

# **Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion**

## **Working Paper 1 Pakistan**

### **Urdu Literature and Poverty induced Shame in Pakistan**

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## **Introduction**

According to George Weber (1995), Urdu (along with its sociolinguist variation Hindi) is one of the ten most influential languages of the world. It is among the five most spoken global languages with 4.7 percent of the world's population as its primary speakers. It belongs to the Indo-European language family that is used or understood by roughly a billion people in many countries of the world (Weber 1995). Just as its literal meaning 'camp', Urdu evolved in the 11<sup>th</sup> century with contact between Persian and Turkish languages of the invaders of the sub-continent and the native languages of Punjabi, Sindhi and Sanskrit amongst others (Sadiq 1964, Bailey 2008). Urdu has been one of the major intellectual languages of the Indian Sub continent for the last three centuries and is currently the national language of Pakistan. Within Pakistan, while all geographical regions are demographically associated with their own native languages and literatures, Urdu alone is the language that is spoken and understood in all provinces and regions. Urdu literature is therefore considered to represent the life, culture and socio-economic conditions of the entire population of Pakistan.

## **Review of Urdu literature**

The purpose of this research component is to explore the notion and place of poverty induced shame in Pakistani society by reviewing Urdu literature of the last 300 years in general and 100 years in particular. The rationale behind investigating literature as a potentially valuable source of information is the popular understanding that literature acts as a mirror of society representing its values, norms and social mores (Jafri et al 2010, Trilling 1970, Daiches 1938). Assuming that this mirror relationship indeed exists, it is pertinent to attempt to understand the representative themes, expressions and associations between poverty, shame and social exclusion in the contemporary social scenario of Pakistani society through a review of its native literature.

While feeling the pulse of the contemporary society is undeniably the major objective, this segment of research is also important in getting to grips with the historical understanding of these concepts and their evolution and development over time. In undertaking research that attempts to have an intimate insight into the feelings and personal experiences of the poor and vulnerable, it is appropriate to get acquainted with the existing social knowledge on their condition, before proceeding to the more sensitive stages of the research-interviewing the poor about their experiences of shame and conducting focus groups about the poor with the non-poor. It is here that native literature, particularly its segment dealing with social realities of life, provides

understanding of the emotional and social aspects of poverty and answers to the basic research questions ; Is poverty a painful emotional condition and does it have an inseparable association with shame? Are the poor indeed ashamed of being poor and, if so, how is the shame process constructed and what factors cause it to come into effect? Is shame an inherent part of the collective consciousness of the poor, of the rich or of both? Is poverty shame an invention of the non-poor, effected through the discourse of dominant values, or is it merely a complicated interplay of the psyche of those living in poverty based on a perceived shortcoming in the self, which is absolute in nature and free from external factors?

Although an open mind was taken while reading the Urdu poetry and short-story texts, in order to understand, systematically list and analyse any emergent themes around poverty and shame the following question guide was prepared to keep a constant reminder of the purpose of this study:

- a) Is the theme of poverty well-represented as a social issue in the mainstream Urdu poetry and fiction and do Urdu poets and short-story writers engage in discussing the causes, conditions and implications of poverty, social exclusion and shame?
- b) Is there substantial literary evidence that there is a sense of shame associated with being poor?
- c) Are there any existing literary perspectives on the nature, causality, intensity and outcomes of the poverty and shame experience?
- d) What are the major sources, manifestations, responses, consequences and counter-indicators of poverty-induced shame?
- e) Cultural norms on poverty and shame.

To undertake this research, a purposive sample of 27 works of the 10 most well-respected mainstream writers of Urdu was selected, among which there were 5 poets and 5 short-story writers (Annex A). The selection of these two genres and their most celebrated writers was done on the basis of modern critique produced during the last 50 years (List at Annex B). Almost all major texts by these 10 writers were scan-read to select 27 texts that seemed to have the potential to inform the intended outcomes of this research. Following an exhaustive reading of the chosen texts to extract the themes related to poverty, social exclusion and shame, over a period of 4 months, 118 extracts related to the notions of poverty and shame were selected for analysis. The extracts were coded, grouped into thematic categories and analysed using a New Historicism approach and discourse analysis technique in order to understand the correct meaning of the texts as well as the socio-economic context in which they were produced. This report will discuss the findings of the analysis and the salient

individual themes in order to form a conceptual framework of native notions of poverty, social exclusion and shame in Pakistan and to pave intellectual ground for the later stages of this research.

### **Working definitions of major concepts**

Before moving to the specific themes, it is appropriate to formulate working definitions of poverty, social exclusion and shame for the purposes of this study. On the basis of the understanding derived from the literary sample, poverty is understood in terms of a lack of material, social and emotional resources required for a basic decent living according to the prevalent social standards. Similarly, social exclusion has emerged as a condition when certain marginalised individuals or groups are constrained to withdraw from active participation in the economic, social, cultural and other spheres of life because of a lack of income and other resources. While social exclusion may also occur from a variety of non-income associations, such as ethnicity, gender, moral turpitude or disease, only its income-related aspect shall be deemed relevant for this particular analysis. As for shame, the literature suggests it to be an act of negative self-evaluation that raises painful feelings of inadequacy, flawed self, powerlessness and inferiority. Just as social exclusion, shame can also have a number of non-poverty associations, which may emanate from a range of sources; sense of exposure, inappropriateness, flaw in judgement, awkward situations, inappropriate social behaviour, dishonourable acts and physical or mental weakness. This diversity of associations is further complicated by the presence of related emotions in the literature, such as guilt, embarrassment and shades of 'positive' shame such as modesty, shyness, humility, shame of appropriateness and conscience.

