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Articles

Perspectives on a Grassroots Theory of Literary Orality and Aesthetics

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The aim of the present paper is to look at some of the issues in reporting instances of an ethnography of speaking in a cultural system, in other words, modes of speech communication or discourse that cultural systems use. For the purpose of this study, the investigator will discuss issues that arose during the period of her research on speech play and verbal art in the Indo-Pakistan oral Sufi tradition at the University of Texas at Austin. These are mainly areas of transcription and the reporting of facts. The polarisation is in reporting facts to an audience which is totally ignorant of the speech events vs. their reporting to an audience who have inherent native intuitions in the interpretation or absorption of the speech events. Additionally, there is the issue of Roman transcription vs. the use of a Perso-Arabic text, this too naturally emerging from the fact of an alien audience.

Firstly, the article tries to place Sufi literature in the descriptions of "canonical" literature that Fredric Jameson advocates for heterogeneity in the North American academy. Aijaz Ahmed, a notable "third world" scholar critiques Fredric Jameson's views, and the researcher tries to find a place of her own research on Sufi oral traditions, in Jameson's rhetoric of "third world" literature for the academies of the north. The Sufi discourse of *qawwals* and performers of *Sufiana-Kalam* is text based, as is evident from the numerous performances at the shrines of the Sufi poets, and from the concerts in public contexts. The area of the discourse is an interplay of the written and oral traditions: the Sufi poets as the creators of the written texts, the *qawwals* and performers the oral transmitters or communicators of the discourse among the audiences. We will see if this communication has a place in the worl of "theorists who speak for the third world". The

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investigator uses Aijaz Ahmed's very significant response to Fredric Jameson's article, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital". Jameson calls for a reform in the US academy for the teaching of not only western literature but also "world literature" and the fact that the "literary canon" be based "not upon the exclusionary pleasure of dominant taste but upon an inclusive and opulent taste for heterogeneity". In this context, what is to be considered is that will Edward Said, because of Orientalism be the sole representative of the Palestinians. Also simply because a vast majority of literary texts produced in Asia, Africa and Latin America are not available in English, are they to be excluded from the US and British canon? (Aijaz Ahmed 1986:15)

Since a large body of literary texts in the subcontinent such as the poetry and treatises of the Sufi poets are representative of the wider historical mystical traditions of the Middle East, from Turkey to Iran, what kind of "third world literature" will they fit into? What the Sufi poets did was to preserve and develop the large body of Persianized texts and their traditions of the Middle East, from Turkey to Iran, what kind of "third world literature" will they fit into? What the Sufi poets did was to preserve and develop the large body of Persianized texts and their traditions of orality, within the frameworks, of the vernacular languages in Indo-Pakistan. For instance, Maulana Rumi was a strong influence for a Sufi poet like Shah Abdul Latif who wrote his discourse in the Sindhi vernacular. A number of the Sufi poets like Shah abdul Latif, Waris Shah, and Hashim Shah were also musicians. Some of their texts were explicitly composed to be sung orally to the "people". Can we then say of these texts and the discourse evolving from them, that they are "narratives of the third world framed by their experiences of colonisation and imperialism?"

To formulate any theory of "third world literature" we have to look at the grassroots literary oral traditions vs. those which are represented by writers who produce "national allegories" "framed by experiences of colonialism and imperialism." How do theorists for the "third world" assess the grassroots culture of *qawwalis* and *Sufiana Kallam*? In Jameson's theory of "cognitive aesthetics" what is the place of the Sufi poetry of Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Bulle Shah, Shah Hussain, Baba Farid, Shah Abdul Latif, Sultan Bahu and a host of others? In a theory of "cognitive aesthetics" "Non canonical" third world texts, where will the rich, Shia oral tradition find its place? How do we look at these grassroots literary traditions which have evolved over canturies in the interaction of the written and the oral? How do we look at the resistance movements direcly affecting these societies

which were generated from the grassroots.?

