the best and "most prominent" modern poets Urdu language has ever produced. Hailed as a "great poetess," her poetry has drawn comparisons to that of Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad, and she is considered among the breed of writers "regarded as pioneers in defying tradition by expressing the "female experience" in Urdu poetry."

A source states, "Parveen ... seems to have captured the best of Urdu verse ... Owing to [her] style and range of expressions one will be intrigued and ... entertained by some soul-stirring poetry." Another praises "her rhythmic flow and polished wording."

Literary figure Iftikhar Arif has praised Shakir for impressing "the young lot through her thematic variety and realistic poetry," for adding "a new dimension to the traditional theme of love by giving expression to her emotions in a simple and pellucid style," and using a "variety of words to convey different thoughts with varying intensities."

The Delhi Recorder has stated that Shakir "has given the most beautiful female touch to Urdu poetry."

 Honours

Shakir's first book, *Khushbu*, was awarded the Adamjee Award. Later, she was awarded the Pride of Performance, one of Pakistan's highest honours.

Upon her death, the Parveen Shakir Trust was established by her close friend, Parveen Qadir Agha. The Parveen Shakir Trust organizes a yearly function and gives out the "Aks-e-Khushbo" award.

 Family and Death

Shakir married a Pakistani doctor, Naseer Ali, with whom she had a son, Syed Murad Ali—but the marriage did not last long and ended in a divorce.

On Dec 26th, 1994, Shakir's car collided with a bus while she was on her way to work in Islamabad. The accident resulted in her death, a great loss to the Urdu poetry world. The road on which the accident took place is named after her.

A Bit Of Advice

If
in the course of a conversation
gaps of silence begin to occur,
spoken words turn silent;
therefore, my eloquent friend,
let's carefully listen
to this silence.

Parveen Shakir

A Poem For The Iranian Poetees, Farugh Farrukhzad (1934 - 1967)

Please tell our lord, the king's good friend,
that His Holiness came today and confirmed:
the crop of sinners is ripe again.
Tell him, his reapers stand ready.
They wait to be told which hands to cut,
which tongues to slash, which fields to burn.
They want to know the names of the doomed.
They should be told which woman to stone,
which child to impale on a virile man.
They wait to learn the names of the killers
who must receive the benefit of the doubt,
and the innocents who should be hanged?
But tell our lord to bear in mind
this one request:
he must always give verbal orders;
writing only causes headaches.

Parveen Shakir

A Simple Request

Lord, I know the duty of a hostess,
but please let it be that this year
either rain clouds visit me
or my loneliness.

Parveen Shakir

Ajab Makaan Hai Ke Jis Mein Makeenn Nahee Aata

Parveen Shakir

Apni Hee Sadaa Sunuun Kahan Tak? ? ?

Parveen Shakir

Bechar Giya Teri Soorat, Bahaar Ka Mosam..

Parveen Shakir

Chaara Saazon Ki Azyat Nahi Dekhi Jaati

Parveen Shakir

Ik Shaks Ko Soohnay Lagi Mein, Phir Aaina Dekhne Lagi Mein

Parveen Shakir

I'M Happy To Remain A Butterfly

Midnight of my passing years
Did someone knock on the mute shutters
or was I scared in a dream?

What house of love is this?
Such frightening rocks litter its base,
its windowpanes already chatter.
Perhaps the dread lies inside me
more than anywhere out there.
My dread of his handsome looks,
my awe of his mind,
my fear of a dance of wild abandon
before his pursuing eyes
Mere covers.

I don't wish to say: "There he is."
Why should I lose what years have
gained:
my life of freedom, my free mind?
I know if I ever fell into his hands
he'd swiftly turn me into a housefly.
Confined to the walls of his desires,
I'd forget I had ever known
the joys of light, breeze and perfume.

Yes, I'm happy to remain a butterfly:
though life's needs conspire against me
at least my wings are still intact.

Parveen Shakir

It Has Been Written

' . . . then Zaid cursed Bakar, 'Your mother is more well known than your father!' "

My son,
this curse is your fate too.
In a fathers' world you too, one day,
must pay a heavy price
for being known by your mother,
though your eyes' color, your brow's expanse,
and all the curves your lips create
come from the man
who shared with me in your birth,
yet alone gives you significance
in the eyes of the law-givers.

But the tree that nurtured you three seasons
must claim one season as its own,
to comb the stars, turn thoughts into perfumes,
make poems leapfrog your ancestors' walls
a season that Mira couldn't send away,
nor could Sappho.

Now it must be this family's fate
that you should frequently feel abashed
before your playmates, and that your father
must grin and bear it among his friends.

The name on the doorbell means nothing;
the world knows you by one name alone.

Parveen Shakir

Khwaabon Ka Nagar Jala Howa Tha

Parveen Shakir

Obstinate

Why should I be the first to phone?

He knows too:

last night came the first monsoon.

Parveen Shakir

Poem

How long did we sit engrossed in talk
under the flowering jacaranda tree?
I don't know. I only know,
the moon crept out from behind the tree
and placed its fingers across our eyes.

Parveen Shakir

Qismat Se Bhi Kuch Siwaa Dia Hai

Parveen Shakir

Something To Remember

Will you too be like others:
put yesterday's dark against today's bright?
Well, please yourself . . . but bear in mind:
they also charge: the sun sleeps with night!

Parveen Shakir

To A Friend

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.
Listen, downpours don't remember
streets,
and sunshine can't read roadsigns.

Parveen Shakir

To A Victorian Man

Instead of keeping me tucked away
in some safe corner of your heart—
instead of struggling with Victorian manners,
in the days of Elizabeth II—
instead of combing world literature
to create one-word conversations—
instead of a vigil below my window
at every Spring's first dawn—
just step forward
one day, out of nowhere,
and gathering me inside your arms
turn a perfect circle on your heels.

Parveen Shakir

What Will Happen To Flowers ?

I hear
butterflies will again be banished,
and bees will get pollen mailed to
them—
"They mustn't flit from rose to rose!"
And breeze will have to watch its step.
Bees, butterflies, even breeze
shall see only whom the law approves.
But,
did anyone think of the flower's fate?
How many can self-pollinate?

Parveen Shakir

Who Then Had The Time To Meet Herself

That I'd manage to glue together the slivers
of my shattered pride,
repair the tattered wings of my aborted flights,
and obtain my body's leave to bid you farewell—
I didn't know.
I had learned so little about myself.
Otherwise this ritual of saying goodbyes
could have ended long ago;
I could've found my courage earlier.
But who then had the time to meet herself?

Parveen Shakir

Yeh Chaand Aur Yeh Abar-E-Rawaan Guzarta Rahe

Parveen Shakir