#### *Positive shame*

Urdu literature has a very strong tradition of presentation of themes related to 'positive shame' such as shyness, modesty, conscience and appropriateness. The most prevalent translation of the word shame appears to be 'Sharam' which is mostly attributable to the positive aspect of shame, which almost seems to be an inherent virtue of the typical Urdu fiction characters. The notion that 'having' or 'keeping' shame is a positive attribute stands the test of sampling time from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Meer Taqi Meer in a 'ghazal' describes a typical shy beloved as, '*No sooner shall he give up his shyness, Than nature does away with this emotion*'. Interestingly, this expression of positive shame is not only evident in what Meer says but also how he says it, using a masculine reference of 'he' and 'his' for his (female) beloved. As curious as it may sound, this practice is widespread not only in classical Urdu poetry but still prevalent today. Pritchett (1994) quotes a

prominent Urdu critic Hali, who argues that an ambiguity related to the gender of the beloved, is not only an established Persian poetic convention but also desirable so as to avoid a shameless public citing of the charms of a female beloved, which would be against the norms of respect and privacy associated with the beloved.

Meer's description of positive shame continues to resonate in the love poetry of the greatest Urdu poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ghalib, '*You make everyone swoon, your face full waxing moon; Why keep yourself from public immune, you are beauty incarnate*' as well as the two greatest Urdu poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iqbal and Faiz, who are overwhelmed by the shyness attribute of their own beloveds:

*'You are like a reddened flower! Do not be shy so much;  
For I am nothing but a soft morning breeze'* (Iqbal)

*'Rid this grace of innocence, my love!  
My sinful gaze is put to shame'* (Faiz)

The situation is not much different in the prose either. It may not come as a surprise to the Urdu readers of fiction that the conservative brides of the 19<sup>th</sup> and even the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Urdu literature are not supposed to talk for days after their marriage, just out of their cultural sense of shyness and modesty (**Perplexity** by Qasmi). To conform to another aspect of positive shame, the average sociable individuals are expected to call on their remote ailing relatives in the hospitals only to conform to the social standards of courtesy (**Eyes** by Manto).

The above discussion brings home the fact that not all participants of a shame study in Pakistan would consider shame to be a negative feeling or emotion. In fact, it is more likely that the most prevalent translation of shame i.e. 'sharam' shall be considered a positive and desirable trait of one's personality. It is therefore imperative for the following stages of this research to concentrate on the negative self-review aspect of shame, and use the appropriate Urdu vocabulary with the participants of this research to clearly bring out the negative sense of the word. The most appropriate words to describe this sense may be 'Ruswaie' and 'Sharmindigi' which despite being fairly appropriate conveyers of the word 'shame' in Urdu, would only translate as 'degradation' and 'abashment' in English. In any event, this focus of the analysis as mentioned earlier is on the specific sense of negative self-review triggered by aspects of poverty, material deprivation and lower socio-economic status.

In the following sections, this report will review how the issues of poverty have been presented in the fictional situations of Urdu literature and how the poverty

of characters interacts with their shame experience. The analysis will try to round up the sources and manifestations of poverty shame, its construct and nature, before moving on to discuss the various response of characters to the experience of poverty-induced shame. At the same time, this report will also deal with the possible implications and consequences of shame on the personal and social lives of the characters. In the next section, this study will try to present any counter-indicators of behaviour that may possibly emerge out of a shame situation. The report will end with a summary of findings from the analysis and concluding thoughts.

### *Harshness of poverty*

By and large, the study of Urdu poetry and short stories suggests a general agreement of writers that the experience of poverty is mostly conditioned by harshness and distress. This harshness usually originates from lack of income and material deprivation but is supplemented by external factors, such as the social place of the poor in a society and their exploitation by the non-poor. Urdu writers have used a number of techniques to engage with the issues of poverty and its social consequences, ranging from symbolism to the use of metaphors and similes and from first person accounts to employing a narration of contempt to highlight the abject realities of the lives of the impoverished people. Nazeer does the same in his following verses:

*'The poor know no politeness or formality  
They fall upon food with uninhibited alacrity  
Risking their lives for a piece of loaf  
And fighting like dogs over every bone'.*

The analysis also suggests that poverty in Urdu literature is generally conceived as a condition of economic hardship, hunger and material deprivation. However, there is also a vivid portrayal of the social suffering of characters that face a lack of income. A classical example of it is Amin, the protagonist of '**No need to say anymore**', whose only means of income is the money earned in return for getting jailed for the illegal actions of the non-poor. With a life like that, it is not only starvation that he faces, but also the public humiliation of getting arrested and jailed at regular intervals. At the climax of this short-story, Amin is in a situation where he is negotiating the terms of his arrest to raise money for the funeral of his mother, whose corpse is lying at his home for burial. Clearly for a character like him, poverty is not only about the feeling of hunger, but a much broader emotional, social and mental trauma on a daily basis.

The harshness of poverty may not be limited to emotional and mental trauma but at times may also result in some kind of physical suffering or abuse. The feudal lord of '**Lawrence of Thalabia**' (author) would not only beat up his poor peasants but also made it sure that they kept their silence about this treatment. The educated son of the landlord apologetically shares his views on this with his friend, saying that "*It's a shame that these people wouldn't learn without such beating*".

The classical Urdu poet, Meer Taqi Meer, provides some of the strongest Eighteenth century poetic references to the distress of poverty. For instance, he equates poverty with '*death in daily episodes*' and elsewhere uses the metaphor of '*a poor person's lantern*' to describe the condition of his dwindling heart. What followed thereafter was a rich tradition of poetic similes and metaphors, which continued as such until the twentieth century. For instance, the protagonist in the short-story '**Jolie**' comments that '*poverty is like a pond where to live is to stay above the poverty surface, and to sink in it is to die*'. With a canvas of expressions as wide as that, it is no wonder that there are instances in Urdu literature where poverty has been referred to as humiliating, degrading and shameful. However, this may not be sufficient evidence for our analysis. In order to understand whether shame is indeed a universal attribute of the experience of poverty, it is important to systematically analyse the behavioural condition of a large enough sample of characters experiencing poverty to trace the elements of social exclusion and shame.

The study also suggests that as well as differentiating between the conditions of absolute and relative poverty, the literature also separates the feelings associated with these two conditions. The historical time scale of these two types of poverty is also interesting. While works of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century poets such as Meer, Nazeer and Ghalib mostly present instances of absolute poverty, most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century poets and prose writers engage with the nuances of relative poverty. The presentation of relative poverty is done either in terms of class difference or the comparison of characters within the same socio-economic class. Interestingly, the notion of relative poverty has also been used for some characters who otherwise do not qualify to be considered as poor. For instance, the talented professor in '**Prince Feroz**' (author) is known to be '*the relatively poorest member of the club of the richest people in Bombay*'.