An argument that ties in with the preceding arguments is the question of the mode of writing an ethnography of speaking of the speech events from the "third world". How will the native of the culture represent the "multiple voices" in the discourse: the Sufi poets themselves, the singers including the female performers like Reshma, Abida Parveen, Surriya Multanikar and Iqbal Bano, to name a few living artists. There are the female participants, and the female voices in the narratives like those of Hir, her mother Maliki, Sohni, Sassi and Mira Bai? What about the female voices in the *chakki-namas* and the *charkhi namas*[4] Interestingly enough, even the male performers of mystical discourse in Indo-Pakistan sing in the feminine gender. A large body of Amir Khusrau's compositions are sung in the feminine gender.

In looking at the aesthetics of speech events and their relationships with the native grassroots traditions is the placement of the ethnographic canon. One is made to question the very tools of the ethnography, especially when it is written for the western academy. An ethnographer of speech events is constantly bothered by the fact as to how authentic, she or he is in interpreting her people and their traditions. One of the questions that confronted the ethnographer throughout the period of work was her endless effort to prove her endless effort to prove her "authenticity" in the reporting of the events. The entire period of the research was filled with doubts in reporting facts using native intuitions. There was always a feeling of inadequacy in writing about her culture, her own people and the manner in which they see their own world. For where does one draw the line between "objectivity" and a "propaganda" of one's people? Also, in reporting facts "objectively" are one's efforts directed to the ignorance of the "other"? Does the ethnographer, especially for the native writing it, have the linear approach? Does the ethnographer record fact after fact, as it is seen by the "outsider"? This brings in the question of methodology, and it assumes an almost political dimension. In working on her study the ethnographer was confronted with issues of transcription, the use of a roman script vs. a Perso-Arabic form for the original discourse, translation, the use of particular "native" terms vs. their western equivalents? In short, while "recording the facts like an ethnographer" does one have to give an anatomy of one's culture?

Under the circumstances, Hymes model of the ethnography of speaking that he applied to the native American Indian languages came closest to the writing of this ethnography. It provided some kind of

"reflexivity" to treat the various elements of the ethnography in a hybrid fashion. Though, the question still remains — can we find alternative, grassroots models?

Additionally, the study provides the researcher some insights into "mysteries" of cultures like her own. For her, the quest started several years ago after reading Frazer's *Golden Bough*. She was curious to find the mystery behind the "occult, magical, rites of primitive societies". The outcome of that pursuit linked to the present research is that for the culture itself, its practices are only in the "context". There is no "magic" in the trance or *wajd* that is induced by the *qawwali* or *Sufiana Kalam*, for the native of the culture. The culture does not perceive itself as such, per se. The culture does not see anything distinct from itself, or outside of itself, and only the context is the reality for the members of the speech community.

These speech events which are very much a part of the popular culture are not non-elitist. The people produce their own culutre, which has its own alternative power structures that are class and caste based, economically oriented: that such culture is not non-authoritarian, and that there is a hegemony in the discourse. One of the outstanding features of the discourse is the use of elitist myths: Hir-Ranjha, Sassi-Punnu, Sohni-Manhiwal, and Mira Bai. These characters are from the uppoer classes, and their lives are sung for the "people". One may also point out the hegemonic role of the singer or *qawwal* in the context of the performance. The same is true for the manner in which the masses uphold the lives of the Sufi poets and their poetry — we only have to look at the sanctity that is given to the shrines of the Sufis in Indo-Pakistan. All these factors constitute the hegemonic structures of popular culture.

Here, the researcher feels that she can respond to Regula Qureshi's observation in *Sufi Music* (94) where she says:

> Pakistan's search for an Islamic cultural identity has provided all kinds of *sama* mustic, particularly *Qawwali*, with new opportunities for institutional patronage of a secular nature. At the same time, the generational and economic ties that united Sufis, *Qawwalas* and devotees around a major shrine are weakening. The result is a potential transformation of both Sufi practice and of *Qawwali* music.

Even during the twelve years of this research the investigator has noticed a remarkable evolution of *qawwali* discourse in Pakistan. She has noticed the difference in the repertoire of *qawwals* like the Sabri brothers and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The former are *Qawwal Bacche* trained in the traditional shrine contexts of Northern India, and the latter very much rooted in the native Panjabi traditions, albeit also a master of the North Indian classical music traditions. Due to lucrative patronage abroad, especially in the UK by an affluent Punjabi speech community, including the Sikhs, and in North America by the same communities, as well as by appreciative local audiences, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan has produced an extensive archive of *qawwali* discourse, based on the texts of the Punjabi Sufi poets. In comparison, the Sabri brothers traditional persian and Urdu/Hindi discourse now appears very limited.