### *Poverty and individual agency*

The literature appears to be helpful in suggesting a cause effect relationship between poverty and shame. According to this understanding, poverty leads to a reduced individual agency, which in turn makes such individuals more vulnerable and defenceless against the internal and external stimuli of shame. There are many instances in the literature where poverty has resulted in

diminishing the agency of characters thus rendering them incapable of acting in the manner most suited to their needs. For instance, Fika does not dare to question the false promises and lies told to him by the narrator, because of his sense of poverty-induced inferiority (**'Recommendation' by Qasmi**). The diminished agency makes it harder for people to exercise choice or act by their true emotions. In **Cul de sac of bandrabin (author)**, the protagonist vows before his girlfriend to retain a book borrowed from the College library because she liked and kissed it dearly. He reports it lost to the library. However, when the librarian fixes a high penalty price because of the rarity of the book, the protagonist is left with no choice but to return the book and cut a sorry figure before the librarian as well as his girlfriend.

Although Urdu poetry has a strong tradition of romance and chivalry, it makes no exception in acknowledging the very strong role of material well being in amorous relationships. As such, poverty is considered to be a handicap for effective consummation of matters of the heart. It was true in Meer's 18<sup>th</sup> century couplet '*With no status and no riches Meer, It's a wonder you picked the courage to fall in love*' as well as Ghalib's nineteenth century poetry '*Beloved is rumored to-day to visit, Pity, no perquisite for visitation*' and still strong in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Faiz' in his poem 'Do not Ask my Love', a few lines of which are as follows:

*'The world is burdened by sorrows beyond love,  
By pleasures beyond romance,  
Do not demand that love which can be no more.'*

### **The shaming process**

The analysis suggests that shaming is a complex process that is nourished by flaws of an individual. The analysis also supports the working of an external factor to trigger, complement or perpetuate the process of shame. This external factor could be an active, passive or perceived shaming mechanism. To elaborate, active shaming may involve the explicit shaming of a poor person by a non-poor person, passive shaming may come in the form of failed expectations of the poor, such as discouraging or non-welcoming behaviours of the non-poor, while perceived shaming may occur with the imagined view of the others towards a personal shortcoming, i.e. a mere comparison of one's inadequacy in relation to another person or group of the society. The analysis further suggests that the process of shaming cannot occur in isolation from the interplay of dominant values, which determine the attributes or flaws that are liable to be treated with respect or disrespect. It is therefore important to discuss the dominant notions of respect in the society, as presented in Urdu literature, and their interaction with the shame process.



## **Social class and respect**

The literature suggests that society has certain pre-determined parameters of respect and respectability and both the poor and the non-poor adhere to this division of respect. Not only is division of respect based along the lines of economic prosperity, but society also maintains dual standards of respect for the poor and the non-poor. What is acceptable behaviour for certain groups of the society might be unacceptable for the others. In the short-story '**Fashion**', Najma convinces her maid to act as a go-between for herself and her prospective boyfriend, saying; '*Since I happen to be the daughter of a respectable man, it will be unbecoming of me to sneak into the house of a man I have no social connection with*'. With behaviour as snobbish as that, not only does she try to assert her social class, but also reiterates the dominant values associated with the 'lower' class people, i.e. their place to engage in undertaking those tasks for the rich which the latter would not like to perform themselves.

This social code of respect draws its strength from the discourse of dominant values and is preserved even in raising the younger generations, who are brought up along the dividing lines of the rich and the poor. According to this social code of respect, material well-being and social position are the most common factors in commanding respect. On the other hand, poverty, with its negative attributes of monetary inadequacy and unequal social status, is a serious disadvantage for social respect, making people look petty and negligible. There seem to be variable thresholds of reverence within socio-economic groups, based on the different levels of wealth and social class. Nevertheless, one sure way to earn respect is by dint of one's socio-economic position. In '**Big Brother**' (author), the misguided 'Bhayya Jee' manages to receive social respect as long as his younger brother holds a senior public position in the Income Tax department. However, as soon as he gets transferred, 'Bhayya Jee' is also rudely ignored by all his one time friends, an experience that leaves him emotionally drained and scarred. Nevertheless, it is evident from this example that education, skills, competence and competitive professions greatly enhance the scope of social mobility of the poor and lower social classes and reduce the odds of their marginalisation and poverty shame.

## **Sources and manifestations of the shame process**

The analysis of literature suggests that poverty-related shame may arise from multiple sources of needs and wants. Although one of its most obvious sources remains the lack of income it may also come from, for example material deprivation or lower socio-economic status. In situations of low income and material deprivation, the shame of poverty may arise from either falling short in

quantity or quality or not maintaining the acceptable social standards of living. A classical 18<sup>th</sup> century example is Nazeer's famous poem on poverty; a part of which is as follows:

*'However good a man, but if he is poor,  
He often is insulted and called a fool, a boor.  
Clothes torn, hair unkempt, unoiled,  
Mouth parched, grimy teeth, body badly soiled.  
Ugly and grim are the faces of poverty.  
Only the poor know the pain of poverty!'*

Apart from income and material deprivation, shame of poverty may arise or intensify because of lower social status and other poor associations, such as social class, profession, family, lineage and friends. Association with lower social class seems to carry a stigma that has endured the evolution of the past 300 years. This stigma seems to pertain to almost all aspects of the social lives of the impoverished individuals, just as Ghalib presents it in the context of drinking:

*Am I too low for you to hand a cup? I'll cup my hands to drink  
Please just dispense the wine, though with less than earnestness (53;4)*

The shame of poverty intensifies in sub-continental literature when it comes to dealing with certain social obligations such as the matters of marriage and relationships. In the short-story '**Chothi ka jora**' (author), there is an acute sense of shame on the part of an entire family to admit to their humble economic status before their future son-in-law. This attitude results in further hardship for them as they continue entertaining him beyond their financial means.

The shame of income poverty appears to further intensify with poor social class, lineage and caste. These shades of shame often interact with income poverty in a way that makes them inseparable from one another. The shame of caste takes a lead in the context of the sub-continent. Not only are the 'low caste' people expected to carry a certain burden of shame for their caste but even the 'upper caste' people are considered justified in their shaming behaviour. For instance, while Krishan's '**Aunt Aseeri**' is a motherly figure for her entire village, she would still take a purging bath, if her hands ever happen to come in contact with a low-caste person. The shame of lineage becomes even worse for the poor in the case of out-of-wedlock children; as evident in '**Ishq pur zor nahin**' (author). It is clear that any lineage other than the conventional legitimate parentage from a socially sound family is vulnerable to the shame of inadequacy.

A highly enduring theme related to the issue of lineage is the preservation of the social status quo. One of the most powerful examples of this trend occurs in

Qasmi's short-story '**Shoe**', where a Village's headman continually shames a low caste poor 'Karmo' for sending his children to school with his 'ulterior ambitions' of making them equal to the children of the headman. Many years later, when Karmo's sons grow up and start making a good living, one of them buys Karmo an expensive jacket as a gift. The headman goes at lengths to buy this jacket from Karmo, ending up paying thrice its original value. Once purchased, he dumps the jacket, telling his servants that he only bought it to preserve the social decorum of the village, as he could not tolerate a '*two penny low caste poor*', socialising around wearing a respectable garment.

Not only caste, lineage and legitimacy are relevant in the issues of respect and shame, the social inequality owing to family occupations matters just as much in accentuating the odds of shame for certain individuals. Qasmi, in his short story '**Cotton Flower**' states, '*It is a cultural norm that servants will eat after the family members and it is expected that they should not feel ashamed or complain about it.*' Iqbal satirises the social inequality in a poem narrating:

*'The distinction between the ruler and the ruled cannot disappear,  
The beggar cannot have the audacity of being equal to the king' (292).*

In '**The last Salute**' (author), Rab Nawaz (Sergeant) clearly seems to carry the stigma of being the son of a Potter. Even at the battlefield, he is deeply ashamed by his old friend addressing him as the son of a Potter. In '**Cul de sac of bandrabin**' (author), the protagonist is again faced with the dilemma of being the son of a fisherman. He is in a state of constant mental struggle to overcome his shame of lineage and come clean with his girlfriend but cannot muster courage to overpower his fear of losing her with this confession:

*'While eating at a small 'Tandoor' at Night, I several times resolved that tomorrow I will tell Kalsoom that I am the son of a poor fisherman. But in the morning, my assumed reality always managed to keep me from coming clean'.*

While some characters currently doing well in their lives may hold shame of their lineage, the reverse may be true in case of others, often with the similar tendency of concealing their family background. In '**Sculptor**', the beggar discusses his brilliant philosophical ideas with the narrator but suddenly refuses to reveal his true identity and the name of his village so as to save his family honour from the 'base' profession he is pursuing. This behaviour is understandable as the literature also suggests that the actions, omissions and shortcomings of family members and friends may become a source of shame for many people. For example, the protagonist of '**Gadarya**' (author), feels very ashamed that his one-time teacher was subjected to poverty and humiliation after the partition of the country. Similarly in Ashfaq's short story '**Search**', members of a family, though satisfied with their own lives, feel greatly

distressed and ashamed because of the irresponsible life attitude of one of their siblings.

From all the above instances, it is evident that whether the source of poverty shame is material ill-being, social class or lineage, it causes a deep sense of disgrace, which is emotionally distressing and painful. Economic well-being invariably provides a sense of security and its lack leads to a mental and emotional vulnerability. This vulnerability becomes an important ingredient in the construct of shame. At the internal level, this vulnerability exposes the impoverished individuals to a negative self-review, thus causing feelings of inferiority and shame. At the external level, there are hierarchical structures of wealth and social class that work to infuse the feelings of poverty shame onto the poor. Together, these processes seem to result in the shaming and consequent marginalisation of the poor, resulting in long-term social, emotional, psychological and political implications.

### *Exposure of poverty shame*

A number of examples from Urdu poetry and short stories suggest that while the distress of shame can be experienced in isolation from other people, yet its intensity is significantly heightened by its public disclosure. The literature of shame suggests that shame is caused by a failure to meet the acceptable societal standards. The exposure of such a failure may therefore become a subject of negative review by other members of the social group according to the prevalent shared ideals, norms and expectations. Ahmed (2004) argued that shame always needs a witness in order to occur and, unless there is an element of external observation of behaviour, a painful feeling of shame is unlikely to arise. However, many social psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are proponents of the idea of reviewing the self through the eyes of others (Cooley 1922, Mead 1934, Goffman 1959). According to this argument, even on occasions in which a person experiences shame in an isolated, non-social situation, it is still triggered by the imagined view of other members of the society towards the flaw that is responsible for causing the shame. Cooley (1922) describes the dynamics of this phenomenon as follows:

*"We are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind."*

Meer masterfully presents his unwillingness to expose the shame of inadequacy while portraying his condition of acute material deprivation in the following couplet:

*How can I manage to extend that hand seeking charity?  
That has gone numb, in being the pillow for my head, too long.*

Moving a hundred years on, Ghalib too seems to be contemplating possible ways of withdrawing from the social scene to avoid exposure of his miserable personal condition. At one particular instance, he considers 'maintaining silence' as a good mechanism to avoid the potential sources of public shame and embarrassment:

*If silence has the benefit of hiding one's condition  
Glad I am 'tis difficult to understand my rendition (78:1)*

When it comes to the possible disclosure of his abject economic condition, Ghalib sounds keener to hide away in the oblivion of unknown. In the following verses, he prefers a death in a foreign land so as to not let his acquaintances witness his succumbing to death in misery and distress:

*How God killed me on a foreign land, away from my family and friends  
How God saved me the shame of dying in abjection before those I knew.*

Similarly, while the characters of short-stories seem to be ashamed of their material inadequacies, they are equally concerned about hiding their condition from a public exposure. Naeem, in Manto's short-story '**Sterile**' is ashamed to admit before others that he smokes low quality cigarettes and is unable to see an expensive doctor, so he chooses to lie about both things. Similarly, the protagonist of '**Big Brother**' (author), does not refute the false impression of others when his inexpensive garments are taken for very expensive ones. In Krishan's '**Prince Feroz**', the biggest rumour about the protagonist is that he is hiding the fact that he earned his wealth by selling sweets abroad (a profession attributed to people of low socio-economic status), but later he moved to Bombay to start a respectable life impersonating himself to be a member of a princely family. A highly psychological expression of avoiding shame occurs in Qasmi's short story '**The Old Man**', where the dignified famished old man reacts to the neighbour's little girl offer of food by saying "*I have become quite old now, I am not sure if I should eat rice anymore....I don't know...would you be hurt if I said no?*" The entire story portrays a struggle between keeping up appearances on the one hand and falling from a perceived respectability for a dire need on the other.