During the period of this study, the researcher further analysed the live discourse of *qawwals* like M. Ali Faridi performing before an expatriate audience in the UK. Though trained in the North Indian tradition, he code-switches from Urdu to Punjabi for the approval of this very affluent speech community. Over the years, the Sabri brothers adapted themselves to the vernacular trends of Sindhi music, and adapted some of their *qassalis* to the local Sindhi melodies. However, native performers of *Sufiana Kalam*, musicians such as Abida Parveen, Reshma and pathana Khan rely mainly on the written texts of the Punjabi, Siraiki and Sindhi Sufi poets to create their discourse, and that tradition is indeed very much of the grassroots.

The noticeable difference in the North Indian style of *qawwali* and the local Panjabi, Siraiki and Sindhi Sufi Kalam is in the use of "frames". Wehreas, the North Indian *qawwali* mostly begins with a *qual* or *hadith*, according to the convention initiated by Bazrat Amir Khusrau, the indigenous discourse of Panjabi, Siraiki and Sindhi performers uses "frames" from the sayings of the local Sufi poets. Whereas, the North Indian style of discourse is of a serious nature centred around events from Islamic history, e.g., the life of the Prophet Muhammad, his family, events from Kerbala or a tribute to the great Sufis such as, Jalaludin Rumi, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya or Hazrat Muinudin Chishti, the indigenous discourse is at times playful using native humour, proverbs and metaphors. If it were not for the "frame" of the Sufi poet's name at the beginning, this discourse could easily pass off for love poetry of a sensuous nature. Whe the researcher, interviewed Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, on this very special aspect of his discourse, he smiled quietly, and remarked that for such to happen, it takes of years of *riaz* or musical practice before a performer has the control to play with esoteric language.

Last, but not the least, in the context of this discussion, we have to look for the future of Applied Linguistics in a developing society like ours. So far, we have looked at imported models for teaching a language like

English with the result that colossal national resources have been drained with minimal profit. The pass percentage in English in the examinations is anywhere between seventeen to twenty percent, and this is a loss no country, even the most affluent, cannot afford. There need to be more researches like the present one for us to create our own models, to use the indigenous grassroots cultures for the creation of education policies and materials, including those for English language teaching.

Considerable work in the local folklore and regional languages is being done at the Lok Virsa, Institute of Sindhology, the Pushto Board, Siraiki Adabi Board, and other centres of regional languages in the country. However, it seems that we need to do more. applied Linguistics in the country ought to be used to promote the local folklore further. universities like the Allama Iqbal Open University ought to undertake teacher-training through Applied Linguistics, to create bilingual and multicultural programmes, using our rich heritage. materials and programmes ought to be created where the grassroots cultures and folklores are used as a basis of instruction. Students and teachers ought to be involved in the collection of folklore; their familiarity with their own legends will make the learning enjoyable and meaningful.

We cannot do away with English, as we need it for our survival, but we can surely create materials for teaching the language from the "context" that is known and familiar. A learning theory based on familiarity with one's own grassroots culture has to emerge and become the basis of syllabus design in the country. Future language planning policies in the country ought to be based on an acceptance of our own root cultures. We do not have to create "functional" English language materials out of experiences at foreign airports and cinema houses alone. We can create enjoyable materials from our own cultural contexts, and the researcher was involved in one such project, the *Qissa Khawan* or *Storyteller* with UNICEF in 1993. The outcome is encouraging.

We can perhaps explore the possibility of introducing folklore as a subject in our universities, and colleges. Applied Linguistics projects can be geared to that purpose. Pakistan is a goldmine of folklore: Graeco-Indic, as well as Islamic. We need to go to our roots. And, instead of leaving the work at the level of research by a few handful of centres like those mentioned above, the area ought to be kindled at a more basic level in the schools, colleges and universities.

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