An even more vivid portrayal of this dilemma occurs in Ashfaq Ahmed's '**Cul de sac of bandrabin**', where the protagonist, a poor village boy undergoes dramatic personal and emotional transition from his native village to a big city. In his native village, he is not ashamed of his poverty as he has grown with it: '*Since everybody in the college knew that I was the son of Sajawal fisherman, I did not feel the need of hiding my poverty*'. However, as he moves to a big city (Lahore) for his BA, things become much trickier for him. Here people are unaware of his impoverished background and they would call him by his 'family name, Mr Namdar'. This makes the protagonist acutely conscious of the fact

that he has merely enough money to make two ends meet, let alone to have a decently stitched suit for public occasions and going to cinema with his new friends. It is here that we see a response strategy to a potential experience of shame. The protagonist resolves to rise to the occasion and works part-time jobs for two months to buy a second-hand two piece suit, a colourful neck-tie, and finally becomes a 'respectable' member of his society. He remembers his experience narrating: '*The mundane made me hide my poverty and play respectable*'. However, even after this transition, he remains troubled by the apprehension that someday, his guardian uncle, dressed in his funny old 'Dhoti' may not show up at his college unexpectedly.

### *Role of consciousness*

A careful analysis of the story '**Cul de sac of bandrabin**' (author), suggests that the shame of poverty is closely related to an individual's consciousness of his condition vis-à-vis his social surroundings. The impoverished young protagonist remains unaware of his poor condition in his native village, among the people who know all about his socio-economic background. But as soon as he finds himself in a new environment where unaware of his humble family lineage, people tend to deal with him with more courtesy and respect; he becomes perturbed by the need to maintain his public image. It clearly seems that the possibility of keeping up this newly found respect gives him the consciousness of his condition and wakes him to the level of effort he needs to come up with, if he intends to maintain an appearance of respectability. This consciousness leads him to work hard to avert a potential source of shame.

Similarly, in Qasmi's short-story '**Advice**', the protagonist resorts to a different, slightly negative kind of response strategy led by his consciousness. While he is otherwise a thoroughly happy and accomplished writer, he becomes acutely conscious of his relative inferior economic circumstances when invited for tea by a well-known rich businessman of the town. In order to avoid a possible source of embarrassment, he chooses to take a cab to travel to his host's house instead of his usual mode of transportation, Rickshaw, which is comparatively cheaper. Similarly, when he arrives at his host's house, despite an argument about it, he does not let his host pay the cab fare. When the host asks about his well-being in general and current income in particular, he fabricates a figure double his actual earning. Though negative in its outlook, this strategy seems to help him avoid any possible feeling of inferiority in the company of a considerably richer man.

### *Restore behaviour*

Although shame is normally thought to be associated with a withdrawal behaviour, in the examples given the sense of shame appears to result in triggering an 'approach or restore behaviour', making the individuals work hard

to attempt to avoid or redress the cause of shame. It is interesting to see that as soon as both protagonists see a gap of information in other people's knowledge about them, they seize the opportunity to restore their threatened self and possibly enhance their public image and respect. In yet another example, the young protagonist of Ashfaq's short-story '**Repentance**', a cigarette-addict, agrees to give up smoking if his father saves him the shame of riding his very old bike by buying him a new one of a 'respectable' brand.

The restore behaviour of these characters is in accordance with the social psychological literature of shame produced in the last century. Although much of the literature on shame describes the reaction as one of withdrawal, avoidance and hiding (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984, Lewis M. 1992, Scherer et al, 1994), some recent studies have proposed that, alongside being a determinant of guilt, 'approach behaviour', is also a characteristic of the shame experience (Tangney 1996, De Hooe et al, 2008). According to this theory, the experience of shame is highly likely to lead to 'approach behaviour', whereby the shamed individual attempts to undo the damage caused to his threatened self. Yet another rather recent addition to shame behavioural theory is the idea that 'approach' and 'withdrawal' behaviour, in most cases, occurs in quick succession, respectively (Frijda et al. 1989, De Hooe et al, 2010). That is to say that a shame-threatened person initially attempts to restore the self, but if unsuccessful, retreats from that social scenario to avoid any further ignominy and distress.

### **Consequences of poverty shame**

The literature is frequented by the negative implications of the shame of poverty on physical, mental and emotional well-being of its characters. As discussed above, poverty shame causes acute emotional pain, distress, disappointment and submission. It also compromises freedom of thought and rational behaviour, blurs judgement, leads to anti-social behaviour and may cause people to turn to crime, drugs or gambling in order to alleviate their poverty or drudgery. The feeling of poverty produces a sense of inferiority, dependence and insecurity. The insecurity of getting insulted or shamed almost reaches a level of fear and horror. The consequences are relatively more severe for marginalised women and children; women tend to become more miserable, insecure and subservient. Some of them feel under enormous pressure to get married to feel financially secure. As for children, literature suggests that poverty and shame has a lasting negative effect on their personalities from very early childhood. Poverty may also deprive young children of their childhood needs and wants and may shame them early on by causing intense household competition for the meagre available resources. A discussion of some of the major possible consequences of poverty shame is as follows:

### *Resentment and anger*

By and large, literature acknowledges the distress of poverty shame and the consequent resentment on the part of the poor for their circumstances as well as the society in general. Qasmi calls poverty 'the killer of feelings' in his short story '**Alhamdulillah**'. The condition of shame may sometimes be shrouded in anger and resentment directed against the non-poor. This resentment may range from a passive sentiment of early nineteenth century Ghalib: *The world of we oppressed people is a small abode, That, relatively, an anthill is a far bigger mode* (88;1) to a stronger protesting voice of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Faiz:

*'Why are these carefree rich folks always happy?  
Why not we steal a portion of their happiness?  
Despite poor, we are just like them (A Thought).'*

The protesting voice of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to be much stronger in the poetry of Iqbal, where it effectively takes the expression of resentment, soliciting action against the non-poor:

*RISE, and from their slumber wake the poor ones of My world  
Shake the wals and windows of the mansions of the great!  
Find the field whose harvest is no peasant's daily bread—  
Garner in the furnace every ripening ear of wheat! (Iqbal, Kulyaat 559)*

The sentiment against the non-poor is a reaction against the long time exploitative behaviour of the dominant elites. In a famous poem, Iqbal reverses the understanding of social classes and their rights and obligations towards each other:

*A witty man in a tavern spoke with a tongue untamed:  
'The ruler of our state is a beggar unashamed;  
How many go bare-headed to deck him with a crown?  
How many go naked to supply his golden gown?  
The blood of the poor turns into his red wine;  
And they starve so that he may in luxury dine.  
The epicure's table is loaded with delights,  
Stolen from the needy, stripped of all their rights.  
He is a beggar who begs money, be it large or small,  
Kings with royal pomp and pride, in fact, are beggars all.'* (Mendicancy 567)

### *Fatalism and despair*

The element of poverty-related fatalism and hopelessness is abundant in Urdu fiction. Traditionally, the social status and level of riches of the people used to be ascribed to their 'good or bad fortune'. The bulk of 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry uses extensive images of hopelessness to describe the personal conditions of the poets, for example '*The heart loses all hopes like the lantern of a poor*' and



*'Whatever humiliation comes let it be, Difficult is it to fight the fate' (Meer).* The socio-political landscape of 18<sup>th</sup> century further deteriorated with the advent of foreign rule in India and the consequent mass social and emotional upheaval. This dismal image of the collective social self might have influenced works of contemporary writers and poets, most notably Ghalib. Although presented as personal expressions of hopelessness and despair, the following images seem to represent the collective consciousness of a large segment of nineteenth century India:

*'Day and night, seven heavens are at sixes and sevens,  
Something sure will happen, why panic and drift (Ghalib 93;2),*

*'There is not a ray of hope  
We do not see any scope' (79;1)*

*'Life's deadlock who can break other than death, Asad  
A candle burns right till dawn, in every hue and aspect' (59;7)*

Towards the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, some individual voices in literature venture to present conflicting views on the fatalistic approach towards life. While part of it still holds the traditional views as mentioned above, a significant shift of thinking starts to take place:

*'My nature in adversity looks for a challenge dire' (Ghalib)*

It was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, that a majority of the writers tried to dispel the belief of fatalism and introduced the discussion of human effort as the determining factor for socio-economic success. The social message of Urdu literature seems to change dramatically around this time, which even goes to the extent of condemning the notions of fatalism. It is here that Iqbal introduces a new picture of the modern dynamic individual as:

*'He who burns down the world presented to him by others  
And then recreates one of his own, from the ashes'.*

#### *Effects on judgment and behaviour*

The literature suggests that poverty shame affects clear and rational thinking leading to a hazed and blurred judgment. An early example of poverty's impact on individual's judgment and behaviour is Nazir's following short poem:

*'An clairvoyant beggar was once asked:  
Of what stuff are the moon and stars*

*The beggar smiled and shook his head:  
God bless you, sir, the answer is only bread.  
For, the poor know no planets, no stars  
The thought of food our vision mars  
It's for food that some go strangely dressed.  
Some won't bathe and let their hair grow unchecked.  
Another wears a kerchief tied around his head:  
All clever stratagems, all tricks are only for bread!*

In sharp contrast to the above discussion of a beggar, in another poem, Nazeer chooses to mention the condition of the non-poor, if ever they happen to face a temporary spell of poverty. Interestingly, the affect on judgement seems to remain the same in this case as well:

*Distinguished scholars, of themselves so sure,  
Lose their confidence on becoming poor.  
Confused with hunger, they often see  
Day as night and A as B.*

Often the inability to think clearly results in further loss of material and emotional resources. In the short-story '**Fashion**', Qasmi narrates of a poor maid, who after getting impregnated by her rich employer, is reluctant to disclose the identity of the father of her out of wedlock daughter. In her peculiar shamed state of mind, she somehow assumes that it would be unwise to involve a rich and respectable man in her misfortune. She is also not sure if her disclosure would cause her further ignominy, as alongside being morally unscrupulous, she may also be considered greedy, she may be guilty of seducing a wealthy man for his riches.

There seems to be an acute pressure on characters to behave according to their socio-economic situation vis-à-vis others. Not only is this apparent in the behaviour of fictional characters, but also in the thinking stream of writers and poets themselves. Ghalib articulates this feeling in the following lines:

*You are king's liege now, O Ghalib, praise to him  
You said you were no protégé, in days of yore (123;8)*

And at the same time, he knows that the connection with the royal court gives a social boost not only to the image of a layman like himself, but also the power to command respect of the public:

*Ghalib is close to crown, is strutting about in town  
Otherwise, there is no renown, in people's estimation (124;9')*

*Reduced participation and social exclusion*

Inadequacy to participate financially in social situations may gradually make individuals withdraw from social participation and cause their social exclusion. Such is the condition of the narrator of **Buray Phansay**, who prefers to stay out of his house when he comes to know that some of his friends are planning to visit him, so that he can save face from the inadequacy to host them properly. In the particular cultural tradition of the sub-continent, the notion of 'appropriate' participation starts right with the ceremonies surrounding the birth of a child and goes until after a death. One example of such participation occurs in the short-story '**A partnership in corpse**' (author), where after the death of an elder relative, it becomes an issue of honour for the family members to try to bury their deceased in a graveyard, which is meant for the elites. The narrator of **Cul de sac of bandrabin** mentions the lack of money as the only reason of his withdrawal from the evening games at his college, saying:

*'The only downside was that I could not participate in games, as the losers were supposed to pay fines and treats to the winners, something I could not afford'*

Nazeer's poetry almost rules out the possibility of effective social participation of an impoverished individual. Although Nazeer himself was a keen religious practitioner, he never mixed his own faith with the social realities that emerge with poverty and hunger. He takes on the orthodox teaching of turning to patience and seeking solace in religion during the dire times of need:

*When the belly is empty, nothing feels good  
No taste for pleasure, only a craving for some food.  
The hungry cannot commune with God nor live the pious way.  
Bread alone inspires him to worship and to pray (Roti Nama).*

The withdrawal on the basis of economic hardship is compounded by the sense of shame that is related to it. While in some instances, social exclusion of characters is related to their impoverished condition or lower social class, in others it is related to a fall in socio-economic circumstances. Since this fall is an inherent source of shame, some of the individuals develop an acute sense of being odd and out of place in their social environment. Their subsequent behaviour leads to their gradual social alienation from their old social circles, resulting in an isolated, distressful and meaningless existence:

*How to tell how long I have lived on the sorry planet  
If I add nights of blight to the days of no desire (Ghalib 114;2)*

This withdrawal from social participation is usually not desirable as it jeopardises the prospects of economic, social, emotional, intellectual and political benefits linked to it. The literature therefore suggests that, despite their

inhibitions, most of the people in a state of social exclusion are still desirous of participating and putting an end to their isolation. The retreat does not therefore imply a total disconnection of the shamed individual from further prospects of social attention, but only a lack of the confidence and initiative that is required to compete for it. Similarly, the poor belonging to ethnic or religious minorities also aspire to participate, but are generally apprehensive of the reaction of the ethnic majority groups. Racial poverty therefore intensifies exclusion because of the poverty being in addition to the sense of alienation of the minorities.

### *Disintegration of 'self'*

The characters that face poverty, shame and social exclusion are generally vulnerable to a disintegration of the self over time. A number of major characters who are subjected to the conditions of poverty, shame and inferiority seem to be threatened with disintegration. In some short stories as well as poetry, there is a vivid portrayal of the physical and mental disintegration of the characters bearing poverty shame for extended periods of time. In the first place, there seems to be a gradual decline in the socio-economic condition of the characters. Ghalib is very conscious of his gradual social fall and the consequential loss of social position in the eyes of his old acquaintances:

*Angel's disrespect for us was not respected then  
Why today, O God, are we humbled to despise (113;2)*

This decline normally shows in lifestyle, habits, characters falling short of people's expectations, etc. and gradually sets in motion a deterioration of the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual health of the characters. Often a condition of loss of identity or an acute identity crisis also precede or come along with the disintegration of the self. In Asmat's Short story '**Unemployed**' Baqir, the protagonist gradually becomes a psychotic and finally succumbs to death because of the shame he felt of being poor and unemployed and because his wife Hajra has to work all day to feed him and his family. Some characters develop an acute conflict of personal and social identity on their way to an ultimate emotional and psychological fall. For some, this condition may result in an acute desire to perish along with all their troubles of existence:

*Ghalib is through with all the blights  
One blighted death is just another test (80;6)*

### **Counter-indicators**

Although a majority of the consequences of poverty-related shame are negative in nature, in a few situations, the notions of dignity, pride and self-respect pose important counters to the existence behaviour of 'poverty-induced shame'. Despite their scarcity, the literature seems to celebrate the presence of these individual characteristics that are positive and reassuring for those faced with

poverty situations. For instance, pride related to work is an enduring counter-theme across the dimensions of time and space. Another notable aspect is the gender dimension of work, where many women have been shown to work their way through poverty and unfavourable circumstances to earn a respectable livelihood for themselves, their children and even their idle husbands.

### *Dignity and self respect*

The literature presents contrasting views on the matters of preserving dignity in situations of poverty. It is however quite clear that regardless of individual behaviour in a given situation, living with dignity is a one of the basic needs of an individual, regardless of his economic circumstance. Iqbal mentions the dignity of the poor in very unequivocal words:

*'Even in poverty those men of God were so high-minded  
That the rich could not offer charity for poor's dignity (Iqbal, **Kulyaat**, pg 255)'*

While Faiz protests against the dilemma of man subjected to indignity for economic reasons, in the following manner:

*I am better off eating with dignity,  
Than being Your vicegerent and hungry (**Lord, the Truthful**)*

The protagonist of **Datan Walay**, Chanda, who has a high level of self respect, refuses to accept a loan from a wealthy acquaintance for the treatment of his wife. His wife ultimately dies of the illness and Chanda too commits suicide. Not much different is the story of Zaman in **Mystery King**, who, despite, a temporary spell of poverty, is reluctant to accept monetary help from his friend for the medicine of his son, who ultimately dies. But apart from these extreme idiosyncratic cases of dignity, this notion of self-respect exhibits in some of the seemingly unexpected characters, for instance, a beggar. In Qasmi's '**Snow on Mountains**', when a female beggar receives a higher than usual charity, she refuses to beg before the same person again for the next few days because of her sense of shame. In this strange behaviour, there seems to be a sense of settling at ease with an assumed tarnished identity of the self but still drawing one's boundaries to avoid indulging in excess.

### *Shamelessness*

Alongside the themes of dignity and self respect, the literature also presents another possible counter-indicator of shame; instances where the poor are subjected by their circumstances to behave in a manner that can be considered undignified or even 'Shameless'. In **Bachni** (author),, poverty is shown to lead to extending sexual gratification without a sense of inappropriateness. Similarly,

in '**Two Hands**' (author),, Ram Autar's wife Gori, a house maid frequently involves herself in sexual misconduct at her work places. However being an earning hand, she is essential for her husband and mother in law, who are prepared to overlook this behaviour as long as she is bringing her income home to serve the needs of their livelihood. But even apart from these extreme instances of behaviour, there are subtle ways in which people may behave contrary to reason or the accepted social norms of living. Ghalib satirises his own tendency to live on the benevolence of his beloved:

*O Asad, as a mendicant, we stuck to humorous temperament  
We fell in love with the munificent, to live on their munificence (74;9)*

And at another occasion, he presents another aspect of the psychological inscape of a needy person as follows:

*To Saqi, 'tis hard to explain, that I don't disdain  
Content I remain, with remnants of wine to be treated (110;2)*

Some instances of the short-stories suggest that the behaviour of 'shamelessness' on the part of the poor is more of an act of getting immune to the experiences of shame than an act of audacity to behave shamelessly. When the poor masseur in Qasmi's story '**Raees Khana**' is erroneously taken for a prostitute, she does not react to it too vehemently for the mere reason that she has had a number of such experiences in her past, and she does not like to make a scene about it anymore.

### *Contentment*

The literature suggests that contentment may also act as one of the counter indicators of poverty shame. While a fatalistic approach towards life has some negative implications for human behaviour, it may also inculcate a sense of contentment in some individuals. Nazir's long poem '**Contentment**' highlights the happiness of a contented heart no matter how poor. In Qasmi's '**Motherliness**', the mother is prepared to starve to death rather than to recruit her son for troops abroad for her livelihood. Iqbal's following short poem tastefully analyses the anatomy of contentment, appreciating the behaviour in a tongue in cheek manner:

*Even if I have greed I do not have the strength for exertion  
Acquiring position is connected with the taste for search  
A thousand thanks to God that my nature is contentment  
A thousand thanks to God that my mind is not mischievous (336)*

Nevertheless, alongside praising the behaviour of contentment on the one hand, Iqbal, elsewhere keeps no secret of his views on the importance of striving to change one's condition:

*The way to renounce is  
To conquer the hearts of earthly and heavenly being;  
The way to renounce is not  
To starve oneself to death.  
O cultists! I like not  
Your austere piety;  
Your piety is penury,  
Suffering and grief. (473)*

#### *Pride in work*

Taking pride in work is another counter-indicator of poverty shame and is otherwise a long and enduring literary tradition of Urdu, with its roots in the Islamic emphasis on work and its merit in the matters of social respect. Irrespective of practical adherence to its commands, the collective social mores of respect of the Pakistani population may largely be influenced by the teachings of the religion, which emphasises work and effort:

*'That no laden one shall bear another's load. And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort. And that his effort will be seen. And afterward he will be repaid for it with fullest payment' (The Quran, 53:38-41)*

It is no wonder that even the earliest pieces of Urdu literature associate pride with work, and the working poor appear to preserve their dignity in relatively more situations than the non-working. Nazeer narrates of his own story in the following poem:

*I'll sing of Nazeer the poet, please do listen to me.  
A nab timid who tutored kids and lived in poverty.  
His height was low, his gait slow, his skin was darkly brown  
A small, frail and well-bred man who lived in Agra town.  
Melancholy or pensiveness pursued him everywhere  
Evident in his late years in youth too it was there.  
His basic needs were always met and he lived with dignity.*

And the same notion of pride in work continued till the 20<sup>th</sup> century Iqbal, who narrates:

*What doth the eaglet know,  
Seduced by vultures and ravens,*

*About the eagle's vision,  
About its ethereal flights? (442)*

And similarly in another poem (author), the message of action is loud and clear in a different philosophical manner:

*Thy world is the world  
Thou dost create thyself.  
And not the world of brick and mortar  
Before thy outward eyes. (506)*

## **Conclusion**

The analysis indicates a strong association between the conditions of poverty and shame, an association that has lasting behavioural, social and economic consequences for the individuals entangled in this nexus, as well as the broader socio-economic structures of society. This association, however, is interwoven within a complex multidimensional relationship. Poverty reduces individual agency which causes vulnerability for shame. Shame in turn, leads to a poor self-image and a sense of inadequacy to participate fully in social and economic activities. This lack of participation may result in social exclusion aggravating the condition of existing poverty further.

The findings suggest that there are some key elements that may trigger the process of shame. These include the established societal notions of respect and, based on them, the perception of the rich being superior to the poor. This sense of superiority combines with the ability to inflict shame to bring the shaming process into effect. The ability to shame, in individual situations, may involve a variable mix of money, social hierarchy and political privilege. The other key contributor to the shaming process is the inability of the shamed individual to avert it. The shaming process takes place in situations when the ability to shame overpowers the ability to go about without shame.

The non-poor, using the power of money and social position, may create situations that are humiliating for the poor. This shame of relative poverty flows primarily from the gap of wealth and is reinforced by the hierarchy of social classes. It appears that the social classes, for their own reasons, prefer to abide by this social segregation and maintain the traditional status quo. But since such a segregation of classes is not in the interest of the economic expediency of society, there seems to be an uneasy truce of interacting without integrating. This interaction, along with a sense of inequality and inferiority, seems to instil shame among the members of the relatively poor and disadvantaged classes.



The shaming process is generally insulting and agonising for the poor, and produces a sense of unworthiness and loss of pride in them. This leads to a tendency to withdraw and reduce participation in socio-economic activities, which in turn may result in the social exclusion of the shamed individuals. Poverty shame may result in the acute physical, mental and spiritual disintegration of the people going through this experience. A number of the people going through this condition may develop resentment and anger against the non-poor as well as society in general. In a minority of situations, people going through poverty shame experience may behave differently, i.e. in a dignified manner, trying to preserve self-respect by taking pride in their work or striving for mere contentment.

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#### Annex A:

##### The selected purposive sample of Poets and Story writers

POETS	SHORT STORY WRITERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <u>Mir Taqi Mir</u> (1723–1810)</li><li>▪ <u>Nazeer Akbarabadi</u> (1740–1830)</li><li>▪ <u>Mirza Ghalib</u> (1796–1869)</li><li>▪ <u>Dr. Muhammad Iqbal</u> (1877–1938)</li><li>▪ <u>Faiz Ahmad Faiz</u> (1911–1984)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Asmat Chughtai (1911-1991)</li><li>• Saadat Hasan Manto (1912 – 1955)</li><li>• Karishan Chandar (1914 – 1977)</li><li>• Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi (1916 – 2006)</li><li>• Ahfaq Ahmed (1925 – 2004)</li></ul>

## **Annex B:**

### **Critiques used for selection**

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